

# City Diplomacy amid Regional Integration: A Philippine Perspective on the ASEAN Smart Cities Network

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**Abstract:** The significance of local actors in regional integration was reaffirmed in November 2018 upon the adoption of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Smart Cities Network (ASCN) Framework. The ASCN is envisaged as a collaborative platform where member cities can discuss and resolve the challenges brought about by rapid urbanization. It can thus be said that it fundamentally espouses the role of city diplomacy as an important means and end in the successful realization of sustainable urbanization. In the Philippines' case, the involvement of Manila, Cebu, and Davao as pilot cities is mainly catalyzed by two factors, namely, the need to address the interests of their communities and as an expression of solidarity with other ASEAN cities. Further, the participation of these local government units (LGUs) in diplomatic activities at the regional level primarily focus on economic, cultural, cooperative, and representative dimensions. To effectively address enforcement-related challenges, LGUs may undertake capacity-building activities, advance a whole-of-society approach, tap new financing schemes, ensure project continuity, and expand the ASCN to include other cities.

**Keywords:** ASEAN affairs, ASEAN Economic Community, city diplomacy, regional integration, smart cities

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) recognizes rapid urbanization as both a challenge and an opportunity. Notably, there is a need for governments to monitor processes and projects rigorously, or else urbanization would perpetuate socio-economic and environmental problems such as income disparity, pollution, and traffic congestion, among others. However, when managed efficiently and effectively, urbanization may bear fruits such as employment opportunities, business efficiency, and global networks and partnerships.

The ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) is a landmark undertaking as it formalizes the regional grouping's goal to secure greater involvement from localities in addressing regional issues amid a shifting environment (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020a). Moreover, the ASCN's primary objective of fostering sustainable urban areas through synergistic partnerships would entail and lead to the empowerment of local actors as the official voice of their respective cities at the regional level. The conduct of city

diplomacy thus becomes an integral means – and an end – in the successful realization of the ASCN.

With the localities of Manila, Cebu, and Davao being tapped as pilot cities from the Philippines, this paper seeks to explore how the country can effectively utilize city diplomacy to advance ASCN and vice versa (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020a). The paper is divided into five portions. Specifically, section 2 provides an overview of the ASEAN Smart Cities Network as well as the related initiatives of the pilot Philippine cities. An introduction to city diplomacy is likewise included. Section 3 then discusses the link between ASCN and city diplomacy and outlines the main challenges faced by Philippine localities. Section 4 contains the concluding thoughts while Section 5 tackles the way forward.

## II. A BRIEFER ON ASEAN SMART CITIES NETWORK

Rapid urbanization is fueling ASEAN's economic growth as urban areas contribute more than two-thirds of the region's gross domestic product (GDP) (Leggett, 2015). Data show that over half of Southeast Asia's population resides in cities presently, and this figure is projected to increase to around 66 percent by 2025 (Leggett, 2015). However, many cities across Southeast Asia must contend with the perils of rapid urbanization such as high population density, inadequate infrastructure, lack of affordable housing, flooding, pollution, and criminality, among others (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020b). These challenges are further compounded by the effects of climate change. Hence, it is imperative for ASEAN cities to strengthen and expand their partnerships towards the cultivation of smart, sustainable urban areas.

A concrete response from the regional bloc came in the form of the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN). The Network ultimately aims to increase the resilience of cities across Southeast Asia by adopting technological and digital solutions to address urbanization challenges (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). More specifically, the ASCN seeks to attain three main objectives, namely: (i) facilitate cooperation on smart cities development; (ii) foster partnerships between ASEAN cities and the private sector for practical and commercially viable projects, and (iii) support ASEAN in exploring possible collaboration with its external partners (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). The cited objectives are aimed at enhancing the quality and accessibility

of services and increasing overall productivity. Furthermore, the ASCN is viewed to complement ASEAN Community-building endeavors such as ASEAN Community Vision and Blueprints 2025, Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025, and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan III.

The ASCN Framework envisages the realization of three mutually reinforcing strategic outcomes, namely, high quality of life, competitive economy, and sustainable environment (Centre for Livable Cities, 2018). It also identifies two key urban systems paramount to the cited objective. These are integrated master planning and development and dynamic and adaptive governance. Moreover, member cities are prescribed to carry out projects in any of the priority areas, which encompass civic and social welfare, health and well-being, security, quality environment, built infrastructure, and industry and innovation (Center for Livable Cities, 2018). The Framework stipulates that the formulation and execution of ASCN-related programs are underpinned by people-centered technological and digital solutions and mutually beneficial partnerships and funding.

Currently, the ASCN comprises 26 pilot cities across the 10 ASEAN Member States (AMS) (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020a). These localities are a mix of administrative and commercial centers, and tourist destinations. The 26 pilot cities are Bandar Seri Begawan, Bangkok, Banyuwangi, Battambang, Cebu City, Chonburi, Da nang, Davao City, DKI Jakarta, Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh City, Johor Bahru, Kota Kinabalu, Kuala Lumpur, Kuching, Luang Prabang, Makassar, Mandalay, Manila, Nay Pyi Taw, Phnom Penh, and Phuket. Each AMS has a National Representative while every city is represented by a Chief Smart City Officer.

The diversity within the regional grouping is reflected in the city-specific Action Plans for Smart City Development (2018 – 2025) as they allow ASEAN cities to work with varying capabilities and pursue different starting points and sub-priorities (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). The action plans were developed by participating localities, and they outline specific projects and corresponding action lines, thereby enabling cities to tailor smart solutions according to their needs. The ASCN has launched a twinning program to operationalize the sharing of best practices as well as identify complementarities between cities (Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs, 2018). Under this initiative, an ASEAN city is matched with an external partner to undertake sustainable urban development-related projects, on a voluntary basis.

The Network is slated to have annual meetings to discuss the progress of each city's action plan (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). The ASCN Meeting will be steered by the ASEAN chair, in coordination with national representatives of member cities and the ASEAN Secretariat's (ASEC) Integration Monitoring Directorate. The ASEC will be tasked to monitor the progress of participating localities'

action plans and produce the ASCN's annual report. Consequently, the Joint Consultative Meeting (JCM) will review the annual report and will be tasked to present its findings to the ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC) and the ASEAN Summit.

#### *An Overview of Philippine ASCN-related Initiatives*

The Philippines is committed to the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 11 which seeks to transform cities and human settlements into inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable spaces. Correspondingly, the national government is expected to lead the charge and provide the overall guidance regarding the attainment of the said SDG. Nevertheless, it can be noted that the shift towards smart cities in the country may be described as primarily a local government unit (LGU)-driven undertaking.

The ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) is expected to further strengthen the role of LGUs in fostering sustainable urban spaces within Southeast Asia. Consequently, the cities of Manila, Cebu, and Davao responded to this call by formulating their respective master plans and identifying ASCN-related priority projects (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020a). The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), acting as the national representative agency, facilitated the creation of the roadmap of each locality. Thus, the succeeding paragraphs provide summaries of the key features of the master plan of the three pilot cities, respectively.

First, Manila City's version of an ASCN-related action plan is the "Manila Bay Sustainable Development Master Plan" (MBSMDMP) which was released in May 2019 (NEDA, n.d.). It envisions the development of "A Sustainable and Resilient Manila Bay" by 2040. The MBSMDMP covers Manila Bay, the coastal zone, and the catchment area which is bordered by eight provinces and 178 local government units (LGUs) dispersed in three regions, specifically, Central Luzon, National Capital Region, and Region IV-A (CALABARZON) (NEDA, n.d.). The eight provinces surrounding Manila Bay are Bataan, Bulacan, Cavite, Pampanga, Laguna, Nueva Ecija, Rizal, and Tarlac.

In addition, the Plan identified five main goals, namely:

- 1.) Preservation of a Manila Bay ecosystem that sustainably delivers variety of services;
- 2.) Inclusive growth in the quality of life in the Manila Bay area;
- 3.) Access by communities to safe, affordable and formal housing with access to basic services and economic opportunities;
- 4.) Better and sustainable quality of water in Manila Bay; and
- 5.) Safe, resilient, and adaptive Manila Bay ecosystems and communities.

The MBSMDMP also laid out guidelines for the creation of two important institutions: i) an inter-agency Manila Bay Task Force to oversee the implementation of the Plan; and ii) the Manila Bay Coordinating Office (MCBO) to monitor and report on the

progress of the Operational Plan for Manila Bay Coastal Strategy (OPMBCS) (NEDA, n.d.). In terms of capital investments and financing plan, the private sector is assumed to fund 85 percent of the total investment requirements, followed by the national government at 12 percent, and LGUs at 3 percent. Local government units are enjoined to raise revenues and savings through several means such as environmental or green tax, payments for ecosystem services, and clustering of facilities (NEDA, n.d.).

Next, Cebu City's commitments under the ASCN is encapsulated in the "Project on Master Plan Study and Institutional Development on Urban Transport System in Metro Cebu" which was released in March 2019 (Saavedra, 2019). It primarily seeks to improve the traffic condition in the metropolitan area and advance sustainable urbanization of 13 LGUs, including Cebu City, until 2050. Furthermore, the project emphasizes the need to promote comprehensive land use that integrates both transport and urban development (JICA, 2018a). Numerous proposals were put forward encompassing sub-sectors such as road and bridge, urban mass rapid transit, road-based public transport, and traffic management.

Given the extensive scope of the project, LGUs are encouraged to regularly coordinate among themselves and establish the Metropolitan Cebu Traffic Management Coordination Board (MCTMB), which will serve as lead organization responsible in crafting and enforcing metro-wide traffic rules and regulations. The project also cited a handful of financial sources and mechanisms such as domestic funding, official development assistance (ODA), hybrid public-private partnership (PPP), and build-transfer-operate (BOT) contract, for priority projects (JICA, 2018a). The five priority projects highlighted in the Project are: (i) Mandaue-Lapu Lapu Link Road Bridge and Mandaue Coastal Road; (ii) Metro Cebu Circumferential Road (Phase 1: Segment 1); (iii) UMRT Central Line (Phase 1: Central Section); (iv) UMRT Coastal Line (Phase 1); and (v) Metro Cebu Area Traffic Control (ATC) System. Despite the intended benefits, the Project did not result into a Master Plan for the city's urban transport system.

Lastly, Davao City's strategy towards sustainable urbanization is reflected in its "Infrastructure Development Plan and Capacity Building Project" which was made available to the public in June 2018 (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2018b). It recommends a 4D approach for the City's infrastructure modernization until 2045. The four dimensions of the development strategy are as follows:

- 1.) Dynamic – refers to a poly-centric urban structure complemented by vibrant city center and high-quality infrastructure;
- 2.) Distinguishable – characterized by a unique agro-industry and advanced urban services, adaptive urban management, and livable urban environment;

- 3.) Diversified – personified by the protection of tribal/traditional culture and lands and promotion of highlands to islands tourism; and
- 4.) Decentralized – pertains to deeper involvement of LGUs and stakeholders and a reliable city administration (JICA, 2018b).

The Plan covers seven sectors and labels the national government as the largest provider of investments at 43 percent. The seven sectors covered by the development plan are as follows: (1) roads and road traffic management; (2) public transport; (3) gateways; (4) water supply; (5) wastewater management; (6) solid waste; and (7) industrial development support. The private sector is expected to contribute 37 percent of the total while the water agencies, city government, and donor agencies fill in the remaining 20 percent.

Notably, two novel institutional mechanisms were mentioned in the cited document. These are: (i) adoption of green infrastructure and building codes as guiding principles for future investments; and (ii) establishment of sister agreement with Kitakyushu City in Japan to capacitate LGUs in designing and planning green infrastructure systems (JICA, 2018). In addition, a joint monitoring team composed of NEDA (Region XI) and the City Government of Davao was created and is tasked to oversee and report on the progress of the development plan every four to five years.

#### IV. CHARACTERIZING CITY DIPLOMACY

City diplomacy is defined by van der Pluijm (2007) as "the institutions and processes by which cities engage in relations with actors on an international political stage with the aim of representing themselves and their interests to one another". In addition, the interactions undertaken within the ambit of city diplomacy can either involve two parties (i.e., two-sided) or multiple actors (i.e., multi-sided).

In terms of rationale, there are three primary motivations while localities partake in city diplomacy (van der Pluijm, 2007). First, it may be a means to address the interests of the city and its community. An example is the representation-related activities undertaken by cities at the European Union. Another is conflict-resolution initiatives led by several cities (e.g., Amsterdam) to reduce the number of asylum-seekers and refugees entering their countries. Next, municipal representatives are prompted by their citizens to implement specific diplomatic activities such as opposition against nuclear weapons or environmental preservation. Lastly, cities exercise their idealistic motives by engaging in diplomatic acts to express solidarity with other localities. This is exemplified by city-twinning projects, specifically between Western cities and South African townships during the anti-apartheid movement in the 1980s (van der Pluijm, 2007).

Hocking (1993) also identified five elements that shape cities' participation in diplomatic activities. The first, and probably the most significant, is the tangible and intangible resources that can be accessed and utilized by cities. These include financing, human resources, political culture of a locality, bureaucratic



strength, and willingness and ability to develop cooperative mechanisms. The second is the degree of autonomy which impact the culture of devolution in a state system. Accordingly, greater autonomy equates to deeper devolution. The third is the nature of relationship between the central government and cities. When cities are substantially represented by their central governments, they have less impetus to partake in diplomatic activities. The fourth is cities' location (i.e., core or periphery) within a country significantly influences their role at the international level. Localities situated in regions considered as economic and political centers are therefore given a larger role on the diplomatic scene. The last is the cities' extent of global connectedness. Localities hosting the world's most active ports, specifically Shanghai, China, and Rotterdam, Netherlands, are internationally-linked and are busier on the diplomatic stage (Hocking, 1993).

Moreover, efforts and activities pursued by local actors at the global level can fall in any of the six dimensions, which are security, development, economic, cultural, cooperative, and representative (van der Pluijm, 2007). The first aspect covers diplomatic efforts such as conflict prevention, conflict management, and post-conflict reconstruction. The second type relates to humanitarian and emergency development assistance provided by cities, while the third dimension pertains to economic-pull activities (or attracting various forms of capital into the city) and export of services and knowledge or collaborations with other localities. The fourth aspect focus mostly on city-twinning projects that promote cultural and value exchanges, and the fifth type encompasses structures and mechanisms that facilitate transnational networks at the regional and global stages. The last dimension refers to cities' initiatives that result in their active participation in the decision-making process at the regional (and supranational) level (van der Pluijm, 2007).

#### V. HIGHLIGHTING THE LINK BETWEEN ASCN AND CITY DIPLOMACY

Although sustainable urban development remains to be ASCN's primary objective, the Network may also be effectively utilized in advancing an equally important goal: the empowerment of actors at the local level in promoting and communicating their interests to other actors at the regional and international level. It can therefore be said that this initiative fundamentally espouses the role of city diplomacy as an important means and end in the successful realization of sustainable urbanization.

To illustrate, the process of establishing a synergistic ecosystem of smart cities in ASEAN entails more frequent collaborations and deeper partnerships among a plethora of local level representatives from the government, private sector, and even civil society organizations. As a good starting point, the ASEAN Smart Cities Governance Workshop (SCGW) which was held in May 2018 brought together mayors, permanent secretaries, governors across the region to exchange views and ideas on smart and

sustainable urbanization. Participants attended thematic sessions, site visits, and action planning workshops. There were also networking sessions between representatives of ASCN pilot cities and of ASEAN external partners.

The exercise of city diplomacy then becomes instrumental in the effective implementation of City-specific Action Plans for Smart City Development from 2018 until 2025. This is because local authorities and representatives are expected to advance their interests and secure assistance from various partners through both two-sided (e.g., twinning program) and multi-sided (e.g., region-wide gatherings) interactions. At the regional level, local actors are expected to primarily engage in the security, development, economic, and cultural aspects of city diplomacy. A workshop held in the ASEAN SCWG found that the majority of the member cities' priority projects focused on four areas, namely: (i) environmental sustainability; (ii) waste management; (iii) safety and security; and (iv) urban mobility.

In her study on ASCN, Martinus (2020a) finds that partnerships between pilot cities and external partners over the period 2018-2019 are concentrated on two sectors, particularly, industry and innovation (seven partnerships) and safety and security (six partnerships). Fields of collaboration under the former include developing a masterplan for development, linking infrastructure, service provision, and urban economic growth. For the latter, projects revolve around traffic management, open data, command center, and cybersecurity. Partnerships were also established in other areas such as built infrastructure (four), civic and social (three), quality environment (one), and health and well-being (Martinus, 2020a).

Subsequently, all the undertakings are anticipated to not only support the actualization of sustainable urban development, but also develop and cultivate an environment conducive to the conduct of city diplomacy within Southeast Asia. The presence of capable local actors executing diplomatic duties at the regional and international levels is indeed desirable for the regional grouping as it tries to secure greater involvement from ASEAN localities amid the deepening regional integration.

In the Philippines' case, it can be observed that the involvement of Manila, Cebu, and Davao as pilot cities is mainly catalyzed by two factors, namely, the need to address the interests of their communities and as an expression of solidarity with other ASEAN cities. While there is no solid evidence to show these localities were prompted by their constituents, this may perhaps signify that smart city transformation and city diplomacy has not yet entered the top priorities of Filipinos residing in the cited pilot cities. Further, the participation of these local governments in diplomatic activities at the regional level primarily focus on economic, cultural, cooperative, and representative dimensions. It is yet to be determined whether cooperation will spillover to the security and development aspects.

Indeed, the formulation of the master plans by cities is an ideal starting point towards sustainable urban development. Thus, the next step in the right direction would be the effective implementation of the specified goals and priorities of each city.

This may be essentially attained through addressing several enforcement-related challenges, which are tackled in the consequent paragraphs.

The first issue refers to coordination at two different levels. At the project level, local government units (LGUs) are tasked to screen and evaluate potential partners, with the overarching goal of entering into an agreement with the most suitable candidate/s. The selected partner/s and the LGU should then tediously thresh out the details of the arrangement to account for two factors, namely: (i) the objectives set out by the city's Master Plan; and (ii) social and environmental considerations along with the economic rationale thus espousing a sustainable approach. The mode of financing will substantially determine the deliverable/s of every party, but the development and use of an effective monitoring mechanism is equally crucial in ensuring that each partner acts in compliance with its duties and obligations.

At the regional level, local governments are also expected to regularly work on project/s that span across localities with their counterparts in other jurisdictions. For instance, Manila City's Master Plan requires practically the collaboration of several LGUs in revitalizing the Manila Bay along with the surrounding settlements. Cebu City is slated to follow the same path as its Master Plan encompasses a handful of localities within Metro Cebu.

The second challenge pertains to policy continuity. The long-term nature of the Master Plans seems to be incompatible with the short-term tenure of the chief local executives, as they are only given three years to govern their localities. Although the law permits incumbent mayors to be re-elected for additional two terms (or six more years), the timelines prescribed in the three Plans indicate that there must be consistent support for the move towards sustainable urbanization until 2040-2050. This is compounded by the delays in the implementation stage and the tumultuous political transitions which may result in the shift of policy thrust away from the goals set out by the Master Plans.

The third concern relates to city representation within ASEAN. The cities of Manila, Cebu, and Davao are expected to carry out sustainable urbanization efforts in their respective means as prescribed in the ASCN framework. Further, ASEAN Member States likewise believe that this goal is more attainable through closer collaboration and coordination among Southeast Asian localities, private sector, and external partners. The sharing of experiences, as well as technological and technical expertise, is perceived to substantially support ASEAN cities in achieving high quality of life, a competitive economy, and sustainable environment, respectively. The ASCN is also projected to contribute to the Association's community-building efforts at the regional level.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Indeed, the ASCN may be regarded as a viable initiative in advancing integration in the Southeast Asian region. Accordingly, it promotes the active participation of city governments in international diplomacy (or paradiplomacy) to address specific issues, build impactful projects for their urban population, and boost global competitiveness (Martinus, 2020b). This is expected to expand partnerships with foreign counterparts and pave the way for more targeted areas of cooperation resulting in specific, tangible outcomes. Hence, the establishment of ASCN demonstrates ASEAN's cognizance of the need to locally develop and implement sustainable solutions addressing regional and global issues.

The potential progressive impact of smart cities comes at an opportune time to counterbalance the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of Southeast Asian societies such as economy, transportation, labor force, digitalization, and among others. While the health crisis interrupted smart city projects and created new financial hurdles for city administrators, scholars and urban planners alike stress that the pandemic has forced societies to rethink the future of cities. It brings to the forefront the necessity to leverage the existing initiatives such as the ASCN to guarantee economic resilience and environmental sustainability (Martinus & Seah, 2020).

Notably, advancing sustainable development at the city level is a long-term goal and requires a whole-of-society approach. The multilayered diplomatic environment indeed gave rise to contemporary diplomacy which recognizes the role of cities in underpinning local interests at the international level. Thus, the ASCN may be perceived as a litmus test in determining the readiness of Philippine cities in achieving two main objectives: (a) realizing sustainable urban development; and (b) advancing city diplomacy at the regional level.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Local governments are key agents in leading and supporting the local communities' socio-economic development. They play an important role in the achievement of the 2030 SDG of transforming cities and human settlements into inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable spaces, and one that is prosperous too. In the Philippines' case, much needs to be done since it is in the nascent stages of smart city transformation and city diplomacy adoption. The succeeding paragraphs therefore identify key policy options and considerations for the local government units of Manila, Cebu, and Davao.

First, local governments must be equipped with necessary skills to promote smart city transformation and overall socio-economic development. An essential skill would be honing the communication skill of local actors in dealing with international partners. This will be necessary in the effective development of master plans. Objectives must be clearly agreed and coordinated between local governments and its partners. The development of a monitoring mechanism may be essential in effectively carrying out the tasks in a timely manner.

Moreover, smart city transformation involves all sectors of society and social and environmental considerations must not be left out. There must also be coordination in these areas. Thus, the Manila Bay Task Force and the Coordinating Office, as well as the Metropolitan Cebu Traffic Management Coordination Board, play a critical role in overseeing the coordination of efforts between and among local governments. The city governments of Manila and Cebu may likewise seek support from their respective regional development councils (RDCs), with the purpose of incorporating the objectives and action plans of their Master Plans into the regional agenda. This may help the cited LGUs in retaining sustainable urban development as one of the top priorities at the regional level.

Second, smart city transformations have financial implications. While it may facilitate financial growth because of streamlined processes and inclusivity, the very transformation process entails massive financing resources. Local governments may hence consider tapping new financing schemes, specifically for the 2030 SDGs, to supply the massive investment needs as well as encourage more participation from the private sector and civil society (Salazar & Katigbak, 2018). Nevertheless, the success of a project is fundamentally anchored on an empowered, capable, and action oriented LGU as the core of any approach.

Next, the successful implementation of projects relies heavily on project continuity. LGUs may utilize the services of capable engineers, scientists, environmentalists, and technical staff to lead the creation of project designs and their respective execution. The overall objective of this undertaking is to contribute to upholding policy continuity while suppressing the risk of projects being utilized for personal and legacy purposes.

Lastly, city representation in ASEAN must be expanded in the long run. Smart city transformation must be extended to all cities across the region. The local governments of the pilot cities should thus be capable in exercising city diplomacy to effectively communicate their interests and oversee the implementation of projects with chosen partners. The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) may play a paramount role in serving as a liaison/coordinator between the national government and the LGUs about the foreign policy agenda and goals of the current administration. Specifically, it may conduct capacity-building activities involving chief local executives and chief smart city officers.

Taking all these into consideration, an important inquiry would be: Will the ASEAN Smart Cities Network serve as a catalyst in empowering city-level actors to play a more decisive and active role in directing the region's future, which is currently deemed as a state-driven project?

Certainly, the answer is to be determined in a half decade or so, but the hope is that the realization of development goals at the local level through ASCN-related activities may result in greater constituency among residents for more extensive city diplomacy-related efforts by officials and representatives of AMS.

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