ARCHITECTURE

THE HINTERLANDS

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TEAM — Martin Knüsel, Marcel Jäggi
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PLACES — 6
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OF TERRITORY
Cities have, throughout history, functioned as centers of political and economic power, from which the agricultural and resource-rich hinterlands were managed and controlled. The dichotomy center-periphery (rural-urban, city-country side, etc) has laid the basis of urban culture in general. Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, new technologies, transportation modes and the opening of trade have introduced a remarkable complexity and an increase of physical distances in the relationship between cities and hinterlands. Less and less it is thought, cities rely on surrounding territories for supply and subsistence. Instead, they seem emancipated from the constraints of geography, operating in a global web of dependencies: global cities are said to have global hinterlands. These are the conditions where the access to resources and land, and even the distance between the sites of production and consumption, are being reconsidered in their economic, political and ethical dimensions.

At first glance, the island city-state of Singapore is the city without a hinterland. Certainly it is the city whose productive territories lie beyond the national borders. The access to resources, land, drinking water, energy and labor has been profoundly important for Singapore since its independence in 1959. On the one hand, these apparent restrictions have proven to foster innovation in urban development, for which Singapore has become known. On the other hand, economical incorporation of proximate areas in Malaysia and Indonesia has remained both a necessity and a profitable opportunity. The momentous growth found at Singapore’s borders – at the convergence of foreign investment with inexpensive land and labor – is marked by less transparent rules. The politics of control of flows of people and goods has imposed an urban geography of sharp differences.

During the FS12, the tri-national metropolitan region of Singapore will serve as the paradigmatic research case. Starting from the base in Singapore at the Future Cities Laboratory, we will traverse the borders toward the islands of the Indonesian Riau Archipelago and the Malaysian region of Johor, to investigate the links and the dependences between the global city and its hinterlands.