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CONCLUSION

A Diverse Approach to Research on Urban Issues

Jean-Michel Cusset
Franck Castiglioni
Patrick Gubry
Nguyen Thi Thieng
Pham Thuy Huong

Vietnam has long been the subject of French urban research. However, it is difficult to get an overall perspective of the themes and issues of this research as it is fragmented between various organizations and institutions. The same problem applies to Vietnamese research, as institutions are highly compartmentalized, and suffer from a lack of international exposure. There is actually a wide variety of institutions producing urban research in France and Vietnam: research institutes attached to central administration or local government, universities, ministries, international institutions, NGOs, etc.

One of the PRUD's achievements has consisted in initiating specific studies which brought together French and Vietnamese teams from the north and south of the country and from diverse institutions. This publication reflects part of the results obtained.

The PRUD programme demonstrates that research can be conducted in parallel on very similar themes, yet according to very different problematics.

Now would be the opportunity to go over the outcome of this research using both a comparative and a synthetic approach, with an eye to joint publications.

It would be useful to improve the circulation of information on past, current and projected urban research in Vietnam — and, more generally, in Southeast Asia. This information is currently too scattered.[1] Consultation between research centres could lead to the publication of a periodic bulletin, which would make studies and research in this field more widely available. The Cooperation Centre for Urban Development (IMV) and the Ho Chi Minh City Urban Development Management Support Centre (PADDI) could coordinate such a project.

There is no point in attempting to formulate a synthesis of the presentations contained in the present publication given the diversity of the subjects. Our ambition here is, firstly, to recapitulate on some of the issues dealt with by the PRUD (Urban Research Programme for Development) projects, as well as to review some of the main characteristics of urban mutations in Vietnam during the current transition period as outlined in the work carried out by the research teams. Secondly, we will suggest orientations for future research: based on existing knowledge accumulated through research projects carried out within the scope of the PRUD, we will either further investigate current themes and issues or explore new ones.

The Research Carried Out and Cross-disciplinary Aspects

Miscellaneous Conclusions

Under the PRUD programme, teams of Vietnamese and French researchers investigated some of the most pressing issues linked to the urban environment and its current evolution: the role of international consultants in urban infrastructure, the role of civil society in the management of urban environmental issues, the development of intra-urban mobility, urban transition and its stakeholders, the evolution of public roads in the urban recomposition process, water management, public development aid, resettlement the population of precarious habitat zones, etc. This list is obviously not exhaustive.

This research is mostly focused on the two largest cities in Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Some studies used comparative analysis, either between the two cities (for example, research on intra-urban mobility), or between Vietnam and its neighbours (for example, research on international consultants and their relations with the local engineering force in urban

infrastructure) or with a more distant country (for example, research on the evolution of public water management), or with an analysis of different models of intervention (for example, research on resettlement). The overall methodology of the research was based on the analysis of existing data and on qualitative and quantitative surveys.

Moreover, we have used a historical approach to highlight the evolution of stakeholders in urban transformation and their strategies.

The development of public roads in Hanoi has been observed throughout different historical periods: this approach emphasizes the significance of the past and the current concern for preserving its heritage.

Intra-urban mobility in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi has greatly increased in the past few years. Migration flows are increasingly directed towards peripheral areas. Moving to the suburbs often results in better living conditions; however, due to the expansion of its overall living space, the population is also confronted by increasing problems of urban transport, which are magnified by the inadequacy of public transport — despite recent improvements — and by the lack of infrastructure in peripheral areas.

Resettlement the inhabitants of precarious zones raises specific issues. In order to resettle them in an efficient and sustainable manner, certain aspects such as habitability, accessibility, residential security and the financial capacity of the resettled population have to be taken into account. One of the conditions necessary for successful resettlement is the setting up of economic and social support for displaced households, not only prior to resettlement, but also during the post-resettlement transition period. Policies implemented raise the issue of the rights of the large part of the population without a permanent residence permit or land-use rights. The administrative and institutional conditions under which planned resettlement is carried out should be more flexible. In addition, this problem stumbles into land issues and, more specifically, the elevated cost of land within the context of social operations.

Under the theme of water management, we reached the major conclusion that, for underprivileged populations, access to water remains largely deficient in most of the country's cities, and even in Hanoi. An essential prerequisite for more efficient management would be for managers and technicians to have an adequate level of competence and experience.

Moreover, the participation of various existing associations — The Women's Union, the Elderly People's Association and the Youth Association — is vital in addressing environmental issues. Nevertheless, participating stakeholders were not provided with specific training. The prospects of developing more autonomous organisational and administrative abilities thus

remain meagre. As for any financial benefits gained from participation, they are either very limited or non-existent.

The analysis of public development aid also sheds light on persistent red tape.

International consultants from different countries such as Japan and France are taking part in various urban projects relating to infrastructures. Transfer of know-how and the strengthening of the local engineering force are sought; although some such activity is indeed taking place, it remains limited.

Cross-disciplinary Aspects

Two important questions, which complete each other, have emerged throughout this research:

- The value of urban heritage is still rarely acknowledged in Vietnam: what are the reasons for this? To what extent will it be possible to avoid eradicating this past, considering the context of high growth and economic liberalization?
- Can one talk about a Vietnamese model of an Asian city? It seems that urban transition in Vietnam is not occurring in as radical and abrupt a manner as in China. Within the field of urban development and urban planning, possible reasons for this are Vietnam's capacity for absorbing external models, the quest for a third way between state intervention and economic liberalism, and the fact that architectural heritage is taken into account in urban planning.

Orientations for Research

Orientations for research in the urban field can be identified at both macro- and micro-level. Research on the following themes could be considered:

- Comparative analysis of the transition towards a market economy of socialist cities in Asia: China and Vietnam.
- Comparative studies of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Until now, comparative analysis could be carried out based on studies conducted in either city, but without a common investigation method. Systematic comparative analysis on urban transition in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City would probably make it possible to underline the specificities of each city in relation to its historical, cultural, economic and socio-political context.

- Transition towards market economy of medium-sized or secondary cities, such as Haiphong, Danang and Hue, which are still the subject of few studies. Are the modalities of transition and the issues at stake similar to those in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City? The same questions need to be asked about medium-sized cities.

Within the scope of urban policies, the fields of planning and programming, land rights, and the management of expropriations are closely linked and generate common interactions.

The implementation of urban management projects following their programming has direct consequences on land expropriations and their allocated use. However, the lack of legal clarity that characterizes poorly established or illegal land rights status, as well as the unpredictable nature of compensation procedures, imply long and arduous red tape and arbitrary decisions that often result in unequal or case by case treatment. The complexity of procedures often leads to loss of property for the poorest and those in precarious situations, or at least to land compensation that fails to match the real value of expropriated property. As a result, expropriations are often disputed, which extends the length of time needed to execute projects, as the negotiation period then needs to be taken into account. They can also result in judicial decisions that can jeopardize the urban operation itself (for example, contestation of the initial land use rights or of the value assigned to the property).

As well as exploring ways to curb the impact of planned urban development operations — for example, by preserving existing structures as far as possible — it would be necessary to undertake further analysis of the above-mentioned fields and their interactions so as to develop directions for proposals which would allow to rehabilitate — or at least level off and equalize — land management and the compensation system within the scope of urban planning. This would not only facilitate the work of decision-makers and urban planners, but also generate greater social equity:

- Social housing policies. This also warrants further investigation, considering the effects of economic transition, the liberalization of the housing market and the prospective demand for social housing, which can only increase in line with the country's current and future urbanization.
- Urban environment, migration and poverty.[2] There is an abundance of technical studies on the urban environment in Vietnam: analyses on air or soil pollution, studies on floods, issues raised by traffic

congestion and noise, etc. Precious few studies, however, have been conducted in the field of social science and even fewer have addressed the issue using a household survey. Examining environmental issues in parallel with migration status and poverty can lead to interesting results. Although not the poorest of the poor, migrants tend to settle in the suburbs of cities, where they are in direct contact with numerous sources of industrial pollution and where infrastructures are weak: if the poor cause some of the degradations of the urban environment, they are also their first victims; low income often leads people to settle on the cheapest land available, which is often the most affected by pollution.

- Changes in the residential control system.[3] Changes to the system of residential control are currently under examination in Vietnam, similar to the recent modifications undertaken in China. The system was initially set up for the distribution of ration cards and no longer serves any purpose. Surveys have shown that it does not prevent people from migrating to cities, though it remains a cause of social inequality, since only the wealthy can easily acquit themselves of its constraints. It represents a constant preoccupation for citizens, as permanent registration makes everyday life in the city much easier. It is worth considering the suppression of this system, whilst retaining the country's system of division into blocks for security purposes. With some technical improvements, it might be possible to maintain a permanent record of the population as has been done in several European countries.
- Urban transport and security.[4] The issue of road safety is particularly serious as helmets became compulsory for motorcyclists since 15 December 2007 only; enforcing helmet usage and seat belts are most likely to have the strongest impact. Controls could be extended to other aspects of road safety, such as vehicle overload, checking whether vehicles are roadworthy, issuing driving licenses, etc. This is a major issue for public health. The current situation almost amounts to criminal negligence, considering the countless road deaths, injuries and resulting disability, which cause untold suffering to individuals and families — not to mention the social cost from overloaded healthcare facilities and lost working days.
- Daily mobility and poverty in Vietnamese cities. To this day, copious amounts of research on urban poverty in Vietnam have been carried out. However, the everyday mobility of the most disadvantaged populations has not been addressed as such, whereas it has been the

subject of numerous studies elsewhere, especially in African countries.[5] Research on this issue could focus on several aspects. For instance, is the accessibility of the poor to essential goods and services hampered by low motorized mobility? Should poverty reduction strategies in Vietnam take the issue of transport into account?

Numerous other elements for reflection could be suggested. We will mention a few:

- The different ways in which consultancy report results as well as publications and reports used for research are being used, and, more generally, the issue of the use being made of research results. Foreign consultant reports mostly contain recommendations: for diverse reasons, these do not necessarily lead to immediate action, but, after several years, end up being applied, and, in a way, absorbed, as has been observed in the field of transport. On the other hand, very little is known about the actual impact of social science research on Vietnamese cities, even though they result — whether or not explicitly — in proposals for measures and policies.
- The use of census results: contrary to what is sometimes thought, population censuses are actually comprehensive and, allowing for a margin of error, include those without permanent registration (similar to China's "floating population"). However, foreigners in Vietnam had, until now, never been included in the general census.[6] This situation should be corrected, in a context where transborder movement is developing, especially with ASEAN countries. Furthermore, it would also be very useful in future if the census published a volume of specific data on cities, considering the growing importance of urban issues and the irreplaceable role of census data for apprehending urbanization. Finally, the situation in cities is rapidly changing, and a census should be carried out every five years, as was the case for the first time in Ho Chi Minh City in 2004.

Ultimately, the issues addressed in this publication, together with the aforementioned suggestions for further research, should collectively act as a catalyst for urban research in Vietnam. With this in mind, it would be useful to build a network including both French and Vietnamese research teams and institutions brought together by the PRUD programme, with the possibility of others joining later. The main mission of this streamlined organization would be to exchange information on past and present research, and to circulate bibliographies and reflections on urban issues and their future

prospects. Those involved in this network could later join forces to set up research projects, with several teams working in cooperation, in response to national and international calls for tender. It would no doubt soon be called upon to help define some of these calls.

Notes

[1] For example, *Lettre de l'IPRAUS* [Bulletin of the Parisian Research Institute: Architecture, Urbanism & Society] and *Lettre de l'AFRASE* [Bulletin of the French Association for Research in Southeast Asia] contain such information.

[2] This theme is addressed in a research project funded by the Priority Solidarity Fund (FSP) of the French Embassy in Vietnam, on the subject of "Migration, Poverty and Urban Environment: Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City". The project is conducted in cooperation with IRD in Paris, IDS in Ho Chi Minh City, and IPSS in Hanoi.

[3] A research project has just been carried out on this topic. See: *Villes en Transition Vietnam* [Cities in Transition], Ho Chi Minh City Centre for Sociology and Development Studies, Hanoi Institute of Sociology, "Impacts of Existing Residence Registration Policy on Urban Poverty Alleviation. Two Case Studies in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City". Ho Chi Minh City, 2005, 278 pp.

[4] A qualitative study has been conducted on this topic at the initiative of the French Red Cross, in association with the Vietnamese Red Cross.

[5] See for instance: Diaz, Olvera L., D. Plat, P. Pochet and M. Sahabana. "Mobilité et pauvreté en Afrique sub-saharienne: Eclairages à partir de quelques enquêtes-ménages [Mobility and poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa: Evaluation Based on a few Household Surveys]. In *Mobilité et systèmes de transport en Afrique sub-saharienne : les défis de la pauvreté.* [Mobility and Transport Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Challenges of Poverty]. SITRASS 8 proceedings, Saly, March 2004, MIET, IRD, LET, INRETS, 530 pp.

[6] The "Mid-term Census" in Ho Chi Minh City from October 2004 was the first to take into account foreign nationals.