THE RED RIVER PLANNING OF HANOI IN THE CONTEXT OF URBANISATION AND MODERNISATION

Analysis of media discourse

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FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

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Contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ECUE	ECUE Consultancy and Service Company Ltd.
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Ha	Hectare
Km	Kilometre
M	Metre
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MOC	Ministry of Construction
PES	Payments for environmental services
USD	United States Dollar
VCCI	Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry
VND	Vietnam Dong
VOV	Voice of Vietnam
WB	World Bank

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INTRODUCTION

This landmark report represents the first academic research exploring the media discourse associated with the Red River urban zoning planning in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, a 1,000-year-old city in the north of the country with a rich history that has witnessed dynamic economic growth in the past two decades. This report is comprised of two parts: the Introduction provides the context for this study by reviewing Hanoi's urban plans, the role of the Red River in the capital and its relevant development projects. It also proposes the study's theoretical framework and methodology. The second part will describe research results from analysing the media discourse.

Urban Planning in Hanoi

In 1986, Vietnam implemented the Doi Moi[1] policy. The opening of the country promoted the market economy, reduced the regulatory role of the State and provided momentum to realise more economically robust cities. In recent decades, Vietnam has emerged as one of the key countries to witness the most intense urbanisation in the world. Since 2010, Vietnam's urbanisation rate has exceeded the average Southeast Asia growth rate (2.5 per cent), and is close to that of China (3.1 per cent) (Labbé, 2021).

Doi Moi created a turning point after a decade of Stalinist-style urban planning. Hanoi's urban development trends are strongly influenced by the transition to a market-oriented economy (Coulhart at all, 2006), as well as by globalisation and modernisation (Geertman, 2010, 2014; Norindr, 2001; Smith & Scarpaci, 2000). The loosening of controls on private property ownership and national development aspirations have had an impact on a budding urban space market and thus, helped the city expand rapidly to acquire agricultural lands that once belonged to other provinces (Dao Van Tap, 1980; Forber & Le, 1996; McGee, 1995; Douglass & DiGregorio, 2002; Labbé, 2021).

According to Smith & Scarpaci (2000), Hanoi's growth is modeled on the form of extended metropolitan regions observed elsewhere in Asia-Pacific and thus, represent a change in spatial morphology of socialist urbanisation, with Vietnam having been drawn rapidly into the regional trends of Asia-Pacific and positioning itself to become a new East Asian 'dragon'. With its rapid transition, Hanoi has been considered "a city in transition" (Forbes and Le, 1996; Tran Hoai Anh, 2015), a "transforming city" (Drummond, 2000), the city of "metamorphoses" (Clément Piere and Lancret, 2001), "a globalising city" (Geertzman, 2010), "a metropolis in the making" (Fanchette, 2016) and "becoming a metropolis" (Thinh An Nguyen et al., 2019). The Vietnam Urbanization Review pointed out that Vietnam's urban system was evolving along five transitions: administrative, demographics, economic, physical and welfare (World Bank, 2011).

Studies on Hanoi's development reveal its paradoxes in urban planning (Smith & Scarpaci, 2000; Leaf, 2009). According to Smith & Scarpaci, socialism had shaped the process of urbanisation and development in Vietnam in different forms, in which the ambivalence of the socialist State towards cities and towns manifests itself in policies that once placed agriculture higher than industry. Cities are thought to be associated with industrialisation and modernisation, which the socialist State tried to resist at certain times. Another paradox is that planning and planning disruption seem to go hand-in-hand. Based on a survey of the Hanoi master plan for the period 1990-2010, Leaf argued that the master plan and actual implementation showed the phenomenon of "odd schizophrenia" on the one hand, the master plan seemed to work only because it "can", based on unrealistic assumptions about demographics and capital. On the other hand, it could only succeed if strict controls were applied for development and construction. Meanwhile, actual development in the city was spontaneous, ignoring these overall principles. Top-down city planning does not seem to be related to actors operating in the city development (Leaf, 1999:312).

The main reason, according to Leaf (1999), was the institutional system that underpins Hanoi's development and management is highly structured, but extremely ambiguous. It is a system that can be used for social control and political manoeuvring when necessary, but can also be flexible with official rules in certain conditions. These practices, when taken together, undermine the most comprehensive efforts at urban construction and thus, the only hope for the city's planned development lies in foreign-funded mega-projects.

Urban planning is always a State project, and so the ideological imprint is embedded in the architecture and planning of Hanoi (Ngo Huy Quynh, 1991; Logan, 2000). Hanoi's fabric has been shaped by a variety of influences, including a thousand years of Chinese rule, indigenous Vietnamese rule, French colonial rule, the American War, the Soviet era and the Doi Moi period (Tran Quoc Vuong and Vu Tuan San, 1975; Logan, 2000).

Ever since Hanoi became the new capital of Indochina in 1902, it has brought in the French vision of a new Hanoi – the "Little Paris of the East", as reflected in new re-planning and construction during this period. The transformation in Hanoi's urban planning at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century is

1 Doi Moi (Renovation) was initiated in 1986 by the Communist Party of Vietnam to introduce a range of economic reforms that marked the transition from a command economy to a market economy.

most evident with the birth of the Western Quarter in two areas: the southeast of Hoan Kiem Lake (the central lake of the city associated with historical legends) and the west of Hanoi. The establishment of the West Quarter expressed the need to expand the concession outside the city that the French had just conquered, but also an expression of "the power exercise of the victor who wanted to flaunt the prestige of the so-called "civilization mission" of the French civilization that is considered superior to the natives" (Nguyen Thua Hy, 2010:65). The ambition to turn Hanoi into a "miniature Paris" (Petit Paris) has made Hanoi much better in terms of urban infrastructure, but still mainly in the Western Quarters to serve the colonial apparatus, but not for the local people. And thus, as Vann (2007) pointed out, the French focus on renovating clearly showed the hallmarks of "colonial whiteness".

In addition to the French imprint, Logan pointed out that Soviet architects and planners played influential roles not only shaping urban planning in Vietnam, but also in reinforcing Soviet hegemony in Vietnam. Soviet ideology had the opportunity to make its mark in the cultural landscape in Vietnam after 1954 in the North and 1975 in the South. In the work "Hanoi: Biography of a city", Logan (2000) explained quite carefully the reason for this. During the period of struggle for independence and building socialism, construction and urban planning were still taking place, but in the direction of rejecting traditional building styles and religious monuments, as well as stepping away from the Western approach as it was considered an enemy. After Vietnam was completely independent from outside interference, the process of rebuilding Hanoi after the American War was associated with the desire to build a true socialist country. But this plan was fraught with difficulties due to the dearth of architects and planners. There were only about a dozen architects in Hanoi at that time, mainly those trained under the French, so they could not accommodate socialist architecture projects (Logan, 2000:193). Later generations were educated in the Soviet Union, and Soviet architects are those who contributed to the architectural morphology of Hanoi that is still visible today.

After the rebuilding of Hanoi after the American war, urban planning was still top-down with the participation of a number of State agencies, such as the Ministry of Construction (MOC), but always guided by the overarching government development policy. Hanoi's authorities actively formulated and implemented strategies on urban planning and policies for socio-economic development of the expanded capital. Hanoi reviewed 642 planning projects and investment projects for submission to the Prime Minister for permission to continue implementing 329 projects in accordance with the expanded Hanoi master plan[2] . The framework for urban planning is often part of a centralised economic master plan. According to Nguyen and Kammier, Hanoi's urban planning system "was used by a principle top-down nature with distribution of resources for the target defined by Party resolutions", and therefore, "urban planning is not seen as a means of addressing urban social or physical issues or problems, but is rather a process of allocation of State resources to meet specified targets" (Nguyen and Kammier, 2002:377).

Many studies have shown that changes in the socio-economic and political environment in formerly socialist countries have had a great impact on the design of the environment, while the transition to a market economy subsequently led to spatial transformations in cities (Nguyen and Kammeier, 2002). In Vietnam, similar to China, urban transformation is associated with globalisation and neoliberal discourse (Leaf, 1995).

There are different senses of a neoliberal approach seen in Hanoi's urban planning.

First of all, there is an aesthetic taste. According to Nikolas Rose, as quoted by Schwenkel (2012), the formation of neoliberal city entailed the reorganisation of space and spatial forms – including housing, streets, parks, and buildings – with the vision of civility. In Schwelkel's words, "strategy of urban governance has consistently focused on the domain of aesthetics as a means to "civilize" residents' conduct and create cleaner, safer and more livable communities" (2012:439). Through the study of a number of films, the research of Norindr (2001) has also shown a tendency to aestheticize urban spaces through the embracing "modernity" of Hanoians. As a colonial country, the indigenous peoples of the once French colony have become modern subjects actively participating "in the transformation of these emerging modern society"(p.73).

Secondly, the discourse of urban planning is imbued with the imprint of modern aspirations. After a long period of resisting modernism development, since Doi Moi the market economy has had a profound impact on the dream of modernisation, and is reflected in the discourses on urban planning in Hanoi. Throughout Vietnam's modern history, "civilization" has become a pervasive discourse. When Paul Doumer became governor of Indochina in 1897, he had an aspiration to innovate Indochina and as a social interventionist, his greatest contribution was the reconstruction of Hanoi. The "civilization discourse" was popular in Vietnamese society in the early 20th century and had an impact on individuals and society. As Bradly (2004) pointed out, the civilizing discourse at that time was closely linked with nationalism. Yet, the discourse on civilization in the post-Doi Moi period had a different sense. It is associated with neoliberalist desire for development, or the "high modernism" in Scott's

2 In August 1, 2008 the National Assembly of Vietnam officially approved the resolution to expand the administrative boundaries of the capital to the whole of Ha Tay province, Me Linh district, Vinh Phuc province and some villages of Luong Son district, Hoa Binh province. Hanoi's authorities reviewed 642 planning projects.
Source: https://cafef.vn/quy-hoach-thu-do-dinh-hinh-de-phat-trien-20180729135753443.chn

term (1985). The neoliberal mode of urban governance in Vietnam expresses itself in the way the cityscape has been civilized through endorsing privatisation and capitalist redevelopment (Schwenkel, 2012).

Thirdly, the market economy has become the biggest driving force on planning. While the city has been maintained by a socialist regime for four decades, during the past 15 years (since Doi Moi) market forces have begun to overshadow the influence of central planning as a city-shaping force, resulting in many clearly visible manifestations of underlying structural changes. Marketisation and decentralisation have facilitated foreign and private investment (Nguyen and Kammeier, 2002). In the previous Vietnamese political system, city planning was often top-down with the distribution of resources directed by the Party. The institutional framework for planning is part of a centrally-controlled economy, with key planning tools including socio-economic policies, sectoral and space planning that can give some orientation for investment decisions. From a rigid top-down Soviet-style master planning, Hanoi has taken a more strategic approach to planning and management (Van Horen, 2005:161). Especially, since Hanoi's 1,000th anniversary in 2010, greater attention was given to Hanoi's planning. Especially, the last decade witnessed the rise of large real estate corporations involved in planning and imposing their vision of a modern and civilized city.

The neoliberal approach also expresses itself in discourse on urban sustainability or urban green. Over the past few decades, sustainable cities and green cities have become dominant in popular discourse in Vietnam. A growing awareness has emerged on the sustainable aspects of urban landscape affected by rapid urbanisation, inefficient urban space planning and multi-faceted growth pressures. Planning towards built-up areas expanded, while non-built and water bodies narrowed (Pham Duc Uy & Nakagoshi, 2007; Nguyen, T.A., Le, P.M.T., Pham, T.M. et al. 2019). Thus, there have been a number of national policies that underline the importance of planning green spaces in the capital, such as "Strategic Orientation for Sustainable Development in Vietnam" (2004), "National Strategy for Green Growth during 2011-2020 and vision to 2050" (2012) and "Management of Architectural Space, Urban Landscape" (2010).

Hanoi, since 2010, is the first major city in Vietnam to apply the "green corridor" model in urban development orientation (Nguyen Van Tuyen, 2018). As a result, planners and decision-makers propose a combination of water bodies and green areas, using cultural as well as historic values, in a strategic concept for city planning in Hanoi. In this context, the Red River and the vision of Red River city emerged to occupy the centre of attention and city planning.

The Red River and its dykes in Hanoi

The Red River originates from Yunnan province in China to the north with a length of 1,226 kilometres. The river's truck stream flows through Hanoi for more than 100km and its branching distributaries spread out to form a fertile delta: the Red River Delta. The Red River also plays an important role in urban development in 10 cities in the north and provides a source of life for people living on both sides of the river (L.H.Phong, 2015).

There have been a number of studies on the Red River and Red River dyke from historical (Phung, 2017; Nguyen Hai Ke, 1985, Li Tana, 2016), ecological (L.H.Phong, 2015), geology and environment (Nguyen Van Hoang, Tran Van Hung, 2007) and folklore perspectives (Tran Tri Doi, 2010). However, all consider the Red River to play an important role in the cultural, historical and natural life of Hanoi in particular, and the wet rice-based culture of the Red River Delta, in general. First, the Red River serves as a source of water and alluvium that nourishes the rice fields in the north: "Each year, about a million tonnes of alluvium sediments is brought by river to consolidate the soils and its basin, while by constructing the dyke, its water is used efficiently for the drainage and irrigation of the agriculture" (L.H.Phong 2015:29). Second, historically, the Red River has been a natural barrier protecting Hanoi from China. Third, along with the river system in Hanoi, the Red River is omnipresent as a trading venue and a means of evacuation during times of wars. Finally, it plays an important role in Hanoi's identity, its artistic and cultural life.

The Red River headlined numerous official historical accounts such as Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu (Complete Annals of Great Viet), Dai Nam Thuc Luc (Veritable Records of the Great South), or the Geography of the Nguyen Dynasty. When the French entered Vietnam, the Red River became of key interest to serve trade. According to Nguyen Chi Ben (2008), there were 22 works by foreign authors in the Hanoi library studying the Red River. After 1954, when the French withdrew, research on the Red River and the culture along it intensified, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, from ethnographic, sociological, human ecological and cultural approaches. Yet, the popular image of the Red River was constructed as a fierce river associated with major floods in the Red River Delta. Thus, the Red River has always been considered an object that needs to be controlled, and the construction of dykes to protect people has taken place throughout history.

Established as a small town, Hanoi grew from a harbour on the banks of the Red River to prosper as a city (Tran Quoc Vuong, Vu Tuan San, 1975). The city, however, always faced flood risks due to the alluvial process raising the level watercourse above its elevation (Hoang et al., 2007). Therefore, dykes are part of the Red River's morphology. The dyke system in Hanoi is longest through northern provinces, including 20 main lines stretching 469,913km.

The first dyke built to protect Hanoi (Thang Long capital) was during the Ly Dynasty in 1108. The book Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu also recorded that in 1248, the court ordered to construct dykes to prevent inundation – those dykes are called Dinh Nhi (or quai cauldron) or "cauldron handle") – from the beginning of the waters to the sea (to ward off floods). Between the 1200s and 1400s, the perception of dyke-building in Vietnam shifted from a view that took it as a method of flood control to one that regarded it as security technology for rice harvests (Phung, 2017). Under the Tran Dynasty, the dyke was mainly to keep water from overflowing into the fields in time for the harvest. After the crops were harvested, the water was free to overflow into the fields. Under the Le Dynasty, larger dykes were newly built and embellished on the banks of Nhi Ha River, considered an interference with nature beyond the allowable limit. As a result, the Red River became aggressive, causing constant flooding during the Nguyen Dynasty. From the 10th to 19th centuries, there were 188 large floods breaking the dyke (MWR, 1994; Tran Quoc Vuong and Vu Tuan San, 1975), of which the flood of 1893 had a flood peak of 13 metres in Hanoi. From 1902-2001, floods were still frequent, culminating in two particularly large ones in August 1945 and 1971. In 1945, the Red River water augmented to 14.05m and flooded 310,000 hectares. In 1971, about 100,000 people[3] were killed when the water level reached 14.13m. As dykes are built higher, the floods seemed to become more intense due to the huge amount of alluvium that rests in the middle of the river could not continue to consolidate on the banks and made water levels higher and more dangerous (L.H.Phong, 2015).

The dyke has contributed to protection of the city, but was also an obstacle that separates the city and river. The riverine zones outside the dyke play a role as green corridors to connect the city and the river. But it is also the location of unofficial residences for those citizens who cannot afford to buy a place to live inside the dyke. Settlements in the flood zones outside the dyke, called "riverside urban areas", show the uncontrolled sub-urbanisation process in Hanoi.

The outside-dyke riverside urban areas were inundated in the rainy season and cultivated in 1920. These areas were later converted to habitation in the 1970s and developed spontaneously in the 1980s-1990s (Hoang et al., 2007). Located quite close to the city centre with cheap land prices, riverside urban areas have attracted many migrants and poor labourers. The overdevelopment of such areas in flood zones that obstruct river flows are considered key reasons leading to increased flood vulnerability of not only the riverside urban areas, but also the whole city (Uyen, 2002; Hoang, Shaw and Kobayashi, 2007). After approval of the revised Ordinance on Dykes, riverside urban areas became the most populous areas in Hanoi. Moreover, the operationalisation of Hoa Binh reservoir has reduced flood risks, and thus the outside dyke areas have attracted more inhabitants, even the rich to live. During 2000-2004, the population there increased 1.6-fold faster than pre-2000 (Nguyen, 2002).

In the last several decades, Hanoi's strong urbanisation and instability of the Red River's complicated hydrology have resulted in remarkable transformations in urban morphology, landscape and environment of the city and especially the riverine zones. In recent decades, under the influence of urbanisation, parts of the Red River outside the dyke have been rapidly occupied (Hoang, Shaw and Kobayashi, 2007). It has a complicated community structure composed of inhabitants from ancient agricultural villages along the river, poorer people who cannot afford inner city housing and those from other provinces who moved to Hanoi to find temporary jobs, such as manual labourers or street vendors in the city centre.

This dense inhabitation outside the dyke zone has left many environmental and social consequences. In terms of the environment, numerous studies have pointed to negative consequences for this river, such as illegal construction and excessive sand exploitation that cause serious erosion, threaten the soil quality and raise chemical pollution risks. These spontaneous communities populated outside the dyke dump waste on the riverbank and into the river through sewers, thus "polluting the water of the Red River, water resources in general and the environment" (Nguyen Van Hoang and Tran Van Hung, 2007:108).

Socially, these settlements have consequences for people. The area outside the dyke does not have a water evacuation or portable water distribution system. Therefore, residents use water from the Red River for their daily life while also dumping waste directly into it, exposing them to diseases and pollution (L.H. Phong, 2015). In certain times, children could not go to school because they were not allowed to register and there was no support policy from the government. These communities outside the dyke are commonly viewed as a social problem that tarnishes the face of the modern city, which needs to be solved. On the other hand, such settlements outside the dyke highlight the failure of State management to stop illegal construction. Despite many construction decrees issued in 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1994, unauthorised houses continued to be built in riverside urban areas, even after the Ordinance of Dyke was issued in 1989 and 2000 (Hoang, Shaw and Kobayashi 2007). Moreover, regulations in 1987 and 1992 even legalised squatters and illegal houses on vacant public land provided that people vacated upon State requests. In 1995, Hanoi local authorities issued a regulation to demolish illegal constructions. However, it

3 According to The historic floods in the history of Vietnam, dulieudiali.wordpress.com

was also ineffective (Hoang, Shaw and Kobayashi, 2007). Again, most recently in early 2021, the Hanoi People's Committee agreed with the Department of Construction to allow individual houses outside the Red River dyke to be licensed for construction and settlement for a limited time, while the Red River Zoning Plan was approved.

Thus, the lack of policy consistency and the prolonged planning of riverside areas has left the lives of people in riverside areas in a precarious state. Indeed, the dyke not only separates the city and the Red River, it creates two separate worlds. While the area inside the dyke is well protected and enjoys better infrastructure and social services, the outer area is threatened by flooding and almost forgotten. According to L.H.Phong (2015), to address environmental pollution, infrastructure and use of riverbank space, four challenges must be tackled: 1) improving the dyke system to connect the city and river, 2) making use of the riverine area effectively, 3) modernising and renovating the infrastructure system and 4) finding a new strategy to link the nature and urbanised zones from the smallest units that form the city. The Red River Zoning Plan appears to be a solution.

The Red River Zoning Plan

Since 1954, after the French withdrawal, the Red River has been the focus of numerous city planning attempts. The planning of outer dyke riverside zones was considered the right strategy to supplement land for urban use. In 1954, to provide residency for officials and employees, the city built a number of residential areas along the Red River, such as An Duong and Phuc Tan. There are also a number of other industrial facilities built, such as timber factories and river ports. But after the severe flood in 1971 with a river level spike to 13m, there was a change in construction on both sides of the river, including relocation of residential areas in the middle of the river and urgent implementation of a number of riverbank embankment projects.

Over the past few decades, many domestic and foreign organisations and businesses have agreed to contribute capital to research water treatment and propose solutions to improve infrastructure development projects on both sides of the Red River. Specifically, some projects according to the timelines are as follows:

The Tran Song Hong (Song Hong City) project was initiated in 1994. It was proposed by a Singaporean investor to be built on land outside the dyke in An Duong, with estimated investment capital of VND240 billion. According to the agreement with the Hanoi People's Committee at that time, the Singaporean side would design a modern residential area with a complex of houses, commercial offices, hotels, amusement parks and community activities to provide Hanoi with a sub-zone like Merlion island in Singapore. Hanoi also established a project management board. However, due to a number of challenges, especially water treatment, the project was not implemented.

In December 2000, **the Resolution No.15/NQTW** issued by the Politburo stated that: "Red River control and planning for exploitation on both sides of the river should take place". Immediately after this Resolution, numerous domestic and foreign investors proposed construction projects on both sides of the Red River. The city even actively organised a study on detailed planning of areas outside the Red River dyke. The initial research process was coordinated with the ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Finance, Transport, Planning and Investment as well as Construction. The city had a pilot project to renovate and build 1km along the Red River opposite Tay Ho district. By January 2002, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai after working with a number of provinces, issued Notice No.05/TB-VPCP to order the exploration of the Red River embankment project and exploit outer-dyke land for socio-economic development.

The Red River City Project was initiated in 2006. The leaders of Hanoi and the mayor of Seoul (Republic of Korea) signed an agreement to cooperate in planning, renovating and developing the two banks of the Red River in Hanoi. As detailed in this plan, the city of Seoul would send experts to assist Hanoi in planning, renovating and exploiting both sides of the Red River, including water treatment, land exploitation and use, and resettlement arrangements. The Koreans would cover 90 per cent of the USD5 million research cost. In 2007, the Red River City was officially introduced to the public. According to the master plan, dykes on both sides of the Red River would be strengthened to enhance flood resistance and become a major traffic axis along the riverbank. The waterway transport route would be improved and closely combined with the roading system. As proposed, the area along the Red River through Hanoi would be home to 97,000 households, accounting for 50 per cent of the area, with the remainder used for public works and commercial and service areas, five-star hotels, international technology and finance complexes.

After many seminars, consultations with experts and some negative public feedback due to fears the project would imprint a Korean-style urban area that would threaten Hanoi's identity, in 2008 the project abruptly stopped. This was due to a lack of agreement between the relevant ministries and sectors on the appropriate water treatment plan, and because Hanoi had expanded its administrative boundaries, making the section of the Red River through Hanoi more than 100km, instead of 40km as shown in original plan which would increase research funding from Korean budget.

In July 26, 2011, the Politburo, National Assembly and Prime Minister approved **the new Hanoi Master Plan to 2030 with vision to 2050** (Decision No. 1259/QD-TTg), which once again identified "the spatial axis on

both sides of the Red River as the important central axis of Hanoi". A year later, the city also approved the design of the Red River Zoning. In 2015, the planning study on both sides of the Red River restarted. The Hanoi People's Committee approved the technical assistance project "Strategy to develop urban planning on both sides of the Red River in Hanoi, the section from Thang Long Bridge to Long Bien Bridge" funded by the Korean Government. In 2017, three domestic corporations were approved by the city to finance the study of water treatment and planning of the Red River Zoning. However, since then, there has been no official information about the research of these enterprises.

These efforts over the past two decades underline Hanoi authorities' determination to develop projects on both sides of the Red River to serve as a middle axis of the city. However, all plans encountered flood drainage and management challenges. According to experts, with the Red River passing through Hanoi, it is necessary to ensure safety against floods with a frequency of 500 years (within 500 years, floods may appear over the dyke). In the face of these flood risks, many parties such as the Department of Planning and Architecture, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), and Hanoi People's Committee have together discussed fundamental conditions to approve urban zoning planning.

In mid-2020, Hanoi assigned specialised units to plan **the Red River urban zoning,** for approval by the end of 2021. The Red River urban zoning planning is a project under Hanoi's general construction plans until 2030, with a vision to 2050. In Hanoi's Master Plan to 2030 and Vision to 2050, the leaders of Hanoi manifested an ambition of renovating the outer-dyke zones into a large green corridor for the capital. According to the project, both sides of the river will be developed in a spacious and modern manner. Specifically, the plan is comprised of five subdivisions (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5), on a 40km long river section from Hong Ha bridge to Me So bridge. The study area is about 11,000ha, encompassing 55 wards and communes of 13 districts with a total population of 280,000-320,000 people. This area-oriented planning will be the typical spatial axis of green trees, water surfaces, cultural history, and the main landscape of the central urban area with public works, cultural green parks, tourism and entertainment services. In which, the trunk road system with a network of riverside roads, pedestrian and bicycle paths will be developed. A system of bridges and tunnels will connect urban areas on both sides of the river as well as urban transport and waterways to accelerate development of the area. However, the MARD has yet to agree with the master plan on flood drainage and population relocation. After more than six months' construction, the project was agreed by the Standing Board of the City Party Committee, assigned to relevant units to complete before approval. Citing leading planning experts invited by Hanoi, Secretary of the City Party Committee Vuong Dinh Hue said that the project was "the best ever and qualified for approval".

However, questions still remain about treatment of environmental issues and synergizing the relationship between humans (local dwellers) and nature (Red River), resettlement of local residents, improvement of connectivity between the inner and outer-dyke zones, protection of natural and cultural heritage. In addition, local people who will be affected directly by the project have not been consulted about the plan. This could lead to social and ecological issues given the magnitude of this project and its lack of public participation.

Theoretical framework

Urban planning is always a project embedded with meaning, ideology, vision and aspiration. To explore the dimensions of planning and its impact on people and the environment, some theoretical concepts will be useful for this report's analysis. Here we applied three basic concepts: discourse, neoliberalism and environmental justice. The concepts of discourse and neoliberalism will allow us to analyse the intertwined dimensions of ideology, aspiration, knowledge and power in shaping the visions of a modern city. The conceptual tools from environmental justice and political ecology will shed light onto the narratives and how they are recreating and re-enacting the power/knowledge dynamics that have defined the riverscape and the socio-natural processes underpinning it.

Discourse

Since the 1970s, discourse has become of practical and scholarly interest, as numerous scholars have endeavoured to explore how meaning is constructed and how it affects people (Macdonell, 1986; Montag, 2015). Discourse is "knowledge" about a certain topic expressed in terms of language, systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs, and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak. Language is not a mere medium to convey meaning and independently existing knowledge, but language itself is subjective, giving meaning to a material object and social practices. Similarly, discourse is not merely language, it is a matter of history and power. Discourse is "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern" (Weedon, 1987, p.108), or in Diamond and Quinby's words, it is "a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance (1988, p.185).

Among various authors, Foucault's conception of discourse has especially had a profound impact on academia from the 1980s onwards. His theory of discourse emphasised that the form of how we speak, write, and think is just as important as the content: discourses structure speech,

texts, and thoughts, allowing things can be conveyed and prevent other things from being communicated – mainly by the interaction between power and knowledge, and the use of knowledge as power. For Foucault, discourse does not exist independently but in a multidimensional relationship with knowledge and power (Foucault, 1966). The question with discourse is when, and how, and under what conditions something is allowed to become "truth", constituting a belief among the masses that it is "true", and without questioning about it. In other words, talking about discourse is about how truth is produced. Discourse controls not only what can be said under specific social and cultural conditions, but also who can speak, where, and when. According to Foucault: "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations". In his book "The Order of Things", Foucault wrote that each historical period is characterised by an "episteme" – the way in which we perceive and think about truth, right and wrong: "In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice".

This view of Foucault on discourse and episteme is important in unpacking the dimensions of discourse on urbanisation and urban planning in Vietnam, as well as the hegemony of developmental episteme. It helps us reveal the vocabulary and mechanism of knowledge and power in the imposition of modern aspirations and urban aesthetics. In this sense, the concept of "discourse" is closely related to another concept of "neoliberalism".

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a term used quite commonly in the 20th century to describe the resurgence of thoughts from the 19th century associated with the ideas of free markets and capitalism (Bloom, 2017; Sager, 2011). Neoliberalism is often associated with liberal economic policies, including privatisation, globalisation, free trade and deregulation. Neoliberalism can be viewed as "a restructuring of the relationship between private capital owners and the State, which rationalises and promotes a growth-first approach to urban development" (Sager 2011:149). Scholars began using the term 'neoliberalism' in the early 20th century with various meanings, but it was especially common in the 1970s-1980s. According to Bloom, the 21st century was the century of "neoliberalism", when the free market pervaded every aspect of economic, political and social life. Bloom even proposed that neoliberalism had become ethics which strategically co-opted traditional ethics to ideologically and structurally strengthen capitalism. Especially, it produces "the ethical capitalist", who is personally responsible for making society, workplace and even their lives "more ethical and even their lives" in the face of an immoral, but permanent free market (Bloom, 2017).

Discourses on neoliberism and neoliberal policies have profound spatial consequences, with a direct relation to urban planning. According to Sager, the concept of neoliberalism was useful in planning theory as "it is an essential descriptor of the political trends and bureaucratic transformations forming the conditions under which planners work" (2011:149). A neoliberal approach to urban planning involves mobility of urban space as "an arena for market-oriented economic growth and elite consumption practices. In doing so, it transforms the politico-economic setting in which public plans and projects are implemented" (Sager, 2011 :149).

According to Sager, there were several reasons why scholars should be interested in discourses on neoliberalism in social geography, public administration and urban studies: 1) neoliberalism sets new premises for analysing concepts such as globalisation, depoliticisation, the welfare state, market liberalisation, and discipline/ governmentality, which are embedded in planning theories, 2) through its new public management programme for transforming the public sector, neoliberalism engenders comprehensive changes in institutions and organisations that are the framework of public planning, 3) neoliberals attack planning directly and 4) neoliberals put into effect a number of planning-oriented urban policies (Sager 2011).

Neoliberalism is considered a key term to connect the issues of politics, economy, social life and globalisation in urban planning. It is arguably the most useful concept available for connecting the political discourses of the economic discourse of social life, the reformation of the welfare state and complex globalisation processes. Neoliberalism becomes a key word that helps us understand the dynamics of planners, the State as well as businesses in Hanoi's current urban picture.

Discussions surrounding neoliberalism include the hegemonic character of neoliberalism as ideology (Barnett, 2005), neoliberalism as a strategy for depoliticisation (Barnett, 2010; Clarke, 2008), the relationship between the concept of neoliberalism and Foucauldian theme of discipline and governmentality (Barnett, 2005, 2010; Larner, 2000). Debate has ensued on how embracing neoliberalism can lead to the public realms being constricted by the process of privatisation and marketisation, the introduction of competitive pressures into public bureaucracies, and the infusion of private financial arrangements into public institutions (Barnett, 2010). There are also criticisms surrounding the exaggeration of neoliberalism in virtually any discourse and the use of neoliberalism as a variable explaining most social phenomena (Barnett, 2005; Clarke, 2008; Sager, 2011).

One can clearly see the neoliberal mode of urban governance in Vietnam. According to Schwenkel (2012), "with its fusion of socialist and capitalist practices, and its lack of fit in the 'postsocialist' category, Vietnam offers a unique case study for examining urban governance

associated with neoliberal redevelopment" (2012:440).

The discourse on urban planning shows the prevalence of the episteme of development, the desire for modenity and a "civilized society". In his book Seeing Like a State, James Scott (1998) coined the term "high-modernist ideology", referring to a strong version of "the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws". In other words, high modernism is the legitimacy of science and technology. High modernism is also associated with economic interest, and thus, the benefit of entrepreneurs.

Environmental justice and political ecology

In conducting this research, our literature review was extended to encompass the lenses of environmental justice and political ecology to be theoretically informed of scholarly debates on relationships between human and non-human nature, and the human-environment-development nexus. Environmental justice and political ecology have grown during recent decades to become leading critical approaches to socio-environmental analyses (Svarstad & Benjaminsen, 2020). Recently, there have been efforts to bring environmental justice into dialogue with a political ecology lens, since they both have common normative aspirations and focus on justice, power, and social relations built on the asymmetrical distribution of resources and risks (Paulson et al., 2003).

Environmental justice scholarship insists on bringing attention to the environmental conditions in which people are immersed in their everyday lives. Political ecology "seeks to understand the complex relations between nature and society through a careful analysis of what one might call the forms of access and control over resources and their implications for environmental health and sustainable livelihoods" (Watts, 2000, p.257). Political ecologists stress attention to the fact that "the provision, reproduction, and reconfiguration of particular environmental relations is necessary to every moment of capitalist production, social reproduction and consumption" (McCarthy, 2005, p.736). The co-production of nature and society is emphasised as the "unity of socionature as a process" (McCarthy, 2005, p.96). Key theoretical concepts in human geography – such as place, region and scale – have long been integral to political ecologists' analyses of human-environment relations (Neumann, 2009). There is extensive work on the 'scale' dimension. Blaikie and Brookfield wrote that "the complexity of human-environment interactions demands an approach that encompasses the contribution of different geographical scales and hierarchies of socioeconomic organisations (e.g. person, household, village, region, state, world)" (Blaikie and Brookfied, 1987, p.17).

A variety of political ecology approaches has developed around a shared set of concepts. The first is a defined concept of marginality, in which political, economic and ecological expressions may be mutually reinforcing: "land degradation is both a result and a cause of social marginalisation" (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987, p.23). Second, is the idea that pressure of production on resources is transmitted through social relations that result in the imposition of excessive demands on the environment (Watts, 1983). And third, is the recognition of a plurality of positions, perceptions, interests, and rationalities in relation to the environment (Blaikie, 1985) – an awareness that one person's profit may be another's toxic dump.

The association between environmental crises and social injustice is now widely accepted (Martin et al., 2020; Menton et al., 2020). One of our primary purposes here is to underline the importance of placing justice at the heart of any political-environmental decisions that might have devastating impacts on those most vulnerable to the climate and ecological crises. There are moral and practical consequences, with disproportionate burdens continuing to fall on already marginalised groups (current of future), or to suppress their voices and values. Efforts to bring about sustainable development will only succeed – and will only themselves be sustained – if they are widely seen to be fair and legitimate and if they clearly bring matters of justice clearly into the picture. Scholars of political ecology and development studies assert that transformative environmental change needs to be premised on redistribution of power that requires the removal of all forms of discrimination based on social divisions such as gender and race, as well as divisions across geographical space and across generations (Martin et al., 2020; Agyeman et al., 2002). In the current era of climate and environmental change in Vietnam and internationally, any decision aimed at natural landscapes – such as riverscapes in urban areas – could cause disruption and (intended/unintended) harm to those whose lives are dependent on these natural environments.

Environmental justice emphasises the unequal distribution of environmental costs, benefits and associated well-being outcomes and seeks to understand the proximate and underlying drivers of this inequality (Martin et al., 2020; Schlosberg, 2009; 2013; 2017). The critical insight from environmental justice is that patterns of observed environmental inequality are associated with existing social inequalities and distribution conflicts. In fact, the patterns of winners and losers often reveal underlying lines of discrimination across social categories – such as race, wealth, gender and coloniality – as well as location in place and time (Martin et al., 2020).

Environmental justice has challenged the very notion of environment, examined multiple reasons for the construction of injustice and illustrated the potential of varied and pluralistic conceptions of social justice. A

nuanced understanding of environmental justice typically centres on the issue of equity, or the distribution of environmental ills and benefits. Scholars of this field tend to break down the idea of justice into different dimensions of concern:

Distributive justice: The earliest academic reflections on environmental justice focused on the existence of inequity in the distribution of environmental goods and the factors behind the production of environmental injustice (Schlosberg, 2013). The concept was used to illustrate that some communities faced more environmental risks than others. Those environmental threats represent an example of social injustice. Agarwal and Nurain (1991) pointed to the United States, where not only poor communities face a range of environmental threats, but communities of colour were especially at risk. However, environmental justice is not simply about establishing why more environmental risks are placed at the feet of minority communities or general inequitable distribution. It endeavours to explore the question of why these communities were devalued and examined the social, cultural, symbolic and institutional conditions underlying poor distribution of justice in the first place (Young, 1990). This leads to the second and third dimensions of concern in environmental justice: procedural justice and justice as recognition.

Procedural justice: It refers to the decision-making process, in particular who gets to participate. It is about who is involved and has influence in terms of decision-making (Svarstad et al, 2020).

Justice as recognition: Relates to the political and cultural status afforded to identity groups defined by social characteristics such as gender, ethnicity or worldview, intersecting with spatial and historical contexts (Sze and London, 2008; Martin et al., 2020; Svarstad and Benjaminsen, 2020). These concerns are typically linked, for example, when failures to respect territorial rights of access to and control over natural resources (concerns about distribution and procedure) have roots in more systemic failures of recognition. Justice as recognition concerns who is given respect (or not) and whose interests, values and views are recognised and taken into account. Iris Young (1990) and Nancy Fraser (2000) consider lack of recognition as part of the issue of injustice and a reason for unjust distribution. Young contends that if social differences exist and are attached to privilege and oppression, social justice requires an examination of those differences to undermine their effect on distributive injustice. A lack of recognition, demonstrated by various forms of insults, degradation and devaluation at individual and cultural levels, inflicts damage to oppressed communities and the image of communities in the larger cultural and political realms. The lack of recognition, in this view, is an injustice not only because it constrains people and does them harm, but also because it is the foundation for distributive injustice.

Equally notable, environmental justice literature draws mainly on Western traditions of liberalism and critical theory (Lawhon, 2013; Schlosberg, 2009). Hence, environmental justice scholars have advocated a pluralist approach to defining justice and recognising worldviews. This, for example, could be evidenced in the growing engagement with feminist and post-colonial scholarship. This includes Latin American decolonial theory that pays special attention to how legacies of colonial dominance continue to contaminate development and conservation practice throughout the world (Rodriguez et al., 2018; Vermeylen, 2019). In particular, a multitude of indigenous and local ways of knowing and relating to nature continue to be forcibly suppressed and replaced by reductionist and anthropocentric ways of valuing nature (Martin et al., 2020). While the global environmental governance institutions, such as United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, now formally acknowledge indigenous and local alternatives to mainstream, modernist knowledge, in practice these knowledge forms remain suppressed (Shea and Thornton, 2019). Svarstad et al. (2020) argues there cannot be environmental justice in an environmental conflict, unless the affected people – often the vulnerable or the poor – possess the opportunity to conduct their own critical knowledge production. In this light a more plural, inclusive and decolonised environmentalism will need to be part of the justice agenda for transformations to sustainability, as "we must always be asking whose visions are represented and following inclusive processes that ensure that we are not restricting which ways of valuing and knowing nature are taken seriously" (Martin et al., 2020, p.27).

Alongside the three mainstream understandings of environmental justice, **the capabilities approach to justice** has recently risen to pre-eminence as an alternative to traditional economic-based measures of development (Day, 2017). The capabilities theory was originally inspired by Amartya Sen and philosopher Martha Nussbaum (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000). "Capabilities theory examines what is needed to transform primary goods [if they are available] into a fully functioning life and what it is that interrupts that process" (Schlosberg, 2007, p.4). In development studies, this approach was widely used to think differently about human wellbeing and how deprivation, equality and ultimately claims of justice and injustice are assessed. Capabilities is a liberal, freedom-oriented theory of comparative justice, which asserts that justice does not lie in an equality of material goods, but rather in the ability of individuals to live lives they consider meaningful. The focus has, therefore, been on whether people have the capability to achieve a particular functioning they have reason to value, or the capacities necessary for people to function fully in the lives they choose for themselves (Martin et al., 2020; Svarstad et al., 2020; Schlosberg and Carruthers, 2010). For example, having a bicycle does not in itself bring mobility or other desired functioning. This is dependent on a bundle of physical and social capabilities, including

gendered norms, for example. In this sense, material goods are only ever a means rather than ends.

The two basic concepts of capabilities theory are functionings and capabilities. Functionings may be defined as the various things a person may value doing or being (Walker, 2012). As examples of doings, Scholsberg mentions eating, reading and seeing, and of beings he mentions being well-nourished and free from disease. He defines capabilities as a person's opportunities to do and be what they choose in the context of a given society. Justice, in this sense, is seen as implying that "people are able to live lives that they consider to have value (Edwards et al., 2016, p.756).

The capabilities approach offers a possible way for framing environmental justice in a way that is broad-based and incorporates multiple dimensions such as distribution, procedures and recognition. In light of this, justice is implicitly defined in terms of capabilities: the minimum capabilities to live a valued life. In relation to the focus of this research on Hanoi's Red River planning, in a political context like Vietnam's, how the Hanoi government can ensure a 'just' planning process and outcomes for the sake of the sovereignty and sustainability of the river (non-human) and river dwellers remains challenging politically, socially and economically.

All of the above theoretical concepts have been applied in this study of the Red River urban zoning from the perspectives of planning and its respective issues. Analysis of the planning itself will reveal dimensions of discourse, neoliberal and modernist ideology, as well as dimensions of inequality and justice, in which people are found to be the most disadvantaged group.

Methodology

Given the large volume of online commentary and sources concerning the variability of Red River Zoning Plans as well as the critical role of the media in aiding the State authorities to strengthen its status quo, the research seeks to capture the prevailing discourses in the media that arise from a range of actors associated with different social groups and power structures. Moreover, given the emotions triggered by these dominant discourses and their intricate links to broader political and social dynamics in Vietnam as well as the qualitative nature of this analysis, we are mindful of the risks of biased or stereotyped generalisations. As such, we sought to quantify online content and commentaries wherever possible and advisable to ensure research rigour.

This report's authors used Google and Facebook as the main search tools to capture all online sources. We focused our searches on three primary Red River zoning plans: **(i) the Project Tran Song Hong (Song Hong City) 1994, (ii) Red River City Project 2006 and (iii) the most recent Red River Zoning Plan**, also considered by city authorities at their respective times as a top priority to achieve "the city's rapid and sustainable development". These projects were selected based on their data availability and accessibility in the media as well as their political salience. The majority of data was harvested from Google searches.

Our searches were not restricted to fixed periods to maximise the collection of available data. Drawing on knowledge and long-term social campaigning experience, the search was limited to 22 online newspapers presented in Annex 1. These online outlets were selected due to their coverage, pivotal functions and representative roles, either in State propagation or in attracting a wider societal audience. These online platforms were categorised into the following groups:

1/ Those regarded as the official voice of the Communist Party and the State, including Nhan Dan (People) Online, Hanoimoi (New Hanoi), VTV (Vietnam National television broadcaster), VOV (Voice of Vietnam, national radio broadcaster), Vietnam News Agency (official State-run news agency). Five outlets were selected in total.

2/ Those that are official voices of particular sectors (nine outlets), such as construction, transport, agriculture, natural resources and environment. They include: Business Forum (Voice of VCCI: Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry), Xay Dung (Construction: voice of the MOC), Giao Thong (voice of the Ministry of Transport), Nong Nghiep Vietnam (Vietnam Agriculture), Thoi Bao Tai Chinh Vietnam (Vietnam Financial Times), Cong An Nhan Dan (People's Public Security), Quan Doi Nhan Dan (People's Army), Bao Tai Nguyen & Moi Truong (Natural Resources & Environment) and Kinh te vŕ Du bao (Economy and Forecast Review).

3/ The most viewed Vietnamese newspapers for the wider public (four outlets): VnExpress, Thanh Nien, Tuoi Tre and Zingnews.

4/ Platforms of associations and civil society (four outlets): Ashui.com, Tapchikientruc.com.vn (Architecture Magazine of Vietnam Association of Architects), quyhoachdothi.com (Vietnam Urban Planning and Development Association) and realtimes.vn (forum of Vietnamese real estate brokers).

Our research team designed a three-tier approach to conduct the research:

First, informed by the review of literature and our research questions, we developed a list of broad thematic keywords, yet significant enough to collect data (see Annex 2). The names of three projects were used as first primary search words, then combined with these thematic keywords to ensure the significance of the amount and quality of data collected, for example "Tran Song Hong + poverty",

"Tran Song Hong + flood control". On each of the 22 selected news sites, we ran a 'search' query. On average on each news site, 174 search queries were conducted in total to collect all data related to Hanoi's various strategic Red River planning projects. Every searched result was recorded and documented carefully with all titles, sapos and relevant content in a password-secured folder. All results in video format were documented. To enable video coding for later analysis, all videos were transcribed.

To run search queries on Facebook, due to different search engine features between Google and Facebook, the names of the three projects were streamlined so Facebook could show results as expected. The keywords used on Facebook included: Tran Song Hong (Song Hong City), city on the river bank, Red River urban zoning, Red River zoning, Red River planning. These streamlined words were then combined with keywords in Annex 2 to run 'search' queries.

Second, all collected data was entered into NVIVO software for coding (see Annex 3 for Coding Structure). Each NVIVO node represents each analytical theme. The analytical themes were informed by: 1) the literature review and 2) themes arising from the searched results. Data was coded based on the list of thematic areas and developed thematic nodes in NVIVO to contain these coded data. Analytical themes were developed via directly coding content of searched data.

Third, distinctive themes for final analysis were formulated drawing on data already coded.

Figure 1. Current Red River Zoning Plan

Source: Tuoitre.vn, 2021. https://tuoitre.vn/ha-noi-tu-quay-lung-vao-song-hong-nay-se-quay-mat-vao-song-hong-de-phat-trien-20210330084114997.htm

MEDIA DISCOURSE

This landmark report represents the first academic research exploring the planning of the Red River zoning. Previously, information on this issue was mainly disseminated via the press.

The following analysis of key themes arises from the detailed coding process of collected data.

Taming the 'fierce' Red River

The Red River, recognised as the ancestral home of ethnic Vietnamese with its natural cycles (flooding), has been historically perceived as 'physically dangerous' to river dwellers by policy-makers, scientists and academics. In Hanoi alone, since ancient times, protecting the capital of Dai La/Thang Long/Hanoi from the river's annual floods was a priority of kings/leaders of different ages. The efforts to tame the annual high waters of the Red River is evidenced by the intricate system of dykes, with the section that protects Hanoi 61km long (Tran Dang Hong, 2018). Working on the dykes and repairing them is a constant preoccupation of river dwellers (Hersh, 1972). For centuries, flood control was an integral part of the delta's culture and economy (Mburu, 2001; Tran Quoc Vuong and Vu Tuan San, 1975).

Cutting across the three river zoning projects, the prime concern of pundits as well as public officials was the crucial importance of how to control the river flow and its natural floods (*trị thủy*). From the standpoints of State officials, artists and local experts, unlike other urban rivers in the world, the Red River is "uniquely aggressive". Thus, identifying a suitable approach to stem and control the annual high waters of the river was key to the success of these projects. A senior academic from Hanoi's University of Architecture noted:

> The Red River has a large and aggressive water flow, so the approach to it should be different from other urban rivers in the world. [...] Hence, the aim of flood control needs to come first.

(Diendandoanhnghiep.vn, 2021 https://diendandoanhnghiep.vn/mau-so-nao-cho-do-thi-ven-song-hong-193246.html)

Likewise, a local painter revealed that "the most important issue in the Red River planning relates to how you can tame, control its water. There have been many foreign projects that wanted to invest in the Red River, but all failed because of this issue". (Vov.vn, 2017 https://vov.vn/xa-hoi/nguoi-neu-y-tuong-quy-hoach-song-hong-cach-nay-10-nam-len-tieng-608102.vov).

Comparing the Red River to others in the world – such as the Seine River (Paris), Thames River (London) or Han River (Seoul) – from public officials to experts, they placed an emphasis on the 'fierce' hydrological regime which is relatively unique to the Red River and the immense disparity in water levels between the flood and dry seasons. The underlying reason why various strategic planning projects since the 1990s were postponed or suspended rests on the difficulties as well as lack of consensus on solving the Red River's flood drainage and flood control issues.

A male architect, also the Vice Chairman of the Vietnam Urban Development Planning Association, revealed:

> It has been 30 years since Hanoi identified the direction for the development of the riverside city, there have been many organisations and corporates, both local and international, signalled their interest in investment in researching the river water control, thereby proposing their infrastructure development projects on the both banks of the Red River. […] Yet, none of these project have been successful because Hanoi has not found a feasible measure in terms of flood control and drainage (trị thủy và thoát lũ).

(Ashui.com, 2020 https://ashui.com/mag/tuongtac/phanbien/16334-thanh-pho-ven-song-hong-o-ha-noi-20-nam-van-dang-do-vi-sao.html)

He added:

> Before the economic benefits brought about by the two river banks, there will be certainly no shortage of domestic and foreign businesses who want to invest. Yet, the key is the flood control, it is necessary to find a feasible and safest solution otherwise the planning will be difficult to implement.

(Ashui.com, 2020).

Diendandoanhnghiep.vn illustrated that the total cost of river flood controls in the Red River City Project 2006 was USD581.2 million. However, these measures were perceived as unable to address river flood issues due to unpredictable impacts of Red River flood controls (Diendandoanhnghiep.vn, 2019). Do Viet Chien, a senior Hanoi Department of Planning and Architecture official, stated his view about the Red River City Project:

> […] First, it is to control the river high waters (trị thủy), the second is to combine transportation with irrigation, and the third is to exploit effectively the land resources on both banks of the river.

(Diendandoanhnghiep.vn, 2019)

Comparing the Han River, Mr Chien continued: "That the two banks of the Han River [Republic of Korea] are well developed is a testament to the successful water

control *(minh chứng cho việc trị thủy thành công)* and is also illustrative of the success of the planning projects which lean on the river for economic development." (Diendandoanhnghiep.vn, 2019).

The strong emphasis on 'controlling and taming' the river reflects Vietnamese people's way of thinking and acting upon relations between humans and nature (or non-human), with the desired command over nature, which is akin to the anthropocentric perspective of nature. The desire of taming and controlling the river, a form of power, has been well established throughout history and any actors/institutions in leadership considered it a political mandate of their ruling regimes. The river, an embodiment of nature, is not a distant thing that one would encounter in the deep forests or in mountains far from their living spaces and disconnected from their everyday life, but nature is mainly around them, next to them (Culas 2019). In close proximity with this nature (Red River), the aspiration of becoming a 'master of nature' ("human beings have the right to alter environmental nature to what they want", De Groot, 1992 cited in Duong & Van Den Born, 2019, p.2) is a dominant view pertaining to the variety of Red River planning projects. This worldview on nature reverberates with Pham and Rambo (2003), which showcases two perspectives on human-nature relationships in Vietnam. That is, on the one hand, Vietnamese people consider nature as a limited resource which human beings must exploit and rely on for their survival. On the other hand, humans are seen interactive with nature in an ecological balance that requires humans to take care of the environment This guardian of nature means humans stand above nature, but are responsible to take care of nature because "nature 'rises up' as having a real value, a sake and meaning of its own" (De Groot, 1992, p.483).

However, the strong focus on the taming of the Red River *(chỉnh trị Sông Hồng)* encounters criticism. In particular, in response to the Red River City Project, Ta Hoa Phuong on Ashui.com vividly demonstrated that:

> The ultimate aim of this project is to adjust the Red River to generate an additional 2,500 hectares of land for new construction. It is expected that this new urban area will provide about 97,000 more apartments and infrastructure for a population of 342,000 people. In order to do that, the core problem is to renovate and strengthen the old dyke system with the main objective of pushing the dyke further away from the riverbank. As the Korean and Vietnamese designers of this project said "building more new dykes is to stabilise flows", but this idea, once put in reality, is in fact detrimental to the River. […] In reality, the right way to regulate the section of the Red River that runs through Hanoi is to move the dyke further away from the river bed, or at least to keep the status quo, but not to push the dyke close to it. In addition, it is necessary to get rid of all the structures and infrastructures located between the two dyke bodies that can prevent the flood flow of the river, not the other way around.

(Ashui, 2008, https://ashui.com/mag/tuongtac/phanbien/262-quy-hoach-thanh-pho-song-hong-trach-nhiem-truoc-lich-su.html)

Indeed, the above concern about over-development of Hanoi's riverside urban areas is in line with existing research. For example, Hung and Kobayashi (2010) showcased that Hanoi's development plan aimed to promote urban development wherever land is available, and this was the reason for the unusual over-development in flood-prone areas on the riverside of the dyke in Hanoi. Land use and population pressures have prompted these policy responses. Hung and Kobayashi explained that the Hanoi Master Plan 2020, approved in 1998, virtually further encouraged the over-development of riverside urban areas highly vulnerable to floods.

Depoliticised, technocratic and top-down plans

The narratives within the media place a heavy emphasis on technocratic issues and overlook environmental justice and other societal issues, such as social justice, inequality, poverty, conflicts and vulnerabilities. In this respect, a pivotal question is how can a top-down technocratic-based approach to Hanoi's Red River planning can create a paradigm shift in urban development, environmental sustainability and social justice for river dwellers, especially poor people and those most affected by these plans. Equally notable, critical standpoints towards the current project seem to be obscured by narratives from Hanoi city's leadership that reiterates the need to build public consensus through propagation for the current project.

The over-emphasis on the need to build public consensus raises a question concerning procedural justice (who actually participates, who is excluded and whose voices are heard, in which process and why) and other forms of justice (capabilities of those most affected to live a life they have reason to value). This concern becomes more evident if a participatory process is superficial and takes place in an ad-hoc manner. Whether and in which way diverse voices of wider society are captured, especially from the disadvantaged and marginalised river dwellers outside the dyke, are not stated clearly. Commonly, the main discourses around projects are primarily at government level, such as with MARD, and not with the public or other stakeholders. This could be seen in public statements by Hanoi leadership regarding the current Red River Zoning Plan, as the Vice Chairman of the City People's Committee, Duong Duc Tuan, highlighted:

> This project involves several ministries and departments. Currently, the MARD has responded to this project with its high endorsement, but required compliance with flood prevention and control measures. In the time to come, the

City People's Committee will consult the MOC about the project, then report to the City Party Committee. After that it will be decentralised based on the competencies of relevant authorities. It is expected that by the end of 2021, the Red River urban zoning plan will be approved. ”

(Hanoimoi.com.vn, 2021 http://www.hanoimoi.com.vn/tin-tuc/Chinh-tri/1006432/do-an-quy-hoach-phan-khu-do-thi-song-hong-du-kien-duoc-duyet-vao-cuoi-nam-2021).

Unpacking this city leader's statement, the statist approach (State-dominated process) is evident, while the voices and meaningful participation of wider society fail to be amplified. The development of Hanoi's Red River projects is a technocratic-managerial process that has centralised decision-making on the fate of the river and city into the hands of public regulatory agencies and powerful interests. The river is the narrative, symbolic and material site of struggle between the forces of State, capital and nature. In these processes, the voice, interests and visibility of communities, especially socially vulnerable river dwellers, have been marginalised in policy debates on Hanoi's Red River planning.

Nevertheless, it is critical to note that the transparency and publication of information regarding the river planning within the State apparatus itself is problematic. A detailed account on Congannhandan online (2021) demonstrated a lack of information and participation by lower-level government (People's Committees of Tay Ho, Long Bien districts under the planned area) during the planning process: "Unfortunately, there is no specific information about the planning other than that in the media. At the implementation level, directly in charge of land management, it [project information] is not updated by the official administrative channels on planning (including drafting), this will certainly cause difficulties for State management activities." (Congannhandan online, 2021, https://cand.com.vn/dieu-tra-theo-don-ban-doc/Bai-cuoi-Truc-loi-quy-hoach-song-Hong-he-luy-nhan-tien-i601693/)

The technocratisation of the Red River dominates the narratives from the State and its circle with the abundancy of technical information that dictates who has knowledge and power over the Red River. As affirmed by the Vice Chairman of Hanoi People's Committee Duong Duc Tuan regarding the current project:

“ All six planning sections (of Hanoi's Red River project) have fully met the requirements as prescribed by law, specifically in accordance with the planning of the upper level. The City People's Committee has so far received written responses to the project from the MOC, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to agree on the categories relevant to their fields of management such as standards and regulations, the height, the old quarter area, Hoan Kiem Lake and its vicinity. The Red River Zoning Project is studied on the total area of 40km, an integral part of the Red River, stretching from Hong Ha bridge to Me So bridge, covering the land area of about 11,000ha that lies within the territory of 55 wards and communes of 13 districts. ”

(Baoxaydung.com.vn, 2021 https://baoxaydung.com.vn/som-ban-hanh-quy-hoach-phan-khu-se-thao-diem-nghen-tao-dong-luc-phat-trien-thu-do-300698.html) (italics for authors' emphasis)

Technical information about the project is publicly available and commonly reported across a variety of media, including the management of riverbanks and residential areas, land use planning, land use outside the dyke, soil types inside and outside the flood drainage area, technical infrastructure, traffic (underground, overpass), spatial architecture, technical preparation, communication, sewage, solid waste, cemetery, stations, parking lots and connections with four inner city districts. Notably, existing research on the Red River reveals a lack of hazard maps, unregulated development, and overreliance on infrastructural and technical means of flood risk reduction, such as dykes (McElwee et al., 2017). Likewise, casting light onto the Mekong Delta, Miller (2007) shows that the domination of technocratic-managerial process in water resources development in this region imposed by the 'command-and-control' State was rendered ineffective, evidenced in the defective, inefficient hydraulic systems that resulted in the decline in ecological values in rice production and soil erosion. Equally striking is the State perception that tends to place blame on the water resources themselves, rather than any failure of governance, which induced the cycle to keep seeking alternative approaches (Tortajada, 2014).

Given the complex social, ecological, technological and political histories of the Red River presented in the preceding section, it is necessary to ask why these large-scale Red River projects are being kept away from the politics and governance of the local context within which the river itself and its dwellers are embedded? What politics are embodied in these planning processes and whose vision is implied in the naming of the Red River project itself? Do the environmental, social and historical aspects outlined in the preceding section make it into the frame and discourse of visibility in these strategic river planning projects? The top-down State narratives assume a strong association between implementation of the current river planning project and sustainable livelihoods for river dwellers, while excluding their participation. In other words, the project's environmental sustainability, poverty reduction and social justice credentials are not visible when viewed through the prism of public interest. These questions are not currently addressed within mainstream narratives from State officials and their circles. As seen in the statement by former Secretary of the Hanoi Party Committee, Vuong Dinh Hue regarding the current Red River Zoning plan:

> Once the flood diversion plan is completed, the city will carry out the planning. This will create stable livelihoods for about 900,000 people living along both river banks and also create a clean, beautiful urban outlook. However, it is necessary to conduct planning for flood drainage before the Red River planning is conducted.

(Vietnamplus, 2020 https://www.vietnamplus.vn/quy-hoach-hai-ben-bo-song-hong-co-hoi-cho-thu-do-vuon-minh/654140.vnp)

The Red River is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, as are its river dwellers. Moreover, it is unclear how the project will generate stable livelihoods for 900,000 people living along both river banks and whether any threat to these livelihoods of the most marginalised groups will exacerbate social injustice and inequality. The strong emphasis on a technocratic approach that overlooks environmental justice and other societal issues in Red River planning projects reflects how contemporary policy processes are recreating and reenacting conflicting structures of knowledge and power that have shaped past Red River planning projects and left the river and vulnerable groups more exposed to vulnerabilities.

Red River as a resource for capital expansion and intensification

Prevailing narratives around Hanoi's Red River development projects have drawn public attention to its materialistic values and capital expansion opportunities, especially areas outside the dyke. The myriad of past articles' headings outline an urban dream, with the river shaped by desires of ownership through multiple planning projects over past decades, which seek to expand and enhance capital-intensive economic development. The new Red River plan will become a driving force for investment attraction, capitalist accumulation and expansion as a high-profile local resource management expert and former Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Prof. Dang Hung Vo compares the Red River area running through Hanoi as a riverside treasure *(kho báu bên sông)* or gold land *(đất vàng)*, wrote:

> The land of Hanoi's old quarter is like gold, so why is the land outside the dyke along the river so cheap? The two areas are not far from each other, but their land values are of two different extremes (giá trị đất đai cách nhau một trời, một vực). What to do to turn wasteland into gold land (biến đất bèo thành đất vàng)? This is a big question for Hanoi. I think, the Red River City project will be an answer.

(Vnexpress, 2021 https://vnexpress.net/kho-bau-ben-song-hong-4296585.html)

He further underlined land capitalisation *(vốn hóa đất đai)* to generate monetary sources for construction: "Once the cheap land outside the dyke becomes 'gold', what can't be done? It is important that the revenue from land conversion must be included in urban development by the State. Developed countries prosper by their art of land capitalisation." (Vnexpress.net, 2021). In another platform, he emphasised that completion of planning of both Red River banks is "critical not only to the effective land use for urban development, but also to better develop the riverbank area which is under spontaneous and chaotic development." (Daidoanket.vn, 2021 http://daidoanket.vn/quy-hoach-hai-ben-bo-song-hong-chia-khoa-vang-mo-canh-cua-tiem-nang-5667077.html).

Similarly, the Vice President of VCCI noted: "Hanoi is currently determined to speed up the formulation and approval of the Red River urban zoning plan, this plan will be one of the strong driving forces for investment attraction, helping to form a chain of modern and sustainable cities. This will make Hanoi soon be named in the list of most liveable riverside cities in the region and world." (Diendandoanhnghiep.vn, 2021. https://diendandoanhnghiep.vn/quy-hoach-phan-khu-do-thi-song-hong-dong-luc-hinh-thanh-thanh-pho-ven-song-dang-song-206839.html).

Daidoanket, 2021 highlights: "After many years of waiting, the planning on both banks of the Red River is being restarted by Hanoi. This plan is seen as a golden key to many potential doors. The planned modern infrastructure works will contribute to creating a leverage for economic development, changing the urban face." (Daidoanket, 2021 http://daidoanket.vn/quy-hoach-hai-ben-bo-song-hong-chia-khoa-vang-mo-canh-cua-tiem-nang-5667077.html).

Likewise, under 'Realising the dream of a city by the Red River', Kinhtedothi (2021) claims that the upcoming construction of modern infrastructure will change the urban outlook on both river banks, hence "the miracle of the Red River *(kỳ tích Sông Hồng)* will soon become a reality." (https://kinhtedothi.vn/hien-thuc-hoa-giac-mo-thanh-pho-ben-song-hong.html).

A series of articles in the media (those aligned with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Vietnamese Real Estate Association, MOC, VOV, Kinhtedothi.vn, Daidoanket.vn) with striking headings and highlights on the "new attraction from the Red River's urban development", "an urban dream of the Red River", "potentials for land development from the Red River planning project", "modern infrastructure works on the banks of the Red River will contribute to creating a leverage for economic development, changing the urban face", "the miracle of the Red River soon becomes a reality", "promote investment attraction", "the land price of both banks of the Red River increasing by 10 times in response to the new Red River planning", "real estate in the East of Hanoi rise up thanks to the Red River Urban Planning", "potentials of the development projects in the East of Hanoi associated with the Red River Urban planning", "profiteering from the Red River urban subdivision planning project". Within nearly 600 pages of coded results for the current Red River planning project alone, 'land price' was mentioned 354 times.

In the article titled 'Potential for land development from the Red River Zoning plan', Construction Newspaper writes "the area along the banks of the Red River has large potential for infrastructure development, but for many years it suffered from desertification (hoang hóa), encroachment *(lấn chiếm)*, and inefficient capitalisation *(khai thác kém hiệu quả)*". (Reatimes.vn, 2021 at https://reatimes.vn/tiem-nang-phat-trien-quy-dat-tu-quy-hoach-phan-khu-song-hong-20201224000001685.html). Or in the article titled "New attraction from the urban development along the Red River" on Baotainguyenmoitruong.vn (2021), the Vice President of VCCI signalled the strong real estate market potential of the Red River project:

> "While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of the economy, the real estate market is one of the bright spots. […] This is also deemed to be a good time for real estate business to get prepared for the new capital inflows into the market when the pandemic is under control. In the long term, Vietnamese real estate is still a potential market, because it is a shelter of assets that ensures safety and profitability in times of economic crisis, which has proved itself recently when comparing investment priorities between real estate and other channels."

(Baotainguyenmoitruong.vn, 2021 https://baotainguyenmoitruong.vn/hap-luc-moi-tu-chuoi-do-thi-ven-song-hong-331300.html)

In the same vein, the Chairman of the Vietnam Urban Development Planning Association, former Deputy Minister of Construction, emphasised that: "The planning of the Red River urban zoning, expected to be approved by the end of 2021, creates a strong basis and opportunity to effectively exploit the potential of the river (in terms of housing, urban features, Hanoi as a famous destination in the world), making Red River become a commercial symbol of the capital" (Baotainguyenmoitruong.vn, 2021, https://baotainguyenmoitruong.vn/hap-luc-moi-tu-chuoi-do-thi-ven-song-hong-331300.html).

The myriad of statements, detailed in this section, from the State and its circle embodies the ambitions and vision of city authorities about maximising the materiality and profiteering of nature (non-human world), and how to deepen capital development and intensification of the Red River. What emerges out of these narratives is the idealised and spectacularised nature of the Red River to be achieved through extending and policing profitable commodification processes. In these narratives, the Red River emerges as inanimate and passive object, primed for commodity capture in service to the creation of capitalist value. The river is becoming a "natural capital". It is subject to "the pricing, valuation, monetisation, and fiancialisation in the name of saving it" (to borrow words from Monbiot (2014)). The plan once approved, as Dang Hung Vo emphasised earlier, would increase the wholesome commensurable values of the land. This will engender a . Much of the existing academic literature on nature-society relations draws attention to the concept and ideology of neoliberalism, neoliberal nature and neoliberalisation of nature in particular – the encroachment of capitalist economic relations on 'environment' and 'resources' (Mansfield, 2008, Castree, 2008a & 2008b, Heynen and Robbins, 2005, McCarthy and Prudham, 2004) (see previous section on the general theoretical discussion of neoliberalism on page…). This scholarship raises profound questions surrounding "why are human interactions with the nonhuman world being neoliberalised across the globe?", "in what principal ways does nature's neoliberalisation operate in practice?", "what are the effects of this process?" and "how should these effects be evaluated?" (Castree, 2008, p.131). Neoliberalism emerged as a response to the crisis of profitability and mounting impacts during the State-led phase of the economy, and that operates as both a product of, and a driver toward, the reconfiguration, enclosure and control of socio-natural systems (Heynen et al., 2007). Bakker (2010) argues, neoliberalism can be understood as a political doctrine, an economic project, a set of regulatory practices, and a process of subject formation and mode of governmentality, which are ultimately oriented around the concept of "governing through markets". Neoliberalisation, an associated term of neoliberalism, indicates the contingent, process-based and articulated relationships of neoliberal actors, policies and processes with national to local institutions, discourses and environments. The role of the State is conceptualised in a complex manner, through both the idea of rollback and rollout regulatory reforms (Barney, 2012).

In general, neoliberalisation of nature refers to the use of market instruments, particularly in regards to privatisation, retreat of the State and decentralisation of management, and commodification of nature (McElwee, 2012). In these processes, nature is perceived as primary commodities, resources (land, fish, water, trees, wetlands, wildlife, urban green space), or as ecosystem services (Bakker, 2010). Non-human nature in neoliberal nature is incorporated or coerced into particular a political economic and spatial forms rather than being considered a socio-natural entity or a constitutive element of social and economic life. Castree (2008), argued that in a capitalist world, attempts to neoliberalise nature could be understood as 'environmental fixes' that are, in theory at least, 'rational' for private producers and also the State (as a key regulator of human-environment interactions).

Critical social scientists' research is broadly unsympathetic to the neoliberalisation of the nonhuman world. They underline the need to expand the definition of what 'counts' as nature (not merely defined instrumentally, as a resource or commodity), and fully acknowledge the multiple dimensions of relationships (not solely political and economic) between humans and non-humans.

However, notably, the key scholarly studies of neoliberal nature have not been well established in Southeast Asian contexts and in Vietnam, in particular. Limited scholarship has argued that neoliberal ideology has only selectively been adopted and deployed by domestic classes, actors and institutions in the region, often as a targeted strategy to buttress the political-economic power of ruling regimes (Barney, 2012). Much of neoliberal reforms pushed by donors have been deflected or remain unimplemented. In Vietnam, Gainsborough (2010) highlighted that while neoliberal actors and economic reforms were present, the neoliberal agenda had been employed in a highly selective and partial manner by the ruling party.

Shedding light onto neoliberal nature in Lao PDR, Barney (2012) showcased how national-to-local factors strongly influenced development of governable or ungovernable spaces and communities in forestry governance. Using the Lao PDR forest sector, Barney demonstrated that neoliberalism was far from the dominant mode of governance in play in this country. Instead it is still the Politburo, military, provincial governors, and their networks in Lao PDR who largely decide how forests are managed, where and when logging is conducted, and who controls the revenues. Likewise, McElwee (2012) argued that payments for environmental services (PES) (a form of neoliberal market-based forest conservation) in Vietnam were unlikely to drive radical changes in land ownership or forest use, because PES was shaped to fit the reality of on-the-ground politics, which continues to be influenced strongly by centralised forest management. Thus, such PES plans do not reflect unfettered market forces, retreating of the State, and expansion of transnational capital that play out elsewhere.

State narratives on the Red River somehow represent an idealised and spectacluralised nature of the Red River by the political hegemony, where the river is subject to capital-intensive economic development through a State building project about 'a dream of a riverside city' that is visioned as a destination for capital investment, tourism, and commerce. Undoubtedly, these visions of the Red River will undergo a complex and contested set of processes, comprised of diverse policies, practices and discourses. However, the potential for inequality and social exclusion remains apparent. Which socionatures – assemblages of human and non-human natures – will underpin these masterplans for Hanoi's Red River? Investments and policies put in place as a consequence of the Red River planning will not challenge the prevailing inequalities between social groups and spatial locations. Both people and nature of the Red River have become entangled in these plans due to an exclusionary approach, which raises pressing concerns about varied forms of justice, scale of inclusion/exclusion, and uneven access to resources.

Superficial and ambiguous discussions around ecological and social issues

Ecological and social issues are overshadowed by declaratory statements and buzzwords about "a green, civilised, and modern Hanoi". Central to narratives from the State circle is the aspiration of the city leadership for 'a green, civilised and modern Hanoi'. But, what exactly this Hanoi looks like is ambiguous, as the modern face of the city is exclusively sculptured by economic values of land and advocated as a magnet for investment attraction once planning is approved. In city leadership's statements, the new face of Hanoi is depicted with abundant striking buzzwords such as "greenery", "civilisation", and claims such as "Hanoi will not turn its back to the Red River as it does now, but turn its face towards the river for development", "the new urban face of Hanoi will be restructured", "a green, clean and beautiful Hanoi", "a historic plan to bring a new face for the capital city", "to light up a riverside city", or "the Red River city: the attraction of a creative, green and sustainable city".

The city leadership reinforces the 'best quality' and the historic role of the current project and its ultimate political will in creating a 'better' version of Hanoi in terms spatial planning, urban management, livelihoods generation, water control and flood control waterway. In order to persuade society people it is important to move this so-called historic Red River plan forward to "attract investment domestically and externally", therefore a compelling story about 'people' and 'nature' of the area outside the dyke needs to be told to legitimise and speed-up the process. Instead of communicating a socially and environmentally sensitive plan to the public on how to secure the river habitat sustainability, how to bring together sustainability, environmental justice and equity, and how to ensure "no river dwellers will be left behind" - especially those most affected who will likely be displaced, they depict nature and people in the way that reinforces their hegemonic agenda which is overwhelmingly inclined to high economic yield of the Red River. In their consistent narratives, the Red River emerges as 'golden land' either wasted, encroached on and harmed by a broad spectrum of people, including immigrants, homeless, landless and those without household registration. A male leader of the Institute of Hydraulic Planning emphasised the encroachment issue: "The Red River is increasingly encroached on, so we need to pay more attention to and manage this area". Likewise, another architect and Chief of Office of the Vietnam Association of Architects who strongly believes that "if we have a good plan, the government will receive huge economic revenues", simultaneously reiterated "thousands of hectares of land on the riverside of the dyke has been occupied by people from all walks of life who settled here, cultivated, earned a living, spontaneously formed hamlets, shacks and other informal settlements, with run down infrastructure and leaving the environment polluted." (Diendandoanhnghiep,

2021 https://diendandoanhnghiep.vn/emagazine/do-thi-song-hong-suc-hap-dan-ve-mot-thanh-pho-sang-tao-xanh-va-ben-vung-206711.html). In particular, the former Deputy Director of Hanoi Department of Planning and Architecture, Do Viet Chien, expressed regret the proposed project land was being encroached on by local people:

> Ten years ago I said that, if the project is not implemented soon, it will not take advantage of the investment resources from 1,500 hectares of land which is taken from the riverside of the dyke. This vacant land is the source for the development of the project, then the revenue could be used for reinvestment. If the project is not realised, this land will be encroached again, and we have to start from the beginning.

He continued:

> I feel very sorry that the project (the earlier Red River city project) was not implemented, and I feel sad when the proposed land for the project was no longer available because people gradually encroached on it. Every time the plan is published for public opinions, people take advantage of this moment to accelerate the encroaching on the riverbank. And now almost all resources are lost to implement the project.

Diendandoanhnghiep.vn, 2019https://diendandoanhnghiep.vn/index.php/du-an-do-thi-ven-song-hong-ky-ii-nhung-chi-tiet-chua-tung-he-lo-143816.html)

Instead of being depicted as civilians with active citizenship, people who happened to settle outside the dyke for a long period of time from all walks of life and called this riverine zone 'home', are framed as 'a category of error' with negative attributes such as "encroaching", "violating law", "unorganised", "messy", "homeless", or even "second-class citizens". These people, therefore, face being displaced because they belong to a 'category of error'. This raises questions about the underlying drivers of the encroachment in the first place and what are the reasons why people are displaced, how the displacement process takes place in a just and equitable manner and how to maintain the dignity of displaced communities. As a female architect from the Hanoi Institute of Construction Planning said: "The Red River urban zoning plan will relocate households that violate the law on dykes, those living within the dyke protection zone, and those in danger of landslides." (Diendandoanhnghiep.vn, 2022 https://diendandoanhnghiep.vn/index.php/quy-hoach-phan-khu-do-thi-song-hong-va-giac-mo-thanh-pho-ven-song-214603.html).

To stress the urgent need for the planning project to be approved, a male architect went so far as to frame the people living in the planned areas as "second-class citizens", exaggerated a long-waiting aspiration and long-standing anxiety of "people of the whole city", with lack of rigorous evidence:

> People hope and hold their breath and wait. The planning on both banks of the river has been along awaited by people, including people of the whole city and people in the planning area. Hanoians in general expect their city to face the river. Hanoians living on both river banks [in the planning area] no longer want this place to be simply just a side part of Hanoi but its integral part, enjoying all the infrastructure. Without planning, people here will forever live in the status of second-class citizens, temporary houses and roads, unlicensed construction, very high risks when buying and selling land, a state of insecurity and a lack of safety. Once planning is approved, people's lives there will be more stable.

(Tuoitre, 2021 https://tuoitre.vn/ha-noi-tu-quay-lung-vao-song-hong-nay-se-quay-mat-vao-song-hong-de-phat-trien-20210330084114997.htm)

"Second-class citizens"? In the word of this elite expert, if people living outside the dyke are second-class citizens, who will be the first-class or formal citizens? This raises a concern about what they think and how they think of 'access to citizenship', 'formal' citizens, how to exercise equal treatment, how those considered as informal are able to live and practice substantive citizenship roles and importantly, how access to citizenship rights is used by different societal groups to defend their privilege. What is the underlying reason for this separation among citizenry? Citizenship consists of rights and responsibilities, where rights are not entitlements, but certain collectively enforced protections and guarantees (Reiter, 2012). Research shows that some privileged groups have secured rights without sharing in the responsibilities, other groups have been left with responsibilities, without having access to the same rights (most notoriously in the case of women, non-traditional citizens and minorities) (Reiter, 2012). Citizenship status, ethnicity, class and gender have been used to divide citizenry into those with and those without rights, and those with and those without responsibilities (Reiter, 2012).

Moreover, other concerns relate to sustainability. Is there a way to incorporate 'people' into the State-sanctioned vision and pattern of what modern Hanoi should be, especially as they possess little political or economic power – yet bear the brunt of entrenched social exclusion and marginalisation. They were largely excluded from the river decision-making processes in the institutionalised policy-making arena that shaped the Red River urban development plans and in efforts to combine science with policy-making. Publicity of the full Environmental Impact Assessment or Strategic Environmental Assessment and other related detailed information of the Red River city projects remains scant. Information is published in a highly selective way, most of which focuses on the self-proclaimed historic importance of this mega project by

city leadership. Civil society and the wider public have been given little information about the projects and their potential impacts.

As a result, there is a lack of clarity on the vision and substance of sustainability for Hanoi and the Red River in State planning and the role of people and nature in this vision. In other words, how will the new Hanoi respond to human-nature interactions in ways that do not constrain poor people's livelihoods and freedom. The link between environmental sustainability and the economic opportunities and social justice for residents, especially river dwellers, remains indistinct. The State circle repeats a vision in which "the Red River urban area should be an ecological urbanity combined with eco-tourism and leisure, and culture because the section where the river runs through Hanoi has many tangible and intangible cultural and historical relics that need to be exploited," the Chief of Office of the Vietnam Association of Architects stressed (Tuoitre, 2021). Across Vietnam, there is multiplicity of evidence about so-called ecotourism projects that turn out to be destructive, exacerbating the depletion of nature and powerless local people being removed. In the case of the Red River city, greenery is equated to space where eco-tourism and leisure are promoted. However, further questions emerge regarding who can afford to live in this 'leisure' space, what types of social and environmental impacts in urbanised areas will result from the influx of residents and new infrastructure. Moreover, the social and environmental vulnerabilities exposed by these mega projects on old and new residents as well as restructured natural landscapes are unclear. Such concerns have not been addressed at any level in State mainstream narratives. Not long ago, Ho Chi Minh City's controversial 2,870ha Can Gio Tourist City project sparked public outcry for various reasons, with public concern about the suitability of the southern part of the city for large-scale urbanisation from a climate change adaptation perspective, and the risk of opening the door for property development in the guise of ecotourism (see Le Quynh, 2020).

To defend the environmental sustainability of the Red River city, the term "thuận thiên" (in harmony with nature, "being rightly oriented to nature"), is widely utilised by the city leadership and State circle experts. The then Secretary of the Hanoi Party Committee of that time strongly affirmed that:

> The Red River urban subdivision planning this time was built on the principle of "thuan thien", taking flood prevention and control as the ultimate goal, dismissing the overload of infrastructure construction.

(Tuoitre, 2021, https://tuoitre.vn/bi-thu-ha-noi-quy-hoach-phan-khu-do-thi-song-hong-theo-nguyen-tac-thuan-thien-20210311122126613.htm).

The concept of 'harmony with nature' is commonly repeated by senior city government leadership, then amplified by local pundits. As the male architect, the Chief of Office of Vietnam Association of Architects, revealed:

> The project thoroughly complies with the direction of the Secretary of Hanoi's Party Committee, which is to seek harmony with nature and not to allow the overload of construction of high-rise buildings. […] It is necessary to promote cultural values of the Red River with traditional craft villages, agricultural products of riverside villages, cultural and historical relics, festivals, to serve tourism and economic development.

(Baotainguyenmoitruong.vn, 2021, https://baotainguyenmoitruong.vn/quy-hoach-phan-khu-do-thi-song-hong-theo-huong-thuan-thien-323412.html)

Again, 'harmony with nature' and 'promoting cultural values' is finally aimed to serve 'tourism and economic development'. The concept of sustainability is highly complex, and essentially sustainability can be viewed "as a means to flourish as a human being, rather than be seen as a set of restrictive or prohibitive regulations" (Jordan and Kristjansson, 2017, p,1211). 'Harmony with nature' is to be exercised in all personal, social and political spheres, rather than merely a technical issue of dealing with flooding. A very basic understanding of 'harmony with nature' is 'respect for nature' and 'care of nature' which involves sharing a common bond with nature and recognition that humans are members of earth's interconnected web, or community, of life (Hursthouse, 2007). At a conceptual level, this virtue emphasises the human-nature relationship that involves an awareness that "we, as individuals, exist within functioning society that exists within nature. A sustainable relationship with nature involves not just the recognition that we are part of a larger ecosystem, but also a deeper, more complex understanding that nature is inextricable linked to society as a whole, as well as to individuals. A virtue concerning our relationship with nature needs to include the perception and reasoning that nature encompasses all of society, and therefore permeates all aspects of our lives. This realisation and awareness is crucial to sustainability" (Jordan and Kristjansson, 2017, p.1218). Environmental virtue ethics has suggested the application of traditional virtues, such as compassion, temperance and benevolence to environmental and sustainability issues (Hursthouse, 2007; Sandler, 2006).

While public acknowledgement of the virtue of harmony with nature by city authorities is partly deemed a positive change at least at the discourse level on the human-nature relationship, stating this virtue publicly does not reflect a nuanced or genuine understanding of this concept. Saying it out loud is one thing but comprehending the meaning and nature of it is a further step. Given the prevalence of economic activities so oriented towards disharmony in Vietnam, a straightforward question relates to whether there is fundamental change in human inter-relations and the human-nature relationship, whether there is a

transformational approach to sustainability in order to genuinely seek 'harmony with nature'.

Gender-blindness, inclusivity and urban planning

The complex interactions between gender relations, nature and sustainability have been totally obscured, while gender perspectives are totally absent, gender-specific and transformative approaches are neglected in mainstream narratives surrounding the projects examined by this report. Running word queries throughout 1,000 pages of coded results, the term 'gender' was absent. With the mainstream narratives of various Red River planning projects male-dominated, patriarchal and stereotypically masculine, they are predominantly suited to men's knowledge in shaping urban spaces. Likewise, the absence of social scientists, culture studies scholars, perspectives of environmental and social justice, rights and ethics, is striking too. The narratives of the city's principal strategic Red River planning document do not take gender and other forms of difference into account. Women's knowledge, agency and decision-making are not recognised, which could be seen, for example, in the gender composition of experts, government officials, business people, and a very small number of ordinary people, who were interviewed, invited to speak in public events, or expressed viewpoints in the mainstream media online news outlets or portals of ministries and associations): just 9 per cent were females. Male representation was dominant (91 per cent), particularly from government bodies (92 per cent or 209 males compared to 8 per cent or 17 females), those being technical experts (98 per cent or 118 males and 2 per cent or two females), and those being architects or having expertise in construction and urban planning (98 per cent or 104 males compared to 2 per cent or two females). More striking, sexist language in urban planning is stated publicly by male experts, when making paternalistic and sexist comparisons of the Red River to "an unspoiled beautiful village girl", an object of desire to be acquired. Both the river and women, in such views, are passive and subjective to serving men's needs and desires. As in his own words, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ngo Tri Long, an economic expert stated:

> When Hanoi is determined to carry out the river city project, domestic and foreign businesses will certainly not miss this opportunity to invest and implement the project. The Red River is like a beautiful village girl, still unspoiled, so any tycoon wants to compete *(Sông Hồng giống như một cô thôn nữ đẹp, vẫn còn hoang sơ, nên bất kỳ đại gia nào cũng muốn tranh phần),*

(Realtimes.vn, 2021, https://reatimes.vn/quy-hoach-do-thi-song-hong-muon-con-hon-khong-20201224000001842.html)

Critically, understanding this significant gap in gender perspectives, the prevalence of paternalism and sexism in urban planning cannot be separated from the political, historical understanding and socio-cultural specificities of Vietnam. Experiences of being gendered vary across places, contexts and political regimes (Beebeejaun, 2017). This under representation of females in shaping urban spaces echoes Vietnam's local realities, where women continue to endure an unequal position in society, ranging from economic inequality in the labour market to unpaid labour disproportionately falling on women, under representation in political and leadership roles, and the persistence of gender-based violence.

With a basic and practical level of knowledge, some fundamental questions remain unanswered: in the new Red River city of Hanoi, will urban amenities and services – such as workspaces, leisure facilities, green spaces and entertainment districts – be accessible to women, irrespective of their backgrounds, social classes and incomes. Moreover, will women-focused services, such as shelters for survivors of domestic or gender-based violence, be available for those already marginalised. Research shows that systematically, socio-culturally, and structurally, urban spaces are discriminatory and often dangerous gendered spaces, and frequently see increased rates of harassment, discrimination, and sexual and gender-based violence (Bullock & Priebe, 2021). Within urban environments, patriarchal structures and laws limit women's access to affordable housing, basic services, and public transportation (ibid). Leisure, entertainment districts are supposed to promote a sophisticated, metropolitan culture, but often many are stereotypically masculine (e.g. beer-based male domains), with presence of fighting, street vomiting and urination, and sexual harassment that excludes women or make them feel uncomfortable (Pojani et al., 2018). Existing research vividly demonstrates how public spaces are becoming unsafe because of lack of gendered participation in the design of urban spaces (Fenster, 2005). Very often women in cities, of Western and non-Western cultures, simply cannot use public spaces such as streets and parks, especially not alone (Massey, 1994), since far from being 'civilising' and equalising spaces, public parks have turned into sites of crime, which women are fearful to visit. This could be seen in Hanoi itself. Here, too, the new planning for Hanoi is not gendered. Everyday spatial practices, experiences, and knowledge of women, women's ability to access the city and their roles of planning in supporting these processes are largely ignored.

From a rights perspective, participation includes the right to take an important role in decisions regarding production of urban spaces at any relevant scale: the state national, provincial or local (Purcell, 2003). It is the right entitled to each dweller to have a key voice in defining urban spaces (Purcell, 2003). Here in the design of Red River urban spaces, the dominance of power in dictating who participates is evident. Female dwellers, irrespective of who they are, where they originally come from, to varied extent, develop a sense of belonging to

the river and cityscape, but their viewpoints and agency are downplayed or neglected. Fenster (2005) emphasised that patriarchal power relations were the most affecting elements in abusing women's right to the city in different ways than those of men. Very often the violation of the gendered right to city (the right to use and the right to participate) – which intersects with gendered power relations, culture, ethnic and national issues – closely link to city planning and local governance especially by abusing the right to participate in decision-making and citizen action (Fenster, 2005). Pojani et al. (2018) goes so far as to say that patriarchy in the planning of urban space is not just a failure of society – it is a failure of the imagination. In this respect, one needs to ask whether and how that new version of the Red River's Hanoi enables women to exercise the right to use and the right to participate, or at least to have the sense of comfort, belonging and commitment to their cityscape? Within this context, the right to the gendered city means the right to use and the right to participate must engage a serious discussion of patriarchal power relations, at private and public scales and the extent to which they harm the realisation of the right to the city for women and people of diversity, Fenster (2005) suggests. Recognising the importance of enabling diverse groups to claim city spaces places responsibilities upon planners to trace the complexities of everyday experiences and map the dynamic qualities of "peopled" space (Vaiou, 1992).

Ecologically and environmentally, there is a strong nexus between gender inequality-climate vulnerability-urban space. Evidently, these critical links have been problematically neglected in the new design of the Red River urban space. Climate change destabilises urban environments (Bullock and Priebe, 2021). Climate change impacts are not gender-neutral, meaning that men and women are impacted differently by, and have distinct capacities to cope with, limit, and respond to, climate stressors (Boyer et al., 2020). It is widely known that on balance, women and girls face disproportionately higher levels of insecurity when exposed to impacts of climate change and natural disasters (Bullock and Priebe, 2021). Climate change, therefore, can exacerbate entrenched gender inequalities. Women and girls are extremely under-presented in climate-urban space discussions in the case of Red River urban planning. Moreover, they are discriminated against and targets of sexism in the political discourse of urban space, as exemplified by the public statement of the male expert above. Their voices and agency are diminished in political processes of urban space design.

CONCLUSION

Whilst Vietnam's re-engagement in the global capitalist economy since 1986 has brought millions of people out of poverty, it has impacted upon the State's complex relationships with capital and natural resources. This so-called socialist-oriented capitalist expansion has also contributed to exacerbating anthropogenic effects on nature, from rivers to oceans, mountains to coastlines, forests to urban cities. As such, nature has been exploited for economic growth and integrated socio-ecological systems have been disrupted at a faster rate than we could ever imagine. For hundreds of years, the Red River was a place and more than that, a social space where dwellers across rural-urban divides make their living and call it home. The river is also described as the cradle of cultural identity practices for its populations. The riverine urban planning of Hanoi for the past 30 years has been the domain for the State to incorporate and regulate the riverscape. These planning projects constitute parts of State attempts to regulate and manage the river, a socio-natural space, for interests at State level, a particular geographic, regulatory and political position. They are also an embodiment of the conflict between the State-building apparatus for capital development, and the river status as a functioning and vital ecosystem, whose natural cycles (like flooding) are regarded inconvenient and physically dangerous to Hanoi and threatening to the imperatives of the State and capital. This research project examines and understands the evolving discourses coalescing around the planning of Hanoi's riverine zone as a capital-intensive economic resource and at the same time, as a sustainable ecosystem that continues to support environmental and economic functions that are critical to river dwellers. The conceptual understanding of discourse, environmental justice and political ecology allows for throwing light onto these discourses and how they are recreating and re-enacting the power/knowledge dynamics that have defined the riverscape and the socio-natural processes underpinning it.

Online coverage and responses to these Red River urban plans should be understood within historical scrutiny and current political economic contexts of post-socialist Vietnam that emphasise the connections between nature, humans, affection and control. The central element of this context relates to the interconnectedness between socialist ideals and capitalist aspirations of the ruling regime. Throughout the history of the Red River, the ideology of controlling nature, or the fierce Red River in this research, to serve the needs and aspiration of 'modernity and modernisation' of the political hegemony, runs through various projects of the riverscape and urban planning.

The design of urban spaces does not happen in a vacuum. It is highly political and comprises multiple social and historical processes. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that the design of the Red River urban space in the mainstream narratives is depoliticised, highly technocratic, exclusionary, paternalistic, economic-focused, devoid of the participation and knowledge of women and other disadvantaged groups. The mainstream discourses, the actors and the priority goals of the Red River urban design are inclined to promote the prevailing economic growth mantra and intensifying the capitalisation of the riverscape.

Governance is central to how narratives – and associated pathways – are constructed and defined in whose terms (Leach et al., 2010). It is critical to understand the dynamics and interconnected nature of inequality (gender and social justice), hierarchy and power in people-environment relationships as well as in ecological urban restructuring. This relates both to large-scale political-economic processes and micro-scale and everyday forms of struggle, community rights, participation, virtue ethics, gendered belonging to urban space. The analysis of the narratives around the Red River urban projects showcases that narratives are often deeply about social relationships and political and institutional power; about who is responsible for a problem and who has the power to deal it or shape political responses. In this case, it is no surprise to see the narratives that locate problem in the local dwellers living on the riverside of the dyke who are demoralised and trivialised by the political authority and privileged people in its circle. These narratives consider solutions to lie in the intensifying capitalisation of the riverside land, which is advocated by them as a remedy to the messy and chaotic development of this area.

Vietnam is among the most affected countries by human-induced climate change, and the prevalent political and social processes are so oriented towards disharmony. It is critical to situate the gender-climate-urban space nexus in urban planning and design. The urban planning processes needs to be genuinely grounded in the virtue 'harmony with nature' and to view environmental issues of the Red River in relation to social structures and social inequalities. In doing so, this requires fundamental changes in human interrelations and the human-nature relationship, and a transformational approach to sustainability. As human beings, we need to understand that we are part of a larger ecological system and we need to be attentive to a deeper, more complex understanding that nature is intrinsically linked to society as a whole, as well as to individuals. As Jordan and Kristjansson (2017, p.1218) emphasise: "a virtue concerning our relationship with nature needs to include the perception and reasoning that nature encompasses all of society, and therefore permeates all aspects of our lives". This realisation and awareness is crucial to sustainability of urban space. Equally important,

it is imperative to cultivate the relationships of care in fostering the relationships between humans and nature, as well as in the design of urban space. As stated by Pojani et al. (2018) patriarchy in urban planning is not just a failure of society – it is a failure of the imagination. But they argued that the matriarchy in the shaping of urban space is not necessarily the answer. Instead, they stress the need to revoke the notion that one group – male or female – creates the world on behalf of everyone else, and the need to imagine entirely new ways of our cities, neighbourhoods, streets, homes, workplaces – our very souls, with fraternity and cooperation.

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