



Urban spaces – green spaces – inclusive spaces

A regional review on the social-ecological
transformation of cities in Asia



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Make space!

Julia Behrens, Project Director, Climate & Energy in Asia Project, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

When you read this editorial, chances are high you are doing so in an urban space. Half of the people in the world and Asia are urban dwellers. Before you move on to the articles, I invite you to take a moment to look out your window – do you see concrete buildings, green trees and streets? How is the air you breathe – does it smell of exhaust fumes or flowers? If you are in a city, what characterises your current location in the wider urban context? Who can access the area? All these individualised questions can prompt observations with the potential to deliver important insights into the urban planning of the city and the environmental and social implications that lie behind it.

One aspect of urban environmental policy and planning is the management of green spaces. Having green spaces in a city is not only a matter of environmental conservation and planning, for example parks can be used to cool urban spaces. It is also a question of health as trees filter the air and have positive impacts on people's wellbeing. If green spaces are only accessible for select people, these positive impacts might reflect and further entrench socio-economic status. Or if green public spaces are unsafe for women or non-binary people due to the risk of sexual harassment, it becomes a question of gender. Also, people with disabilities may be shut out if city planners have not thought about making spaces barrier-free and inclusive.

These are just a few examples of how environmental and social questions are interlinked and why Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) advocates for a systemic social-ecological transformation of cities. Too often cities are not planned for the purpose of well-being of all people. By fostering dialogue between diverse stakeholders in government and civil society, hosting workshops and conducting research on cities across Asia, FES seeks to make cities a sustainable place to live for all. In Asia, this issue is highly relevant as the region continues to exhibit highly dynamic socio-economic development and cities are projected to grow further in the coming years.

With insightful contributions from diverse authors who address a range of issues on urban spaces in Asia from their respective perspectives, this publication is part of this effort. It sheds light on the social-ecological nexus from eight angles, thereby highlighting the importance of the often over-looked nexus between environmental and social urban politics. First, Erik Akpedonu maps out

how Manila's green spaces have been wiped out by the city's planning and its lived realities, creating spaces for consumption by the middle class rather than recreational places for all. Snehashish Mitra takes us to Guwahati in India, where environmental planning is closely linked with ideas of ethnic divides. With a focus on Vietnam, Anh Ngoc Vu and Binh Quang Le exemplify how the narrative of modernisation of a city can quickly turn into social exclusion in the Red River Zone in Hanoi. Melinda Martinus explains how urban citizens across Southeast Asia perceive climate change policies and how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted social-ecological transformations in Jakarta and Singapore and Christina Schwenkel shows how eco-socialist architecture is worth revisiting in today's city making. Nannan Dong from China shares project examples on how the Shanghai government seeks to bring nature back into the cities and closer to its citizens. Komchai Thaiying illustrates with the Eastern Economic Corridor in Thailand what controversies of different ideas of development bring to a place. In between the longer written contributions, we invite you to view our photo essay from Chennai that visualises how marginalized groups make the city their own and move around it.

If you would like to learn more about the social-ecological transformation of cities, we invite you to visit us on [Youtube](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or on our [website](#), where you can roam through our [interactive map of cities in Asia](#). I wish you an interesting and inspiring read.

Privatizing the public: Manila's disappearing public spaces

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Metro Manila, the Philippines' capital region, is not exactly known for parks, public and green spaces, and leisure, unlike its more reputable neighbours in Southeast Asia, such as the tropical "garden city" Singapore, colourful and cosmopolitan Kuala Lumpur, or Bangkok, which still capitalises on its outdated image as the "Venice of the East".

The near-complete absence of meaningful public places in today's Metro Manila would have come as a great surprise to a typical Manileño of the 1920s and '30s when the "Pearl of the Orient" and "Paris of the East" was rightfully touted as the most modern city in Southeast Asia, and one of its greenest, with its new leafy subdivisions in Ermita, Malate, and Singalong. The foundations of modern Manila were laid out in 1905 by famous American architect and urban planner Daniel Burnham as a showcase of US-American colonial urban planning following the concepts of the then-popular City Beautiful Movement, of which he was a founder and foremost advocate. The

City Beautiful Movement was social reformist and deeply Victorian in its emphasis on promoting moral virtue by means of beauty in the public sphere. It emphasized the creation of vast public spaces accessible to everybody, such as plazas, malls, promenades, boulevards, sporting grounds and public parks, and adorning them with imposing neoclassical monuments, civic structures and government buildings. All this to imbue ordinary "lower" and working-class citizens with a sense of awe and respect for the state, and to refine their taste and sense of beauty. It was believed that an appealing and beautiful urban environment would elevate the lower classes' moral standards and lure them away from gambling, alcohol and drug abuse, prostitution, crime, and other social ills then commonly associated with the lower classes. Key for this programme of moral uplifting was the public realm, where citizens of all classes would be able to mingle with and learn the values and conventions of wealthier and morally upright citizens, such as civic-mindedness, obedience, industriousness and above all, law-abidingness.

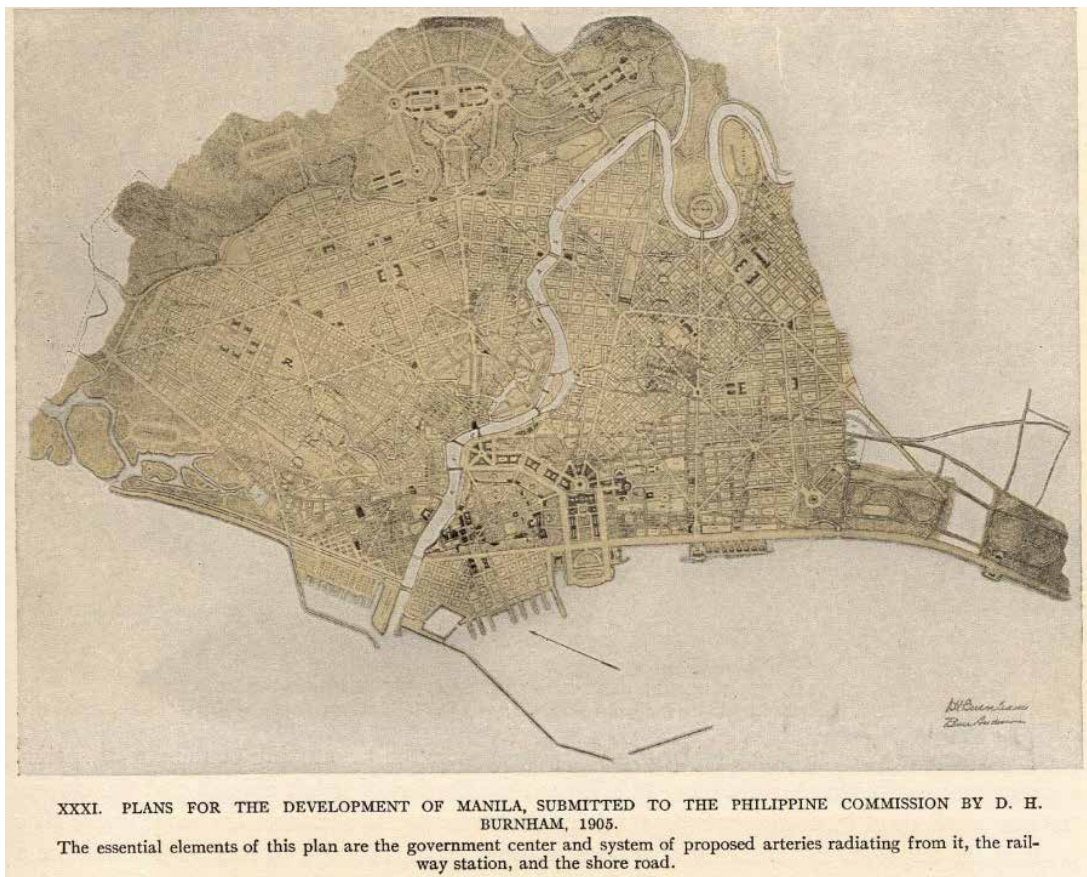


Figure 1. Daniel Burnham's Plan for Manila. Source: Pikrepo

Thus, in 1905, were planned five huge public parks at the fringes of the city, dozens of local sporting grounds and a wide seaside boulevard along Manila Bay, together with dozens of tree-lined avenues along the Pasig River. Following World War I, the influence of the City Beautiful Movement and its “Victorian” values, in tandem with its art and architecture, greatly declined in favour of more rational and practical approaches to architecture and urban planning, such as the emerging Modernist Movement. Moreover, Manila experienced massive population growth during the 1920s and 1930s, resulting in tremendous real estate speculation and rising land values, which ultimately made it impossible for the government to consolidate all the land needed for the grandiose plans. Furthermore, the near-total destruction of Manila south of the Pasig River during the Battle of Manila in 1945 and the planned systematic development of Quezon City as the nation’s new capital after the war dealt the final death blow to Burnham’s elaborate plan. Subsequently, only one of the five originally planned large parks (Harrison Park) was built (but was given over to commercial development in the 1980s). The non-implementation of the Burnham Plan show the early beginnings of a common threat that continues until the present and has massively shaped contemporary Manila, namely the government-sanctioned sacrifice of the public common good (aka public spaces) in favour of private gain, be it private corporations and developers, individual homeowners, or landless squatters.

In sharp contrast to the conservative and moralising City Beautiful Movement, the approach in Quezon City was a socialist and practical one: Leisure and well-being were not moral issues but social rights in the form of a healthy and liveable environment for the common tao (working-class Filipino). Thus arose a second opportunity to create a green and liveable city, with a huge 400 ha public park at its very heart, the so-called Diliman Quadrangle to the southwest of the Elliptical Road (Quezon Memorial Circle), which was to contain a vast park, a zoo, sporting arenas and other leisure and recreation amenities.

But this grand vision of a large “green lung” in the city was also never fully implemented. After the originally planned national government complex in the Quezon Memorial Circle failed to materialise, the area was given over to a relatively small public park with the mausoleum of former President Quezon in its centre. Thus, as previously happened in Manila, a small left-over piece of failed urban planning today constitutes the largest public park in Quezon City.

The development of Quezon City again illustrates the sacrifice of the public realm (green public spaces) for the benefit of private gain. This is not least a direct consequence

of the political system and culture in the Philippines, where leading politicians tend to be (or become) leading businesspeople and vice versa or are sponsored by leading corporations with commercial interests. At the same time, wooing the decisive vote of the millions of poor and/or homeless voters in the metropolis also prevents any serious large-scale evictions of informal settlements.

As a consequence of these historical developments, Metro Manila today has among the lowest rate of green public spaces of any city in Southeast Asia. While the WHO standard recommends a minimum nine square meters of open spaces per inhabitant, Metro Manila only has an average of five square meters of open space per Filipino (Siemens, 2012). And while 47 per cent of Singapore’s land area consists of green space, with Kuala Lumpur (Kanniah) and Rio de Janeiro at 30 and 29 per cent respectively, and New York City at 14 per cent, in Manila, it is a mere 0.03 per cent (Palma, 2019). Public and leisure spaces in the form of parks, playgrounds, pools and sports venues are thus largely absent throughout this metropolis of over 13 million people, making it the one of the least liveable cities in the Far East (albeit only average in Southeast Asia) in 2019, with particularly low ratings for culture and environment (Mercer, 2019). Whatever other green spaces exist in the city today are either cemeteries (such as the huge necropolis in La Loma), tiny pocket parks (often leftovers of abandoned projects), or are otherwise privately owned and access controlled, such as the numerous expansive golf courses for the elite and the military, and small green parks in private gated subdivisions. These private enclaves only cater to a tiny and wealthy upper and upper-middle class crust of the population. For the common tao, there remains only a handful of free public places of beauty and leisure, such as the previously mentioned Rizal Park and Quezon Memorial Circle, Marikina Riverbanks Park (Marikina City), Balara Filters Park and La Mesa Ecopark (both Quezon City), all of which are relatively small and some difficult to access without a private car.

Given that the nation’s leading politicians are heavily invested in or sponsored by commercial interests, there is little incentive to change the current environment, leaving poorer Filipinos with few leisure options other than relaxing and playing on the streets (hanging out and playing basketball on improvised courts), and better-off middle-class Filipinos to spend much of their leisure time in consumerist pursuits in the countless air-conditioned shopping malls of the metropolis. In fact, in recent decades, shopping malls, or “private spaces masquerading as public ones” as famously observed by Martin (2019), have so much replaced the public realm that today even government institutions frequently

accessed by the public, such as the Bureau of Internal Revenue, the Bureau of Investigation and even the Catholic Church, have moved their offices and venues to shopping malls.

The preference given to private interest or government offices over the common public good continues to this day and now threatens to eclipse the last remnants of free leisure spaces in the metropolis, such as the only remaining pocket parks and public playground in Barangay Krus Na Ligas, 75 per cent of which were recently given over to a new public school-cum-covered basketball court. In the Arroceros Forest Park, one of the last remaining tiny pockets of greenery in the vast concrete jungle that is Metro Manila, a significant portion was sacrificed a few years ago to build a public school. Only public protests prevented the entire park from being built up as originally planned.

The biggest threat to public leisure space, however, are large-scale public-private development schemes. One of these are the continuing land reclamation projects along Manila Bay, which have already cut off large portions of Roxas Boulevard from the bay.



Fig. 2: Roxas Boulevard facing Manila Bay (Placeholder)
Source: By Lawrence Ruiz - Own work, CC BY-SA4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=90051802>

Watching the fabled Manila sunset from Roxas Boulevard across the bay is one of the famous and free sights of Manila, open to rich and poor alike. By increasingly reclaiming land, this last vestige of free “entertainment” is threatened with privatisation as well, as new developments in front will inevitably block the iconic view¹. Although it is repeatedly assured that even a new

waterfront would be accessible to everybody, public transport to these reclamation sites is noticeably absent or infrequent, thus cutting off a significant portion of the population from easy access, if granted at all. Even ordinary middle-class Filipinos may find it difficult to access these new enclaves by the bay via private car, as public parking is either not available or if existent, is usually attached to a commercial enterprise such as shopping malls and casinos, requiring passage through the commercial zone before being able to access the seaside.

Even more problematic is the recently proposed PAREX (Pasig River Expressway), another proposed private development that aims to build a six-lane elevated highway above the Pasig River, the key environmental feature of Metro Manila. The metropolis is notorious for its almost permanent traffic gridlock and abysmal public transport system. PAREX promises to address this by constructing a 20 km long toll road above the river, thus privileging a small, car-owning wealthy upper and upper-middle class, which comprises only about 20 per cent of Manileños. PAREX will eliminate one of the last free vistas of the megacity at the expense of the remaining 80 per cent, including the hundreds of thousands of Filipinos living along or near the riverbank. A number of very narrow promenades and pocket parks lining the riverbanks in various places such as Makati and Mandaluyong offer many especially poorer Filipinos a chance to relax near the river while enjoying one of the last unobstructed vistas in the metro. Children are frequently seen swimming in the river (even though it is not advisable) and some citizens even attempt fishing along its banks. All of this would be at risk should the proposed plans push through.

From a city consciously planned by Daniel Burnham as a place of social inclusion, intermingling and exchange, Manila has over the last 100 years developed into its exact opposite: a place of increasing social compartmentalisation, segregation, and exclusion. Unless a stronger sense of civic mindedness can be forged, be it through public education, mainstream and social media, or others, Manila’s public spaces will continue to disappear in the name of private benefit and profit. In the end, it is the ordinary citizens who pay the price.

1 The widespread disregard for important or even iconic vistas by developers recently caused massive controversy when a 40-story high-rise condominium was built in the sight line of the iconic Rizal Monument in Ermita. Another current development threatens to destroy the historic vista of the San Sebastian Church in Quiapo, the only historic steel church in Asia.

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Greening interventions, settlement rights and anti-eviction politics: Land conflicts in Guwahati, India

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Since the global neoliberal turn in the 1990s, Asian cities are increasingly becoming focal points for real estate and infrastructural development to become 'world class' cities (for example, Mumbai aspiring to become Shanghai, see Weinstein 2013). Such aspiration is mostly espoused by the urban elite and closely tied to their idea of urban order, planning and aesthetics (Doshi 2012). In such imaginaries, settlement practices of poor people in informal settlements (for example – slums in India) are deemed to be an unwelcome presence which hinders the stated goal of 'development'. To that end, in recent decades governing policies have targeted informal settlements, by demolishing them and evicting people. Such exclusionary practices in cities across Asia has evoked a wide range of opposition, negotiation and mobilisation by the urban poor who are impacted by displacement and dispossession (Bayat 2000; Benjamin 2008; Chatterjee 2004; Holston 2007).

Although the inhabitants of informal settlements have a much lower carbon footprint (low consumption) than those living in legalised formal settlements (high consumption), allegations of environmental degradation are overwhelmingly directed towards the urban poor. Based on her research work in New Delhi, India, sociologist Amita Baviskar (2011, p. 392) conceptualises such practices where the poor are removed from public spaces to align the city with elite aspiration as 'bourgeoisie environmentalism'. On the other hand, environmental degradation impacts the urban poor the most as they inhabit areas (for example - ecological peripheries like hills, wetland areas) that are not maintained by urban authorities, while subjecting them to the vulnerabilities emanating from extreme climate and weather changes.

Therefore, as Harms (2016) suggests, attention to the environment can lead to the exclusion of the urban poor in two ways: if environmental issues are not addressed, it perpetuates a degrading living space. On the other hand, cleaning up cities may increase demands for removal of people and homes. Across the cities of Asia, we are witnessing such multifarious conflicts over urban space, which reveal the challenges of implementing a just transition and socio-ecological transformation. In

this article, I examine the contestation over the hills¹ in Guwahati city, northeast India's largest city situated in the state of Assam, and how it has transformed into a debate between settlement rights and environmental concerns. Furthermore, I focus on the 'tribal'² groups to reveal how development initiatives can disproportionately target racial and ethnic minorities.



Figure 1: Locating Guwahati and northeast India on the map. Source: Google Maps

Situating the hills in Guwahati

Guwahati, topographically, is an admixture of plain areas and 15 hills interspersed throughout the city. Since India's post-independence period, Guwahati's urban expansion has led to the incorporation of the hills within the city limits. Environmental groups, formed by the urban middle class and elites, demand that these hills, with green vegetation, must be protected. On the other hand, around 30 percent of Guwahati's population, who are mostly urban poor, live in informal settlements on the hills. Environmental groups have labelled these settlements as encroachers and advocated for their eviction by filing court petitions. Based on court verdicts, eviction drives have occurred in the hills of Guwahati,

1 There are 15 hills in Guwahati Municipal Corporation area (GMCA): University, Fatasil, Kalapahar, Sonaighuli, Sarania, Kharguli, Japorigog, Burhagosain, Khanapara, Garbhanga, Kamakhya, Kahilipara, Betkuchi, Chunsali and Koinadhara.

2 Here 'tribal' refers to those communities which are enlisted under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This category was introduced by the British colonial rule, indicating geographical isolation, 'general backwardness' and physical features. However, there has been inconsistencies in the application of the criteria (Xaxa 1999). Notably, the tribes of central India (known as adivasis) are different from ones of northeast India, while adivasis are subjected to Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution (McDuie-Ra 2016).

which inhabitants have resisted through a combination of legal and discursive strategies. This contestation over the hill settlements can be deemed a case of environmental concerns against settlement rights (Mahadevia et al. 2017), which is taking place across Asian cities and revealing the challenges of balancing the ecological well-being of a city with that of social justice aligned to basic requirements of the urban poor. The following sections of this paper focus on two key aspects of the issue: how the environment configures in the land disputes of Guwahati and what is the significance of the tribal response to allegations of environmental degradation and threats of eviction.

Issues of housing, environment and land categories on the hills of Guwahati

Over the years, Guwahati has been plagued by numerous urban management issues, such as droughts, dry spells, floods, landslides and human-animal conflicts. These issues have been mainly attributed to increased urbanisation and population growth. However, allegations of environmental degradation have been mostly targeted at the hill settlements by Guwahati's civil society, especially environmental groups. In addition, the conservation agenda also features prominently in the arguments of environmental groups. An environmental-focussed study, by using future Land Use Land Covers data of the Guwahati hills, projected that the hill settlements covered 25.45 percent of the hills, rising from 14.33 percent in 2011, signifying around a 10 percent increase in hill settlements in just seven years (Patowary and Sharma 2018). By formulating a model

named Assessment of Settlements in Eco-sensitive Area (ASEA), Patowary and Sharma predict that between 2018 and 2025, an additional conversion of 14.5 percent of the watershed area to urban settlement will lead to a 20.75 percent increase in peak runoff, therefore creating an increased risk of landslides and flash floods.

Such forecasts underline the need for urgent prioritisation of housing and environmental issues in Guwahati. Terming the hill settlements of the urban poor as encroachments, while staying silent on the high-value real estate on the hills reveals the anti-poor bias of certain environmental groups, which does not align with social commitments of a welfare state. In other cities in India, the environment has been evoked to target and evict the poor, while making way for high-value (re)development, which consumes more energy than a settlement inhabited by poor and marginalised people (on Delhi, see Ghertner 2011). In Guwahati, advocacy by environmental groups led to the declaration of some hills, already with human settlements, as 'wildlife sanctuaries' (a protected area under the forest laws of India) in 2004. In 2017, a massive eviction drive was organised by the State authorities in the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary, leading to strong response from residents through legal petitions to stop the evictions. People impacted by the eviction also legally contested the boundaries of the wildlife sanctuary and alleged that eviction was carried out in areas outside the jurisdiction of the Forest Department. Improper interpretation of survey reports by government officials and deliberate ambiguity of land boundaries are common issues in cities of India. Ananya Roy (2009) argues that such ambiguities are deliberately created by the State, serving



Figure 2: Guwahati seen from the Koinadhara Hills in south Guwahati (photograph by the author)

as modes of discipline and sovereignty. In Guwahati, the opaque demarcation between urban and forest land, coupled with contested boundaries of the forest areas, create multiple grey areas. This allows the urban poor to occupy land through multiple negotiations with State and non-state actors, while also leaving them vulnerable to eviction and displacement threats when State and judicial agencies back the broader environmental protection and conservation agendas.

Anti-eviction politics

A key feature of the anti-eviction protests in 2017 and in recent years is how members from tribal groups, impacted by eviction drives, articulate their right to settlement and land through their identity as tribal by drawing on their historical experiences of marginalisation in India (during British colonial and post-colonial rule). In the Amchang eviction drive, the tribal Mising community was largely impacted. The Misings started migrating to Guwahati in the 2000s from native districts in Assam state to escape the impacts of lower returns from rural-based agrarian livelihoods and flood-induced displacement. Primarily informal labourers, they settled on the hills which offered land to occupy as first-time entrants to avoid the high rent market of Guwahati.

to enhance revenue generation through increased cultivation practices (mostly Muslims). Such migration patterns have sustained anti-Bengali sentiments in Assam resulting in episodes of conflict between different communities over time³

Conclusion

The ongoing dispute over the hill settlements of Guwahati reflect the socio-ecological challenges of governing the environment and addressing housing issues in a dynamically growing city in Asia. Environmental agendas must incorporate social and racial justice and ensure that aspirations of urban greening do not generate exclusionary urbanism. People who face eviction threats have made repeated pleas to be stakeholders in official environment protection and conservation plans. Given the curtailment of State agencies, public workforce and the prevalence of contractual job regimes due to neoliberalism, incorporating common people in the management of green and forest covers seems more feasible than arranging effective surveillance. By being sensitive to people's interests, conservation policies in Asian cities can align environmental and humanitarian objectives to enable a just socio-ecological transformation.



Figure 3: Signs of demolition during an eviction drive in Amchang, Guwahati in 2017 (photograph by the author)

Articulation of land and settlement rights as tribal and indigenous people holds significant leverage in Assam. Since the British colonial era, Assam has witnessed strong anti-immigrant sentiments against the Bengali community (Hindu and Muslims) from Bengal province, who were settled in Assam by the British to handle the bureaucracy as administrators (mostly Hindus) and

3 Anti-outsider and anti-immigration politics also targets other communities, like Nepalis and Adivasi, who are deemed recent migrants to Assam compared to indigenous communities). Hill inhabitants have creatively employed their social identity as 'indigenous' with unquestioned national citizenship (as opposed to Bengali Muslims who are often alleged to be illegal immigrants from Bangladesh) to claim urban citizenship. For further on Assam's identity and citizenship politics see Barbora (2022); Baruah (1999); McDuiera (2014)

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Understanding the lack of social politics in urban planning via media narratives: The case of the Red River urban planning in Hanoi

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Introduction

Southeast Asia is seen as the site of urban futures for its rapid urbanisation (Ho, 2002; Dahiya, 2014). The region's urban cities have been in a constant process of growth and change in recent years (Dahiya, 2014). Vietnam, with an urbanisation rate above the Southeast Asian annual average, is no exception (Labbé, 2021). The urbanity of Hanoi, the country's age-old capital city, lying on the right bank of the Red River (RR), shaped by different cultures, including Chinese, French, Soviet and other contemporary influences (Lien, 2020), is experiencing an acute urban expansion (Leducq and Scarwell, 2018). In times of urban development, Hanoi no longer resists urban modernity. Instead, it is expanding and engaging itself in a fierce regional and global race to achieve an international metropolitan status (Leducq and Scarwell, 2018). Hanoi is transforming; whether for good or bad, only time will tell. But for the time being, the city's ambition to expand to the Red River to attract foreign and domestic investment to boost urban growth, and to be well connected with globalisation, has been subject to public scrutiny. The Red River, for Hanoians, is not only an embodiment of life, but also a reflection of national history and the city's long prosperity (Voice of Vietnam, 2014). In recent years, the Red River urban planning of Hanoi has been thrown into question: Aspiring for urban modernity cannot be removed from addressing urban challenges. What are the material and ecological outcomes for both marginalised peoples and nature through this process?

Using sources from media platforms, this article seeks to understand the dominant discourses that revolve around the planning of Hanoi's riverine zone. The prevailing discourses depict the riverine zone of Hanoi as a capital-intensive, economic resource and concurrently as a sustainable ecosystem that continues to support environmental and economic functions. Drawing on the literature of environmental justice and political ecology, this article attempts to understand these discourses and examine how they are (re)producing and (re)enacting the power/knowledge dynamics that have defined the riverscape and the socio-natural processes underpinning it.

The paper focuses on three primary Red River zoning plans: (i) the Project Tran Song Hong (Song Hong City) 1994 ; (ii) the Red River City Project 2006 ; and (iii) the most recent Red River Zoning Plan , also considered by the city authorities 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 the data was mainly collected from a Google search with a focus on 22 online newspapers. These online outlets were selected on the basis of their coverage, their pivotal functions and representative roles, either in state propagation or in attracting wider social attention. In particular, these platforms were categorised into the following groups: (a) those regarded as the official voice of the Communist Party and the State (five outlets), (b) those as the official voice of particular sectors (nine outlets), (c) the most viewed Vietnamese newspapers for the wider public (four outlets), and (d) platforms of associations and civil society (four outlets).

Results

Online coverage and responses to these Red River urban plans are understood within historical scrutiny and the current political economy of post-socialist Vietnam, which emphasises 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 history, the ideology of controlling nature, or the "fierce" Red River¹ (*sông Hồng hung dữ*) in this case, serves the needs and aspiration of "modernity and modernisation" of the political hegemony. It runs

1 The popular image of the Red River was constructed as a river with the "fierce" hydrological regime and 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 dikes to cope with the river to protect people has taken place throughout history. The "fierce" hydrological regime is relatively unique to the RR, which has an immense disparity between water levels in the flood season and the dry season. The underlying reason why various strategic RR planning projects since the 1990s were postponed or suspended rests on the difficulties as well as lack of consensus in solving the Red River's flood drainage and flood control issues (Vu et al., 2022).

through various projects of the riverscape and urban planning.

Taming the “fierce” Red River

The Red River, recognised as the ancestral home of the ethnic Vietnamese, has long been viewed by policy makers, scientists and academics as “physically dangerous”, due to its natural cycles (like flooding). Cutting across the three river zoning projects is the prime concern of pundits as well as public officials about the crucial importance of how to control the river flow and its natural floods (*trị thủy*). The strong emphasis on “controlling and taming” the river reflects the ways of thinking about and acting upon the relations between human and nature (or non-human) by the Vietnamese people, i.e., the 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.

In close proximity with this nature (Red River), the aspiration of becoming a “master of nature” is a dominant view pertaining to the variety of Red River planning projects. That is, on the one hand Vietnamese people consider nature as a limited resource that human beings should exploit and rely on for their survival. On the other hand, humans are seen interacting with nature in an ecological balance that requires humans to take care of the environment, i.e., guardian of nature: humans stand above nature but are responsible for taking care of nature because “nature ‘rises up’ as having a real value, a sake and meaning of its own” (*De Groot, 1992, p.483*).

Depoliticised, technocratic and top-down plans

The narratives place too much focus on technocratic issues and overlook environmental justice and other societal issues (e.g., social justice, inequality, poverty, conflicts, vulnerabilities). The technocratization of the Red River dominates the narratives of the state and its circle. It is abundant in technical information that dictates and privileges who has the knowledge and power over the Red River.

Technical information is overwhelming: the management of the riverbanks and residential areas, land use planning, land use outside the dike, 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, connections with the four inner city districts, to name a few. The overemphasis on technocratic issues and disregard of environmental justice and other societal issues in the RR planning embodies how contemporary policy processes are recreating and reenacting conflicting structures of knowledge and power. This increases the risk that marginalised groups will be rendered vulnerable.

Ambiguity around ecological and social issues

Instead of being depicted as civilians with active citizenship, people who happened to settle outside the dike for a long period of time, who call this riverine zone “home” but have no legal land titles, are framed as “a category of error” with negative attributes such as “encroaching”, “violating law”, “unorganised”, “messy”, “homeless”, or even “second-class citizens”. It is in this manner that displaced people are included in planning papers.

Gender-blindness, inclusivity and urban planning

The complex interactions between gender relations, nature and sustainability have been obscured; gender perspectives are absent, and gender-specific and -transformative approaches are neglected in mainstream narratives. Running a word search throughout our over 1,000 pages of coded results, the term “gender” is not mentioned at all. Women’s knowledge, agency and decision making are not recognised, which could be reflected, for example, in the gender composition of the experts, pundits, government officials, business people, and small number of ordinary people who were interviewed, invited to speak in public events or express viewpoints in the mainstream media (i.e., online news outlets or portals of ministries and associations). Among those groups, 91 per cent were males and nine per cent females. Male representation is dominant, particularly those representing the government (92 per cent males compared to 8 per cent females), technical experts (98 per cent males and 2 per cent females), and architects or construction and urban planning experts (98 per cent males compared to 2 per cent females). The small number of local dwellers (70 people) being interviewed also show a male bias, with 70 per cent compared to 30 per cent females.

Additionally, narratives used in describing urban space use discriminatory metaphors. An example is the comparison of the Red River to “an unspoiled beautiful village girl”, an object of desire to be acquired. An 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” (Realtimes.vn, 2021 <https://realtimes.vn/quy-hoach-do-thi-song-hong-muon-con-hon-khong-20201224000001842.html>). Both the river and women become passive, subject to men’s needs and desires.

Conclusion

The design of urban spaces does not happen in a vacuum. It is highly political and comprises of multiple social and historical processes. The findings of this study demonstrate that the design of the Red River urban space in the mainstream narratives is highly technocratic, exclusionary, paternalistic, economic-focused, and devoid of the participation and knowledge of women and other disadvantaged groups.

The analysis of the narratives around the Red River urban projects shows that narratives are often rooted in social relationships and political and institutional power; they define who is responsible for a problem and who has the

power to affect change or shape political responses. In this case, the narratives place the problem on the local dwellers living on the dike’s riverside. These narratives consider solutions to lie in the intensifying capitalisation and privatisation of the riverside land, which is advocated as a remedy to the messy and chaotic development of this area.

Vietnam is among the countries most affected by human-induced climate change, and the prevalent political and social processes are oriented towards disharmony. Therefore, it is critical to situate the gender-climate-urban space nexus in urban planning and design. The urban planning processes need to be genuinely grounded in the virtue of “harmony with nature” and to view environmental issues of the Red River in relation to social structures and social inequalities. This requires fundamental changes in human interrelations and the human-nature relationship, and a transformational approach to sustainability. Equally important, it is imperative to cultivate relationships of care in fostering relationships between humans and nature as well as in the design of urban space.

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- i The Project Tran Song Hong (Song Hong city), initiated in 1994 by a Singaporean investor, sought to develop the land zone outside the dike in An Duong ward with a total investment capital of VND 240 billion. In the agreement with the Hanoi People’s Committee at that time, the plan was to develop a modern residential area with a housing complex, commercial offices, hotels, amusement parks and community activities, which aimed to help Hanoi have a sub-zone like Merlion Island in Singapore. Hanoi also established a project management unit. But, due to some problems, especially in river flow control, the project was not implemented.
 - ii The Red River City Project was initiated in 2006. The leaders of Hanoi and the mayor of Seoul signed a cooperative agreement in planning, renovating and developing the two banks of the Red River in Hanoi. In 2007, the Red River City planning was officially introduced to the public. According to the proposed master plan, the dikes on both sides of the Red River would be strengthened to improve flood resistance, and these would become major traffic axes along the riverbank. The waterway transport en route to the river would be improved and closely integrated with the road transport system. As in the proposal, the area along the Red River through Hanoi would be home to 97,000 households, accounting for 50% of the area and the remaining area would be used for public works and commercial and service areas, 5-star hotels, international complexes of technology, finance, securities, etc. After several seminars, consultation with experts, and also with some negative public feedback (of fear that Hanoi’s identity would be lost with the imprint of a Korean-style urban area), in 2008, the city planning project on the Red River unexpectedly terminated. This was due to the lack of agreement between the relevant ministries and sectors on an appropriate water treatment plan, and because Hanoi expanded its administrative boundaries, making the section of the Red River through Hanoi more than 100km, instead of 40km as initially planned, should increase research funding from the Korean budget.
 - iii In mid-2020, the Hanoi city leadership assigned specialised units to plan the Red River urban zoning, which was expected to be approved by the end of 2021. In “Hanoi Master Plan to 2030 and Vision to 2050”, the leaders of Hanoi manifested an ambition of developing these areas and renovating the outside-dike zones into a large green corridor of the capital city. According to the project, both sides of the river will be developed in a spacious and modern manner. Specifically, the plan is to set up into five subdivisions R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, on a 40km long river section, from Hong Ha bridge to Me So bridge. The study area stretches over about 11,000 ha, which belong to 55 wards and communes of 13 districts with a total population from 280,000 to 320,000 people.

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Chennai's pursuit towards a green and inclusive city

Shruti Kulkarni

Rapid urbanisation in Chennai is leaving the city's vulnerable susceptible to effects of unplanned growth and climate change.

Chennai, the capital city of Tamil Nadu and one of the six mega cities of India, is home to about 10.9 million people. The local government aims to make Tamil Nadu a \$1 trillion economy by 2030, according to reports. As a fallout of this economic and urban growth, Chennai faces challenges of land and water resource management, housing and land rights, and mobility. The city's most vulnerable groups are already facing consequences of these issues and several efforts are underway to not only improve the city, but also the lives of its inhabitants. This photo essay looks at some of these challenges and solutions.

Ecological restoration, displacement and resettlement

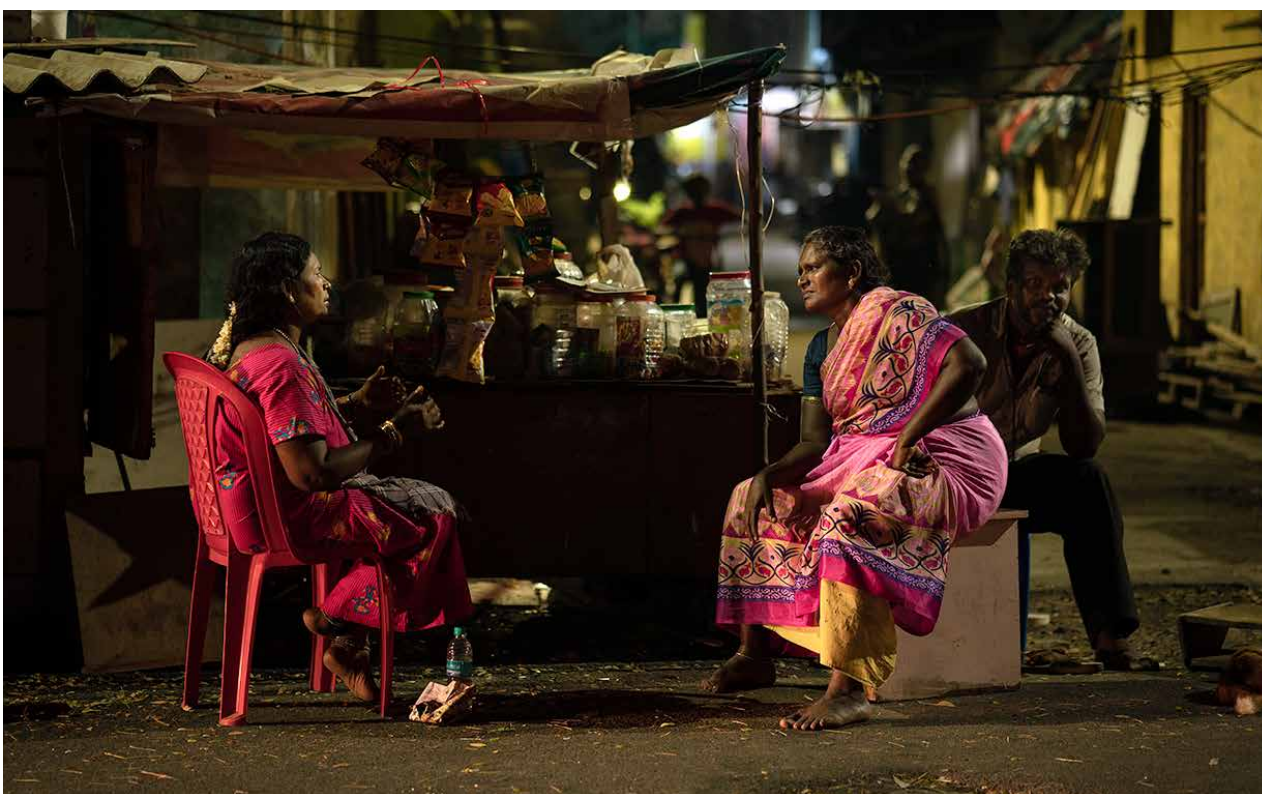
More than 30 per cent of Chennai's population lives in informal settlements adjoining the Adyar and Cooum rivers and the Buckingham Canal. Over the past several decades, municipal and industrial waste has turned the waters into polluted sewers. To give its rivers back to the city, ecological restoration work began in 2006. The Adyar is already recovering, showing signs of improved flora and fauna. However, in the process of restoration, families living in urban slums along Chennai's waterways have been displaced and resettled in multi-storey tenements like Kannagi Nagar and Semmancheri on the outer limits of Chennai.



Chennai's extensive road network connects suburban areas with the city centre | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni



Shamala has lived all her life in Lock Nagar along the Buckingham Canal. Chennai's waterways are home to many who live in fear of displacement. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni



Rosy runs a small tea shop along the Cooum river near Egmore. She has lived here for many decades and fears being displaced because of river restoration work. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni

Most of these tenements lack maintenance and have inadequate provision of basic services like water, electricity, schools and clinics have worsened the plight of these people. Moreover, the displacement has cost many residents access to livelihoods. Long commutes to

workplaces have forced many to quit their jobs. Some say that Kannagi Nagar is a ghetto of criminals but people living in the endless columns of 23,700 houses here only hope for living with dignity.



Trans women of Ernavur fought for their housing rights, against discrimination and stereotyping. During the COVID-19 lockdown, they ran a community kitchen to provide free food for those in need. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni



The other side of Kannagi Nagar, transformed into a public art district by a team of artists from across the world, an initiative of St+art India Foundation. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni

Land and livelihood rights

Fishing communities along the 14 coastal villages of Chennai face serious consequences of rapid urbanisation and climate change. On the one hand, rise in sea level and coastal erosion are the biggest natural hazards. On the other hand, development projects threaten fisherfolk's livelihoods. In 2010, the state government proposed an elevated expressway cutting across intertidal zones in these villages. The construction of elevated expressways will result in grazing of these villages, displacement of

fishing communities, loss of livelihoods and severe threat to marine ecology. Some beaches on this coastal stretch are nesting grounds for critically endangered Olive Ridley turtles. Saravanan, fisherman and coordinator at the Coastal Resource Centre (CRC), upon enquiring about the project learnt that the land on which they worked was classified as wasteland, feasible for development projects. The project was stalled after fishing communities protested.



With resource depletion and extreme climate events, fisherwomen who make their living by selling fish are more vulnerable to harsher economic conditions and forced migration for work. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni



Fishing communities are caught between the rising sea levels and cities expanding towards coastal villages. "There is always fear of extreme weather at the sea, but fishing is all we have ever known," says N. Ravi, a fisherman. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni



"It's sustainable growth only if along with the city, coastal villages also develop," says Saravanan of CRC. He is mapping coastal villages to protect fishing communities from eviction and land encroachment. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni

Saravanan has been mapping fishing villages to establish evidence for fisherfolks' traditional land rights. He says: "We have always known that common land belongs to the fishing villages. There was no documentation

to prove this, so to protect our common lands, we are mapping our villages." The Coastal Resource Centre has so far mapped over 150 villages in Tamil Nadu and is extending training in other states.



Fisherfolk of Pulicat (Pazhaverkadu) are campaigning against the expansion of Adani port which is threatening their livelihoods and the Ennore-Pulicat wetlands. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni

Resilient Chennai and way forward

According to sources at the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority, several sustainable growth plans are anticipated in the third Master Plan 2026, which emphasize on affordable housing for the poor and a blue-green print for land-use and conservation of water

bodies. Consultations were carried out with transgender people, people with disability and fishing community members to understand their requirements. Moreover, through Vision 2023, the government aims to make Chennai slum free by providing housing for urban poor.



"It's at least 10 years before Chennai becomes friendly for people with disabilities," says Sathish Kumar, a Boccia player. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni



Tamilvanan on wheelchair on his way home. The Museum of Possibilities, a recently launched initiative of the State Commissionerate for Welfare of the Differently Abled, in partnership with Vidyasagar, could help improve lives of people like him, by advocating inclusive work, play and living spaces for people with disabilities. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni

In June 2019, Chennai Corporation launched a resilience strategy in partnership with 100 Resilient Cities, a programme by the Rockefeller Foundation. Urban Horticulture was initiated through roof-top farms, with a specific goal of ensuring food security, nutrition and livelihood training for the families in resettlement colonies. The Water as Leverage project was introduced for stormwater management, urban heat island mitigation and to promote nature-based solutions for water needs.

However, as Chennai-based writer Nityanand Jayaraman said during our visit to Pulicat where Adani's port expansion remains stalled: "Engineering solutions are not the only answer to Chennai's urbanisation and climate change challenges. Political changes are required and land use challenges need to be addressed."

Inclusive sustainable growth requires strategic, comprehensive policies that consider the needs and

aspirations of even the most vulnerable communities to ensure that everyone in the city grows together.

To ensure development in the truest sense, Chennai needs to address both short-term and long-term aspects of coastal development, housing and resettlement, livelihood opportunities, transport accessibility, social and environmental impact of projects, social equality and ecological restoration.

The initiatives led by Saravanan or the fishing women of Pulicat, programmes on inclusive growth, as well as programmes for improved sustainable habitation and eco-restoration, could prove to be the pathways to lead Chennai into greater resilience and into becoming a city where everyone can live with dignity and has equal opportunities for growth.



Free travel for women in government run buses has empowered women from low-income groups. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni



Shanu, a trans woman is employed by Greater Chennai Corporation's waste collection unit. | © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung / Shruti Kulkarni

Learning from each other: Southeast Asian cities' needs for climate action post COVID-19 pandemic

Interview with Melinda Martinus

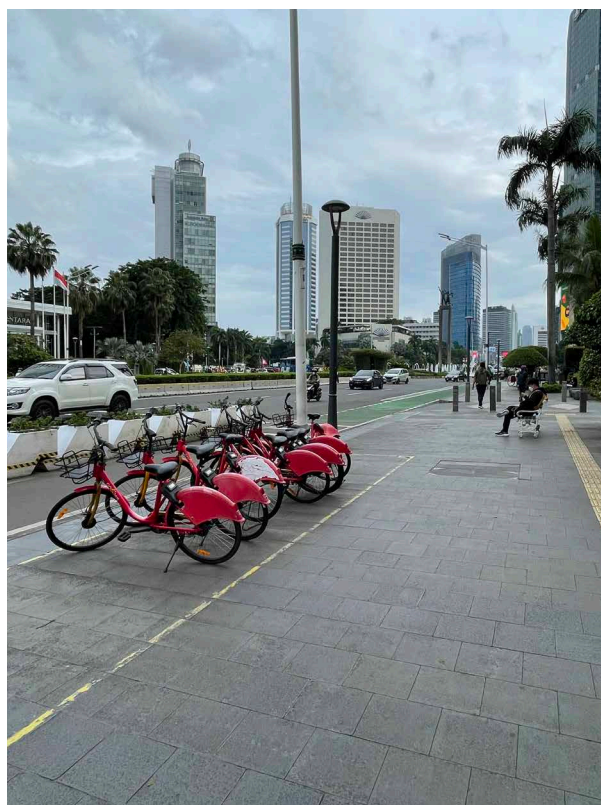
In September 2021, the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (ISEAS) in Singapore published the results of an insightful survey on Southeast Asian people's attitudes and perceptions towards climate change. The "Climate survey on Southeast Asia" looked at how people across all Southeast Asian countries, especially city dwellers, felt about the threat of climate change and their respective governments' responses to it. Adapting to current circumstances, developments during the COVID-19 pandemic were also part of this second edition of the survey first conducted in 2020. Julia Behrens, Project Director of the FES Climate & Energy in Asia project, talked to Melinda Martinus, a lead researcher with ISEAS focusing on urban issues in Southeast Asia, about her most important take-aways from the survey and where she personally sees improvements in Southeast Asian cities.

Melinda, as an urban city researcher, which trends in the urban spaces of Southeast Asia fascinate you the most and why?

I think in the past two years there have been many developments and new trends, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in the region in 2020.

I would say prior to COVID-19, city development was all about hard infrastructure, building more concrete buildings and more mass-rapid transportation. But, now I find urban planners' approach has shifted. Policy-makers and people in the region care a lot about

improving public health and urban experiences through soft infrastructure. For instance, my hometown, Jakarta has dramatically improved its pedestrian networks and new bike lanes were installed 2021 in the city centre. I was surprised when I visited the famous Thamrin-Sudirman street recently – two years after my last visit before COVID-19. I saw much improved crossings and widened sidewalks. Interestingly, docking stations for bicycle-sharing have emerged in some areas. This is indeed a fascinating development, since Jakarta is well-known for being one of the most congested cities in the world.



An improved crossing and a newly installed docking station for shared-bikes in Thamrin-Sudirman Street, Jakarta ©Melinda Martinus

ISEAS published the “Southeast Asia climate outlook in 2021”. In the report, you show and discuss the perceptions of climate change held by citizens from Southeast Asia. What main points did the survey investigate?

I think the most interesting point of the survey is that we are trying to understand citizens’ perceptions of climate change mitigation and adaptation priorities in their city. That’s why we asked our respondents to rank which measures they want to see improved in their city. So, for instance, there is one question about climate mitigation, we provide nine measures such as energy efficiency, green building, standardization and installation of bike lanes, amongst others. These are samples of climate mitigation policies that can be implemented at a city-scale. There is also a question about climate adaptation, where we asked respondents in the survey to rank various measures ranging from air quality control, climate-proofing of infrastructure, disaster warning systems and various efforts to help enhance resilience to adapt to climate impacts in cities. We gained many insights from different urban areas across the region. While we had many respondents living in smaller cities, we only highlighted findings from the capital cities and economic centres such as Singapore, Jakarta, Manila and Ho Chi Minh City, amongst others.

When you look more closely at the different cities, can you see major differences between them and within the region?

There are many commonalities across cities in the region. For instance, regarding the climate mitigation question, most respondents argued that their cities needed to do more in recycling, renewable energy adoption, and promoting public transportation. But, there are some nuances too. In Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, they want their city governments to enhance efforts to adopt renewable energy. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, people want their cities to prioritise vehicle emission controls. This is indeed unsurprising, as Hanoi is among the most polluted cities in the world. For many years, people living in the Vietnamese capital have grappled with air pollution which affects their respiratory health and environmental quality. Also unsurprisingly, people in Bangkok and Jakarta want to see their city governments improve public transportation. The two cities are well known for traffic congestion. Enhancing public transportation is critical because not only will it help to alleviate traffic problems, it will also reduce carbon emissions from private vehicles that contribute to global warming.

How about when you bring adaptation measures into sharp focus, are some cities more affected than others?

Yes. In adaption too, there are some commonalities and differences. Overall, respondents in the survey want to see further green restorations in public spaces, flood protection, and air quality measures. Flood protection was most desirable for respondents from Jakarta and Singapore. In 2021, the two cities experienced flash floods in several locations, so they want to see concrete measures to protect their cities from flooding.

In terms of survey participants, do you have a breakdown of the various social and economic groups?

It was an online survey promoted across social media to attract citizens from the region. Our target respondents are Southeast Asian citizens in general, with or without extensive knowledge on climate change. But most survey participants were engaged and familiar with climate change-related issues.

We collected data on gender, country, age group, education levels and also institutional affiliations, such as businesses, academia, NGOs and students. We have yet to analyse this data granularly based on respondents’ backgrounds. Moving forward, it is something we need to do in order to understand the different preferences and perceptions on climate change across different demographics.

With two years of COVID-19 behind us and going into the third with surges in the Omicron variant, do people see there is a tradeoff between rebuilding and recovering from the pandemic, and fighting climate change? Or do people see them as two connected issues?

I would say there has not been any trade-off yet. But, COVID-19 has indeed inspired changes in the way we build cities. Many interventions we see today stem from COVID-19 interventions. There is a very fascinating example in Singapore. You may hear about the 30 by 30 Goal, an effort to meet 30 percent of Singapore’s nutritional needs locally by 2030, up from approximately 10 percent currently. The 30 by 30 Goal was announced in 2019 to raise Singapore’s ambition for local food production and enhance the resilience of its food supply. There was panic buying in Singapore when the government announced border closures with neighbouring countries. People living in Singapore were concerned that due to their reliance on imported food, border closures would prevent fresh produce making its way to the city-state. COVID-19 has even advanced the 30 and 30 Goal. From the crisis prevention perspective, having at least 30 percent of local food production

capacity will provide a cushion to protect Singapore from an unexpected food crisis in the future. The 30 by 30 Goal is closely interlinked with climate actions too. Having less dependency on food imports means lessening carbon emissions emanating from transport and logistics. Strengthening local food production capacity can be explored alongside greening the city through urban farming.

You live in Singapore. When you move around the city, do you feel there are ways to make the city greener and more inclusive?

I think Singapore is a very unique case study. As a small city-state with about 5.3 million people living within its 270 square miles, Singapore never had the chance of sprawling like other neighbouring megapolitan cities such as Jakarta, Manila, or Bangkok. This precondition has pushed Singapore to manage its resources and land utilisation carefully. Singapore is such a nice laboratory for urban planners to experiment with density and efficiency. The most unique thing about Singapore is its ability to combine multiple high-density developments with housing, jobs, and amenities at the neighbourhood level connected by efficient transit lines. These 'compactness' characteristics help to prevent its citizens from expanding their carbon footprints. But, Singapore is no exception to the impacts of climate change. As global temperatures are rising every year, the city-state is also at risk of heatwaves. More efforts to adapt to these changing temperatures are needed, particularly using technology and emerging innovations for building materials to climate-proof Singapore from heatwaves.

And do you also see where other cities in Southeast Asia can learn from Singapore?

Singapore's success story in building such a compact city with abundant greenery is a valuable lesson for planners. Affordable public housing and public transportation are two other things planners can learn from Singapore. But, many of these initiatives are supported not only by physical infrastructure or design per se, but also by policy and governance. In the case of public transportation, for instance, despite having excellent mass rapid transit networks, the government also has a robust policy to limit the number of private vehicles on the road. People in Singapore need to bid for a certificate of entitlement in order to own and use a vehicle for a limited number of years. A certificate of entitlement for a sensible sedan car will cost around 50,000 to 70,000 Singapore Dollars. So, many people eventually choose to use public transportation over owning a car. This is one example why it is worth looking across borders and boundaries to other cities in Southeast Asia. This allows for learning

from mistakes as well as good practices that might be adopted elsewhere, not only in mobility, but also concerning topics such as recycling, energy transition and air quality measures. And that changes are possible, as we have surely seen from COVID-19 measures.

Greener pastures of post-war planning: Towards a more inclusive late socialist urban future

Christina Schwenkel, University of California at Riverside

Though it may defy conventional thought about concrete dystopias, one of the legacies of socialist urban planning has been its inclusive greenness: its verdant public parks and grassy open spaces. Of course, ecological concerns have long played a role in modernist design and planning, especially in tropical climates (Anker 2010). Environmental disputes and protests in recent years in Vietnam, including the 2015 tree protests in the capital Hanoi, show how efforts to conserve urban nature are entwined with claims to rights to public spaces in the city, especially among the youth (Geertman and Boudreau 2018; see also Kurfurst 2021). However, the elderly also have an important stake in such debates, as highlighted later in this paper.

More than political tools to express a millennial eco-sensibility, trees in northern Vietnamese cities have historically served as important “building materials” (Dümpelmann 2019, 23) to regenerate nature and urban life in war-ravaged cities. As such, they formed part of a critical network of urban infrastructure—trees to reduce surface temperatures in the absence of stable electricity—that are now under threat from urban redevelopment schemes. At issue is not only the de-greening of the city, but also the resignification of what and for whom green spaces are built. While “green” may be a relatively new branding device and measure of value in Vietnam, green planning to produce more just cities and living environments has a much longer history.

To understand how the ecological and social have worked in tandem in the past to produce more equitable distribution of green spaces than we find today under conditions of housing privatisation, we might turn to those quintessential buildings of socialism: the planned assemblage of housing blocks, also known as an integrated residential district or a “microrayon.” I draw on two examples of eco-socialist planning where I have conducted fieldwork: Quang Trung housing estate in Vinh, the first planned socialist city built in the 1970s after the air war (Schwenkel 2020) and Kim Liên, the first planned microrayon or “socialist housing” complex in Hanoi, as planning documents called the area from 1959. These examples point to a paradox: how the contemporary era of green discourse (green cities, green buildings, green architecture and so on) and heightened concerns about sustainability in response to

anthropogenic climate change have meant the death of nature and shrinkages in public green spaces in the now late socialist city.

Trees are densely symbolic objects in Vietnam closely associated with post-colonial nation building and its promise of future prosperity. Hồ Chí Minh’s famous maxim: *Vì lợi ích mười năm thì phải trồng cây, Vì lợi ích trăm năm thì phải trồng người* (“for the benefit of a decade one should cultivate trees, for the benefit of a century one should cultivate people”) equates the labour of planting with the nurturing (*trồng*) of both human and non-human things. Trees were thus as important to the transmission of socialist ideology as they were to the rebuilding of post-war cities. Street trees would transform society: planners envisioned urban nature as restorative. In maintaining the health and wellbeing of the work force, green spaces would optimise worker productivity while contributing to a higher quality of life. In Vinh, planned green spaces in the Quang Trung housing estate proposed an average of 1.5 square metres per person, with half of this space devoted to arboreal coverage. In practice, the rate was much higher. More than 30 years later, the lush expanse of vegetation that encircles the housing complex stands in sharp contrast to adjacent neighbourhoods with more recently built individual housing (Image 1).



Image 1: Area B of Quang Trung housing estate next to a non-planned community of private residences, Vinh City, 2021. (Photo by the author)

During my research, residents of all generations took advantage of the generous open spaces that constituted up to 60 percent of the housing estate at the time, transforming them into badminton courts, cooking and eating areas, playgrounds, soccer fields, poetry clubs, vegetable gardens, sun drying beds, grazing pastures and venues for small businesses. These shared multifunctional spaces that blurred the boundaries between domestic and public activities were explicitly non-exclusionary. In fact, in interviews, residents recalled with fondness the ecological design of the complex, which they felt contributed to a better living environment, with cross ventilation between widely spaced buildings, capped at five stories and arranged in a zigzag pattern to maximise wind flow around and through the units (see Image 1). Re-cultivation with native plants that lined the pathways and perimeter of the complex reduced solar heat in the blocks and offered natural shade from the punishing sun.



Image 2: Area B of Quang Trung housing estate next to a non-planned community of private residences, Vinh City, 2021. (Photo by the author)

Similarly, in Kim Liên, interviewees who grew up there as children remembered the large open spaces that they turned into playgrounds under the canopies of young trees (Image 2). Like the housing complex in Vinh (built with the assistance of East Germany), Kim Liên (built with support from North Korea) followed an open landscape design to facilitate air flow and cool breezes through the complex, which was outfitted with parks and greenery between the buildings. This pattern would be repeated in collective housing complexes across Hanoi: urban planners designed rows of apartment blocks at an average of 24 metres apart to provide ample sun, air, and greenery for residents (Đào 2011, 67). The scale of Quang Trung, on the other hand, given the availability of land allowed for even wider spatialization in Vinh. Over time—as building materials became more readily available in the market—residents began to cement

or pave over many of these shared spaces in Hanoi. Makeshift structures came to replace trees and greenery as residents expanded their living spaces and livelihood activities beyond their single units (Image 3). This gradual paving of public green spaces in Hanoi's housing complexes should thus be understood in relation to an emerging market economy and privatisation policies, rather than an intrinsic feature of socialist planning.

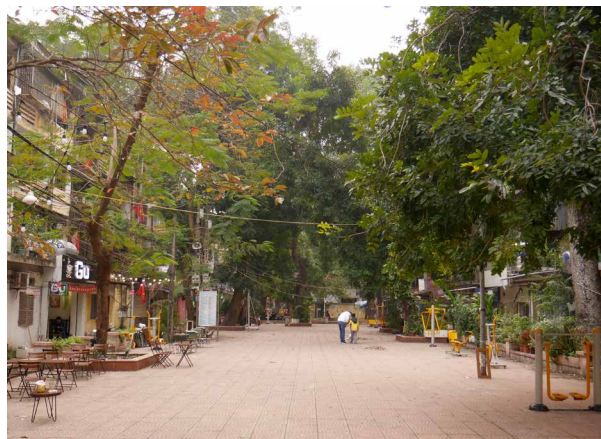


Image 3: Filling in green space between buildings, Trung Tự housing complex, Hanoi, 2022. (Photo by the author)

Plans for urban redevelopment and the demolition of socialist housing complexes have meant the death of nature in the city at a far greater scale than the appropriation of green space by residents. Where residents saw public green space for leisure, sociality, and economic activities, developers saw “wasted land” (*lãng phí đất*) for speculative development. Thus, despite the popular “eco” talk circulating in Vietnam today, urban space in Vietnamese cities is notably less green than it used to be. According to media reports, land allotted for green space in new urban high-rise projects has been on average less than 0.5 square metres per person, up to five times short of regulations (*Việt nam News* 2011), and three times less than the average proposed in the plan for post-war Vinh. Trees have thus fallen victim to privatisation of parks, lakes and gardens that produce social exclusion and stratification in previously inclusive spaces. Under a system where the spatial logic of capitalism has become deeply embedded in the landscape, concerns for private property have come to outweigh those for ecology and people-oriented planning.

This is not to wax nostalgia about the greener pastures of the socialist past, but to point to the unique ecological characteristics of post-war planning and to suggest that perhaps we have something to learn from such models, rather than dismiss them as obsolescent. The human costs of Vietnam's fast-paced urban “development” were again made clear to me during an interview with the eminent architect, Nguyễn Trức Luyện, an urban planner of Hanoi's early microrayons. Looking out from his 12th story balcony across the increasingly vertical

city, I asked Luyên in 2017 about his family's decision to move to an upscale condominium in the centre of Hanoi. "There is no place for the elderly to gather," he sighed. Without green spaces close by, he passed most of his time alone indoors (before his death in 2021). In the Quang Trung housing complex in Vinh, on the other hand, seniors spent much of their days outdoors

socializing with one another, gossiping and drinking tea, playing board games or badminton in vibrant communal spaces that were alive with activity. The loss of that sense of collectivity that Luyên expressed to me that day spoke not only to the death of nature in the city, but to an even greater harm: the loss of identity and the strong sense of inclusion and community that green spaces once afforded in cities.

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From country parks to park cities: Green Infrastructure in China's metropolitan areas under the goal of ecological civilization

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Although there is a long tradition of garden culture in China, public green spaces did not emerge until the middle of the 19th century when urban modernisation started. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, green space developed according to the green system planning of the former Soviet Union, which attached great importance to functional zoning and land use quota (Zhao, 2008). With the rapid development of cities, especially urban sprawl in the 1990s, there emerged a trend of pursuing parks and green spaces in a quantitative scale in new districts and towns; that is, aiming for a specific proportion of urban green space in built-up areas and a per capita green area. With the central government's 2007 proposal for an ecological civilisation, and especially the establishment of the Ministry of Natural Resources, which is responsible for the establishment of a spatial planning system and its implementation, green infrastructure and its ecological service capacity has been increasingly considered in developing public policies in cities. This article will showcase a number of pilot projects that lead the way for integrating social and environmental questions into the urban development and the regional integration of cities.

The necessity for urban green space development

China's urbanisation rate is expected to reach about 70 per cent by 2030, with a projected population of one billion living in cities (Development Research Center of the State Council and the World Bank, 2014; United Nations Development Programme, 2016). China has been undergoing a process of accelerated urbanisation since the 1980s as a result of rapid economic growth, which has resulted in severe problems associated with maintaining China's social, economic, and environmental sustainability. With the improvement of living standards and the increase in leisure time, citizens' requirements for the service capacity and quality of a healthy environment has also risen accordingly. The actual service level of public green space (including accessibility, types and number of service facilities for specific populations, environmental safety, etc.) needs to be combined with the improvement of social welfare, such as the spatial distribution, the socio-economic status and the needs of the population. As a consequence, most cities have accelerated the construction of large open space facilities such as rural parks, waterfront green spaces,

central green spaces, and community-scale renewal of outdoor spaces to meet these needs.

Another approach is the recent proposal of a "15-minute community life circle", where basic service facilities and public activity spaces required for daily life is equipped within a 15-minute walk. Internationally, it is also known as a "compact city" or "city of short distances". It emphasises a people-oriented planning idea and tries to optimise and adjust supply from the perspective of the behavioural needs of community residents (Li, 2017). In the context of the ageing Chinese population and the comprehensive two-child policy, the supply of public service facilities further focuses mainly on the needs of the elderly and children, providing all basic services and more quality-improving facilities, and realizing a diversified and accessible community service system. Young parents who rely heavily on social media may be motivated or self-organised to use public facilities. The development of social media also promotes the use of green spaces by citizens. NGOs use social media to connect online and offline groups through "online registration + offline community activities + online publicity". Through both the widespread online and offline interaction initiated by various social groups, the concepts of community participation are accepted, which promotes self-organisation opportunities in public space affairs. For example, the SEEDING programme initiated by Clover Nature School encourages residents to exchange seeds/green plants to promote the formation of a community neighbourhood network to support the actions of community mutual-aid.

Improvement of service value of urban green space in existing projects in China **Regional integration of green space system**

In 2010, the Pearl River Delta Greenway Network connected scenic spots, nature reserves, forest parks, country parks, wetland parks and ancient post roads (Feng, 2012), and was facilitated with service pavilions (Wang and Wang, 2019). The Greenway Network directly serves about 25.65 million people in surrounding cities in total. On average, a regional service area is set up every 20 kilometers (Green Pearl River Delta Road Network Master Plan Outline, 2010). The small-area service pavilions provide an opportunity to meet the needs of multi-functional social activities, become

gathering points for citizens to carry out activities such as salon, forums and children's nature education, and supports the integration function of the greenway. As a first trial in China, it seeks to integrate rural environment, agricultural land and ecological space. This integrated planning instrument of country parks has been successfully applied in Shanghai for a decade. Country parks are also an effective policy attempt to combine rural planning with ecological reservation, especially the combination with land consolidation provides a new paradigm for other Chinese cities (Wei and Cai, 2018).

Considering the unsatisfied rural infrastructure, the unbalanced and insufficient supply of recreational resources, country parks increase recreational opportunities for citizens without changing the nature of the land use. Country parks are aiming to meet the outdoor activity needs of outdoor activities by individuals and social groups, such as nature schools, outdoor sport clubs, eco-cultural NGOs, etc. Using social media is a popular tool to support the activities there and helps the city to re-network social groups based on their free time communication. Shanghai Urban Space Art Season (SUSAS) provided an online exhibition channel for tourists who could not visit the site in person. Through the online gallery, tourists could virtually visit an exhibition of land art in the country park.



Fig.1 Cultural and artistic activities in Caojing Country Park (Jinshan District, Shanghai)
image credit: Innovative Urban Green (IUG), photographer: Seven

Besides these social aspects, the Demonstration Zone of Green and Integrated Ecological Development of the Yangtze River Delta, founded in Zhujiatiao Town, Qingpu District, Shanghai by the central government focuses on the ecological co-governance among Jiangsu Province, Zhejiang Province and Shanghai. Blue-green infrastructure improvement projects are planned not only to solve ecological or environmental problems but they also aim to push these regions economically by attracting innovative, creative and sustainability-oriented companies as a process of revitalisation. In this case, the

Huawei Group, one of the top Chinese technological pioneers, announced their new headquarter settlement there in the near future.

City Parks

Improvement of service capabilities through urban green infrastructure is a new trend for cities. Urban parks, considered as the urban space for recreation with health benefits and nature restoration/preservation, also provide more cultural service value to citizens. Festivals, concerts and garden shows are increasingly being initiated in urban parks in order to attract various social groups.

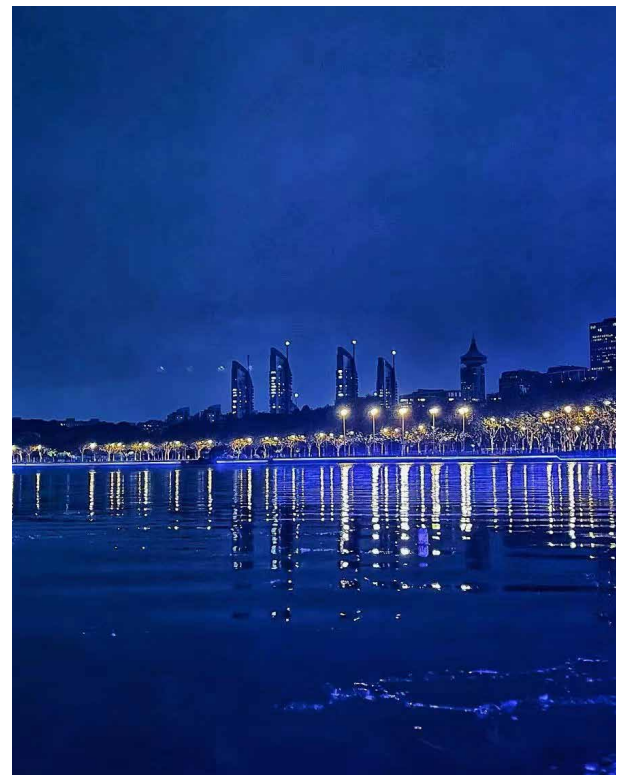


Fig.2 Century Park was completed in 1999 and was transformed into a 24-hour park in July 2021 (Pudong New District, Shanghai)
image credit: Innovative Urban Green (IUG)

Another new trend is the participation of people in the renewal or redesign of urban parks, with cities are now collecting citizens' opinions as part of the planning process. For example, the new Shanghai Expo CulturalPark solicited suggestions from nearly 20,000 citizens for the park set-up during its design process (Wang, 2021).

The "Park City" initiated by the city of Chengdu, Sichuan Province (also a National Demonstration Area of Park City) is an example of this trend, too. The wide participation by various social groups enable social collaboration on community green space issues, such as funding and management of service facilities (Chen et al., 2021). In Chengdu Luxelakes Red Stone Community Park, the project was realised by the developer, while the management and maintenance was organised by local

residents (Zhang et al., 2021). Based on community park participation, a public network platform was successfully established for resident volunteers, community councils, social foundations and sponsorship by enterprises.

Urban renewal

The increasing efforts in renovating existing urban spaces such as industrial areas, waterfront spaces, and open space in old communities has provided cities with higher service value from existing green infrastructure. Through public participation in community gardening projects, urban renewal provides social-ecological solutions for insufficient community public outdoors space.

Metropolitan areas such as Shanghai, Chongqing and Shenzhen have intensively carried out the renovation of riverfront spaces, encouraging citizens' recreational activities and social participation. As an example of the institutionalisation of the public participation model, the SUSAS and the Shanghai Urban Public Space Design Promotion Center promote the construction of riverside service facilities in cooperation with the Binjiang Culture and Sports Business Alliance to carry out cultural activities for residents and enterprises and to provide additional facilities, making usage more convenient for user groups.

Furthermore, the programme “Community Planners” was initiated recently in Chinese cities. Urban planners, architects, landscape architects and artists have been invited as community planners to participate in community open space renovation and activation. Besides their professional expertise, they contribute to the organisation of discussions, decision-making and management processes among residents.



Fig.3 Child-friendly community garden (Zhuanghang, Fengxian District, Shanghai) image credit: Shanghai Clover Nature School

Future trends

Working towards goals such as community life circles, dual-carbon development goals (carbon peak and neutrality goals), biodiversity conservation and healthy cities, Chinese urban green infrastructure is co-developed in close cooperation between authorities, companies, NGOs, and community committees.

Besides the pilot examples outlined above that can serve as models for further projects, the urban-rural green infrastructure integration still needs more interaction between cities and villages. The newly established programme for community planners in rural areas is expected to bring more urban social resources into rural communities. The programme will be needed due to the projection that people will continue to move from rural areas to cities.

In all mentioned projects, it becomes clear that digital technology plays a central role in China, specifically in the improvement of urban infrastructure, social services and ecological environment. These digital technologies are applied in the development of smart parks. For example, digital technologies such as monitoring and evaluation are widely used in parks so that parks can better respond to the strategies of ecological assets, ecosystem services and dual-carbon development goals, which are recent governmental concerns. In addition, with the wide popularity of social media, the analysis results represented by POI (point of information) data have promoted the precise identification of user groups and needs in different types of parks. Technological solutions can have the advantage of making decisions and management processes of green space more transparent. This is due to the fact that the massive amount of social media users in China is going to play a more important role in the social participation in various scales of urban green space in the future.

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The Eastern economic corridor: A case study on the controversy and implications of economic and industrial development versus social and environmental impacts in Thailand

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Although sustainability and sufficiency are highlighted in many aspects of the Thai government policies, like many developing countries, Thailand prioritises economic and industrial development as the national concern. Every National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) since they began in 1961 has focused on increasing foreign investment and providing for industrial needs. As the country is dependent on income from export, Thailand has had to adapt to global requirements and concerns, including environmental and social concerns, while maintaining industrial growth and a robust GDP growth rate. Thailand planned to strengthen its economy and reduce poverty in rural areas by decentralising urban development and distributing economic growth through special economic zones in each region. This was one factor driving rapid urban sprawl in Thailand.

However, economic and industrial development policies tend to give more importance to the growth of GDP than to quality of life and environmental protection. For example, one very classic case in Thailand illustrating the conflict between development policies and society and environment was the promotion of “small-scale biomass power plants”. While the environmental and health policy was to reduce particulate matter in the air and promote health, the policy on small-scale biomass plants required no EIA for plants generating less than 10 MW. As a result, many owners designed and registered their biomass power plants at 9.9 MW or less in order to avoid performing environmental, health and social impact assessments (EHSIA). According to the registry regulated by the Energy Regulatory Commission, 178 of 277 biomass power plants have a capacity below 9.9 MW¹. To set the background for further discussions as to why there are controversies and implications on social and environmental aspects due to economic and industrial developments in Thailand, it should be noted that there are multiple laws regulating factories and industries in terms of environmental impacts, social responsibilities, design for green space, resource availability, etc.

Urbanisation in Thailand, like many other countries in Southeast Asia, has been rapidly increasing in the past decade. Generally, the biggest expansions of urban areas in Thailand occurred mainly in the major cities of each region, such as Bangkok, Chiangmai, and Hat Yai. However, another key factor for urbanisation were the industrial and economic zones. Laws including the Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act (No. 2) B.E. 2561, whose latest version dates to 2018, the Factory Act B.E. 2535 (1992) and Factory Act (No.3) B.E. 2562 (2019), the Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand Act B.E. 2522 (1979) and the acts establishing the special economic zones, which are separated for each region, are important in shaping the special economic zones and urban and transportation planning because the existence or the lack of specifications about green space in these laws have a direct impact on the quality of life and environment surrounding the factories. Thus, it is very important that urban and transportation planning for the special economic zones is carried out carefully to support and facilitate its functions.

Previous industrial estate establishments did not take the migration of workers and their families into consideration; therefore, residential areas were not accounted for in the planning, and when urban sprawl quickly surrounded the establishments as the workforce built up, liveability became an issue. Still, it can be expected that new clusters of urban areas will continue to form, with the special economic zones as the nuclei. At the same time, as the communities grew, conflicts and claims of environmental misconducts also became more common. Hence, the Factory Act B.E. 2562 (2019) was passed to induce responsible conduct by requiring factories to produce annual audit reports, where the certifying party must have a license and experiences relevant to environment, health and safety, chemicals, energy, etc., and empowers the authority figure to demand that the factory make improvements in the case that they assess the factory may cause danger or harm to individuals, assets or the environment surrounding the factory. In the past, it was easier for factories to find ways to avoid penalties or having to take action, but with social media and modern communication technologies, the public have ways to take their grievances to the

1 Available at: http://app04.erc.or.th/ELicense/Licenser/05-Reporting/504_ListLicensing_Columns_New.aspx?LicenseType=1

media and press, which gets them more attention and quicker responses.

The most recent attempt to create an enabling environment for an economic boost and industrial investment was the policy on special economic zones, which came about in 2015 when Thailand announced the creation of 10 Special Economic Zones that were later grouped by regions. The setup was ideal in that it adopted the concepts of an eco-industrial park by putting industries in the same place so that pollution discharge could be better controlled. At the same time, other risks such as accidents from transportation are minimised. There are control measures in the Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand Acts and the Ministerial Regulation Prescribing Rules, Procedures and Conditions for Establishment of Industrial Estates B.E. 2548 (2005) for the surrounding environment. Industrial estates are required to provide green zones within the facility and factories are required to have at least five per cent of green area in their design.

The most well-known special economic zone development in Thailand is probably the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), which already has its own supporting legislation: the Eastern Special Economic Development Zone Act B.E. 2561 (2018). The idea was to decentralise urban development and economic growth to other parts of the country as well as to link the industrial estates and create infrastructure facilities that aid industries such as transport pipelines and enhance the cradle-to-cradle production model. The EEC is an industrial nexus built on the existing Eastern Seaboard Economic Development that has been in place for over 30 years. However, the EEC is a large project requiring new infrastructures to bridge industries and economic activities; therefore, it is like building a new city. In the EEC areas, there are 32 industrial estates that house over 5,000 factories and in between that, there are communities, both old and new that came with the migration of labour throughout the years. There are also pre-existing stand-alone factories that will be pulled into the EEC set up. Due to the large scale of the project, it is required by law that environmental, health and social impact assessments be performed, but at the same time, it is very much criticised because the political and national mandate that provides and supports economic and industrial growth sometimes overlook the well-being of the present communities.

The EEC project posed many changes and possible displacement and relocation of existing communities for new infrastructure. Although the EEC development showed that they carried out systematic land use and transportation planning assessments and that the infrastructure was carefully prepared and designed to prevent negative impacts both during construction and after construction, the public consultations were limited to the minimum requirements of the local law (Metternicht, 2017).

The Institute of Transportation Engineers refers to transportation development of this nature as the nexus of various disciplines working together to initiate plans, policies and legislative activities, find funds and propose project developments that will take into consideration the context of a city, town, community needs and their travel patterns to find an alternative to improve the transportation system². It is evident that transportation and land use planning can enhance movement for economic purposes, as the local saying goes, “where the road goes - the economy grows”. This is quite a common concept because roads create access to resources and also enable those resources to be transported for use in other locations.

However, in the present day situation, people tend to settle or move nearer to work, and they commute to and from work and to other destinations for various purposes, which is the case for the EEC. Around 15-20 years ago the workforce commuted further and did not have permanent settlements near work so other infrastructures such as public transport, roads, schools and other facilities were prioritized in the area planning. Now the behaviour of younger families is changing and they want to keep their children with them rather than send them to their hometown to live with the grandparents, therefore, supporting infrastructures such as electric trains and other modes of public transport and facilities are required.

There are different schools of thoughts for zoning. Ideally to separate residential zones from business zones and industrial zones is good in terms of traffic control and functional purposes. However, the EEC is being developed on top of an existing community, which includes tourist attractions and an already crowded traffic situation. Therefore, the new infrastructure had to take that into consideration as well as green space, clean air and recreation for the community. Liveability and environment were issues of concern raised at the public consultation forums. The official EEC site presented eight potential impacts from the project on education, transportation, agriculture, industry, economy, growing businesses, logistics businesses, hotel industry and tourism industry. However, only the positive side of what could be gained from the development was presented. The potential negative impacts on the people and existing environment, how to mitigate the problems or how to assist society through the change were not discussed³.

2 Accessed 1 February 2022. Available at: <https://www.ite.org/technical-resources/topics/transportation-planning/>

3 Available at: <https://sites.google.com/site/bbboseec/4-2-dan-kar-khmnakhm>

Issues such as relocation, displacement and alteration of livelihoods were raised by the public and responded to by the consultant team, but in a manner steeped in theory and removed from the reality of those raising the concerns. Thus, it seems that although public consultations were held as required by law, the voices of the local stakeholders were not taken into consideration. Therefore, although the construction of the facilities have already taken place and some facilities have already been commissioned for use, the social and environmental concerns still remain unresolved.

A previous study in China suggests that to improve the quality of life and land use efficiency, a residential area should be enclosed and separated from outside traffic (Wang et al., 2018). The study suggested this because less traffic in residential area will mean less pollution and better liveability. At the same time tall buildings for residential purposes will increase land use efficiency because it can accommodate more population in densely populated cities. However, in the case of the EEC, the zones will be integrated. An integrated approach to land use and transportation planning could contribute to the reduction of GHG from vehicles by shortening commute times and reducing the need for personal vehicles. This was the case for the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, where an integrated approach resulted in a more than 40 per cent reduction of GHG compared to the base line data (Tayarani et al., 2018). Therefore, if alternatives to personal vehicles are promoted, it might reduce the risks of pollution and accidents.

Previous studies showed that with proper land use and transportation planning and implementation, the impacts of urbanisation can be minimised and mitigated.

The combination of people, transportation and industries leads to issues of environment and liveability conditions; hence, the relationship and interconnection between them directly impact the sustainability of urbanisation. They are also the issues that implicate the implementation of economic development policies. However, the impact of the local communities and their situations from the implementation of the promotion of the large infrastructure development for industrial and economic enhancement is yet to be determined. The intensive development of regions can also create biased vulnerability gaps when considerations such as gender related issues, social welfare and other opportunities for the public may have been overlooked. Furthermore, facilities and infrastructures that come with rapid urban development must also take these issues into consideration in order to create a sustainable and liveable environment for all. Mentioned are just some examples of the complications resulting from existing development-based policies that have impacted the lives of local people. Even though people adapt to change,

it will take years. Consequently, the trade-off on social health, environment and quality of life issues should be further monitored to track the changes attributed to infrastructure construction and urbanisation resulting from the implementation of economic development policies.

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Vietnam

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) opened its Vietnam Office in Hanoi in 1990. It was one of the first international non-profit organisations to work in Vietnam. As a political foundation, we base our work on the principles of promoting social justice and political participation. Within these parameters, FES is supporting the renovation process known as *Đổi mới*, which was initiated by the Vietnamese Government in 1986.

The close and long-standing cooperation with local partners forms the backbone of the work of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Vietnam. The Vietnamese partner organizations of FES are central actors in the fields of politics, economic development and political education. In its cooperation with local partners Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung emphasizes its demand orientation. Hence, all projects focus entirely on partner's needs and wishes for political dialogue.

The Regional Climate and Energy project in Asia works with its partners and colleagues towards a social-ecological transformation in the region. It is based in Hanoi, Vietnam, and advocates for greater climate justice through its network in five different countries in Asia.

About this editorial

The annually published editorial highlights a topic from the work of the FES Climate & Energy project in Asia. The editorial brings together diverse perspectives on one topic to outline common perceptions and different realities across the region. It strengthens the social-ecological nexus in the debate around building a just future for all.

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