



TRANSFORMATIONS OF PUBLIC SPACE IN HANOI'S PERI-URBAN TRADITIONAL VILLAGES, WITH NHAT TAN VILLAGE SELECTED AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: Peri-urban areas in developing Southeast Asia are undergoing profound transformations. Formerly agrarian places surrounding fast-growing agglomerations such as Bangkok, Jakarta, Manila, and Hanoi have become dynamic sites of encounter between urban and rural built forms, activities and ways of life. The resulting urban formations belie conceptions of a neat cleavage between city and countryside. Since at least the 1980s, rural traditional villages in Hanoi's periphery have been absorbed into the urban fabric. The tightly bound community of traditional village life-based on religion, kinship ties and common use of space - has broken up. This paper outlines how public space in peri-urban villages has transformed - with the assumption that these changes are reflecting broader changes in the society. Relying on qualitative surveys and mapping, the research involved a case study of Nhat Tan village, a thousand-year old peach flower village strongly affected by Ciputra Hanoi (West Thang Long), the first new urban area in Hanoi. The research identifies emerging networks of public space that help to make the community resilient. The paper also contributes an initial exploration of the usage of the terms "public" space in the context of the contemporary Vietnamese city.

Keywords: Peri-urban, urbanization, globalization, public space, traditional village.

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1. Introduction: Background and research interest

Over the span of several decades, Southeast Asia's big cities have begun a process of metropolization linked to globalization, relying on the development of transportation and communications to create conurbations within which the cadences of population mobilities are intense and increasingly complex. Within metropolitan areas of Southeast Asia, a triple process of urbanization can be observed: the expansion of urban sprawls, acceleration of in-situ urbanization, and administrative urbanization [1]. The driving forces accelerating the urbanization in Southeast Asia are principally associated with globalization and with very heavy international and domestic investment in real estate, communication and industry. With the economic crisis of the 1970s resulting in industrialized capitalist country's increasing interest in cheap labor markets [2], industry has become the main activity in the new megapolises of Jakarta, Manila, Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur [3]. The scale of investments in the real estate market linked to banking policies that encouraged new middle classes to acquire loans for new property led to a construction boom and the expansion of urban sprawls [4]. Villages that were integrated into the inner rings of the new suburban areas housed migrants and became dormitory villages, while villagers developed new strategies to access resources - especially land, the principal means of capital accumulation. In the 2000s, the outskirts of these metropolises underwent rapid demographic and economic changes and acute social upheavals, expanding outwards to a radius of more than 30 km, sometimes as much as 50 km from the town centre [5].

Hanoi was distinct from its Southeast Asian counterparts because of its long years of war and resistance toward international partners. Firstly, the border war with China did not end until 1979. Moreover, due to the US-Vietnam war, Vietnam was not only impoverished but also did not have a chance to get rid of poverty. In contrast to China, which had been able to boost its economy after connecting with the international capital market, Vietnam experienced a difficult and slow economic growth due to the American trade embargo, which lasted until 1994. Secondly, other countries in the region integrated with the global market

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and started liberalizing more rapidly than Vietnam, thereby making the gap even wider. This situation has been further exacerbated after the Asian crisis in 1997; most foreign direct investment went to South Korea, Malaysia, and other countries, with Vietnam seeing much less interest from global investors. Despite Vietnam's wish to "be a friend and reliable partner with all nations in the international community" since 1991, it was not until 2000 when the US signed the Bilateral Trade Agreement that foreign capital started to flow in [6]. Since then, Hanoi has been experiencing a great urban transformation due to an increasing integration into the global economy and culture. New large-scale projects such as shopping malls, business centers, and high-rise residential towers have started to appear in the city, especially in the urban fringe, enabled by enlarged inner city roads. The Vietnamese state is promoting these large-scale urban typologies in a similar fashion to other Asian countries, with the goal of becoming a civilized society (xã hội văn minh) [7].

The thousand-year-old city of Hanoi, built on "the bend in the Red River", took shape in part from a dense substratum of villages that slowly being absorbed into its fabric. Since 2000, the change in speed brought about by property developers, small and large and the high influx of rural migrants, has resulted in profound changes in villages in the urban fringe, including increasing informal economic activities and the development of 'dormitory villages' for rural migrants [8]. These phenomena leave their marks on public spaces which were shaped by traditional solid communities characterized by kinship, religious and cultural norms, and neighborly relationships. It has been attributed to four processes. First and foremost, the formerly rural population has adopted what might be called "urban" ways of life, which focus more on individuality - possibly linked to a decline in traditional values. The second factor is a tighter control of the urban administration system. Thirdly, around Hanoi, as in many other densely settled regions of developing Southeast Asia, village-based urbanization process has recently been confronted with a new, exogenous form of peri-urban space production: the massive development of "new urban areas" - large-scale land redevelopment dominated by residential housing, geared toward expats and high- and middle-income residents. The consequent loss of farmland often leads to the reduction of communities' spaces of production and reproduction. Last but not least, urbanization has involved a high influx of underemployed and low-skilled rural migrants. Thus, the paper seeks to clarify the change of public space of village, using the theory of "place" to shed light on such an important component of physical structure of village. The paper also contributes an initial venture into thinking about the uses of the terms of "public" space in the context of the Vietnamese contemporary city.

Taking these different perspectives into account, the paper will study three interrelated elements: the material form of a place, its function and activities, the meanings and values of a place, and the ways by which its formation is determined by both global and local forces.

This research makes use of several different qualitative methods. In total, 60 questionnaires were collected, two focus group discussions, data from oral history and participatory mapping. To gain an understanding as comprehensively as possible, interviews with residents, migrants, and local authorities were conducted. The 60 questionnaires were carried out by a team of 12 students at the National University of Civil Engineering. This student team was supervised by university lecturers. Because this is a qualitative study, the students were given considerable flexibility and encouraged to improvise and rephrase the questions as long as they explored the most important themes. Participants were recruited with the help of a hamlet leader. Answers are memorized and then took some time after to record narrating the interview. With low-income residents in particular, it is assumed that this approach facilitates a much more open and relaxed exchange than if a recorder was present throughout the whole conversation.



2. Literature review

Sense of Place

Place does not lend itself to a definitive interpretation. Whereas economic geographers largely deal with place as location, architects, urban designers, physical planners, anthropologists or human geographers may typically focus on how a sense of place informs people's attachment to and conception of their environment [9]. From this perspective, places can be defined as "locations imbued with meaning that are sites of everyday practice" [10]. In the book *The Sense of Place*, Fritz Steele discusses this same concept: "There are certain physical and social settings that are so potent that they evoke similar responses, regardless of the diversity of internal states of the responders. These settings have what we call a strong spirit of place that acts in a powerful, predictable manner on everybody who encounters them" [11]. Physical environment settings (location, boundary, size) combined with social features (behavior, the willingness to share



the setting with the outsiders, etc.) of the people living and working in these settings form the spirit of some particular places.

The meanings and methodologies used to understand place have also shifted along with major transformations of the global political economy. For one, the rise of the network society eliminated the need of a physical location for a place to enable human interaction, let alone flows of goods, capital, or information [12]. The advent of “world cities” or “global cities” [13] is commonly understood as a process of cultural homogenization and synchronization, thought to create similar global urban architecture and metropolitan lifestyles throughout the “developed world” [14]. Concepts of “non-place” [15], “placelessness” [16], and “cities without a place” [17] downgraded the importance of the local contexts of place and led some to claim that place should be seen as something that did not matter anymore. Other scholars developed an alternative view in which place has become a particular instance in the network of social relations [12,18], in which a sense of place can only be constructed by “linking that place to places beyond” [18]. A city (or a place) is a “milieu that is in constant formation, drawing on disparate connections, and subject to the play of national and global forces” [19]. Thus, place is seen as embedded within a wider political economy, determined by systems at many scales that transcend the local. In this view, the question is not whether and to what extent “place-making” has become impossible.

Extending this argument further, urban critical theorists see “place” as a “market commodity that can reproduce wealth and power for its owners”, a social construct embedded within wider political economic systems and thereby always subject to commodification by capitals. As such, place-making is not just an organic local process but negotiated through power struggles. Who defines how place is used is inherently a political process, determined by existing political economic institutions. However, while theorists have explored how place-making becomes commodified under processes like gentrification [20] and have theorized the role of the third sector in this process [21], there remains a poor understanding how place-making continues to occur despite accelerating “planetary urbanization”, and what institutional mechanisms can prevent it from becoming commodified [22].

Taking these different perspectives into account, the paper will study three interrelated elements: the material form of a place, its function and activities, the meanings and values of a place, and the ways by which its formation is determined by both global and local forces.

Public space

The interpretation of public space has changed over time. Public space since the Greek, polis represents the material location where the social interactions and political activities of all members of “the public” occur [23]. Public space is the space “out there” which belongs to the whole community, although regulated by prevailing social and legal norms [24]. The Western ideal of public space is unconstrained space within which political movements can organize and expand into wider arenas [23]. It is a space where the marginalized can challenge the status quo or dominant order [25] and where “oppositional social movements” can form and operate [23]. In practice, however, it is more often a controlled and orderly retreat where a properly behaved public might experience the spectacle of the city [23]. An especially valuable contribution is Edensor’s (1998) comparison of Indian and Western streets wherein he argues that social ordering and regulation of Western streets is culturally specific and not easily transferable to the non-Western context [24]. Therefore, one of the paper objectives is to shed light on the usage of “public space” in the local context of Vietnam. The public space in paper is defined as space belonging to whole community, including symbolic spiritual spaces and social spaces serving for daily life in traditional village.

Hanoi’s people-driven urbanism

Since Vietnam’s change to a socialist market economy in 1986, Hanoi has experienced a very rapid population growth. In the production of urban space, state and society are engaged in a process of negotiation, resistance and compromise [26,27]. Urban space production in Vietnam has been characterized as people-led [28] and self-organizing [29]. In the early decade of reforms Vietnam witnessed a decrease of state-employment and a growth of informal employment in the “informal sector”, leading Hanoi’s streets to be occupied by street sellers [24,31]. Urban culture became characterized by a pavement culture; individual households developed low rise vernacular housing by encroaching on public land and making their own improvements in existing housing [29,30]. Many residents receive income from small businesses on the ground levels and do not want to lose this source of income. Hanoians often stay in close relationships with their neighbors and surroundings, and they often use their own resources to restore and improve their

houses. The vernacular houses have a high symbolic meaning for the residents because they represent their newly acquired autonomy from the state and demonstrate their new individual aspirations and aspirational lifestyles [32]. With the seeming loosening of state control over many aspects of socioeconomic life, it has come a number of pressing social problems. This includes ever-increasing rural-to-urban migration, rising divorce rates and a changing structure of families. Another is a staggeringly young population (estimate of over 60 percent of the population under 30 years of age) - meaning one with no memory or experience of the nationalist anti-US war and little ideological attachment to the Communist regime, as well as indicating a rapidly expanding labor force needing employment [24].



3. Nhat Tan Case study

Nhat Tan village is located in the northernmost area of West lake, about three kilometers away from the city center. This agrarian village was been geographically formed by the accretion and flow changing of the two major water features of Hanoi, namely West lake and the Red river. It has had a long history as the sign of its ancient residential settlement area can be traced back to about seven hundred years ago [33]. Since 1995, Nhat Tan has administratively upgraded to an urban ward. Among ancient villages of Hanoi, Nhat Tan has always been widely known for its heirloom peach tree cultivation profession which had been practiced since the very beginning of this village. In addition, just like many other peri-urban villages, it has also been an agricultural area that provides farming products (flowers and vegetables) for the city. (Figs. 1-2).



Figure 1. Location of case study [34]



Figure 2. Aerial view of case study [34]

For centuries, Nhat Tan always remained as tranquil rural village with stable physical settings. However, within the past two decades, this village has been dramatically transformed through an expeditious urbanization process, turning from a rural village into an urban neighborhood. There have been many major urban development activities and projects contributing to such a transformation, namely:

- + In 1995, Nhat Tan was institutionally defined as an urban ward. Its physical and institutional settings have been changed/ improved following urban standards.

- + 1998: 'West Lake Water Park' project started and the park opened in 2000;

- + In 2000, "Ciputra Hanoi" new urban area had been built in popular peach tree planting area ('Dinh dào') of Nhat Tan - Phu Thuong villages. A large portion of the farmland was taken for new development. To keep their traditional job, Nhat Tan - Phu Thuong farmers moved their peach garden to alternative places such as areas outside the dike which used to be vegetable farmland.

- + In 2005, Lac Long Quan road on western side of West lake was renovated and extended to promote transportation and to prevent the lake from being encroached by the residents. This road divided Western residential entity of Nhat Tan into two parts.

- + During 2005-2015, West lake had been renovated through various landscape, environmental and infrastructural projects. Hundreds of Nhat Tan houses facing West lake were spatially affected by land recovery and infrastructural network installation.

- + During 2011-2013, Nhat Tan bridge - an ODA transportation project connecting Hanoi inner city and the northern part, including Noi Bai international airport completed. It started to operate in 2015. In addition, for the construction of the bridge, a sand exploitation location set up by Red River and the front road of Nhat Tan village had been concreted and widened to facilitate bulk trucks transforming sand.



+ In near future, Hanoi city authority planning to level and widen the main dike including the part running through Nhat Tan. This signals significant changes on the two sides of the dike in the future.

It can be seen that Nhat Tan area has been going through a restless period of urban development. External impacts and contextual developments have led to internal physical and social changes inside Nhat Tan village.



4. Findings

a. Symbolic spaces

From the old days, the communal houses, temples, pagodas and shrines have become symbolic places where Nhat Tan villagers organized significant community events. The survey undertaken by the research group reveals that Nhat Tan Communal House is given the most frequent reference over other ritual places as 100% of the focus group and 55% of the social survey participants mentioned 'Dinh'/Communal house. More or less, it indicates that the Communal House currently has a great influence on the community life of Nhat Tan village.

With regard to the form, the communal house site had been narrowed due to the expansion of recent dike. In terms of functions, three main functions of Nhat Tan communal house (administration, religious practice, and socio cultural) have vibrantly changed over time.

First of all, administrative function of the Communal House has completely disappeared upon the emergence of modern administrative system which manages the localities through wards/communes People's Committees, which separate an administrative place from a traditional ritual one. It remains a place for people to meet and round up with talks of not only political concerns but also individual daily life.

The religious practice is demonstrated with the worship of Village Tutelary God. Nowadays, these practices are maintained and widespread for not only the villagers but also people of adjacent neighborhoods, as local people put more values on spiritual life. Another notable feature of today's worship practice is the shift of gender roles. Communal houses were restricted in gender and status (only man and highly respected people), this space nowadays can be accessed by everyone that represent for the gender-equal society. Nowadays men and women play the same role, and women perform this role even more often. Ms. Hanh - a villager who has lived in Nhat Tan for more than 40 years said that she has always visited it during New Year holidays and traditional festivals with her family, friends and/or with local women union of Nhat Tan ward.

In terms of social-culture, firstly, as a way to convey the pursuit of tradition of knowledge and learning spirit of Nhat Tan village in particular (and Vietnamese people in general), the House served as the first place where those who achieved academic honors degrees had to return home to pay tribute to ancestors and also the avenue for villagers' festival of glory. In today's village festival, students of academic excellence or having passed the national university entrance exam are honored at the Communal House. Furthermore, Nhat Tan Communal House is place of cultural events and performances. Upon these occasions, local people meet, exchange, foster traditional customs and update modern culture. Lastly and most importantly, the House serves traditional community festival activities to commemorate the Village Tutelary God which is a great festival for all villagers including those who are living and working far-away from home village to gather.

Thus, despite the disappearance of administrative function and the role as the representative of local authority and village autonomy, the Communal House has other meanings preserved and promoted. Local people still use, love and symbolize their communal house as their home. The House itself is no longer isolated from the masses of people, but welcomes all community members and cements their relationships. Withstanding the powerful influence of urbanization, the Communal House remains as a symbol for those born and grown in villages or former-villagers.

b. Social spaces

Market

Nhat Tan Market is not an archaic public place associated with Nhat Tan Village from the very beginning, however for decades it has played an important role as well as possessed a substantial influence that goes beyond the local level. This market was settled about 30 years ago when trading and commercial activities started to be allowed after long time of banning in centrally planned economy period. Located at the

strategic position at the front of village and on the main road, it has grown inconstantly, starting from several temporary stalls to a major city market facilitating ample goods and services nowadays.

In terms of meanings, the most important thing that is worth mentioned is the vital role of supporting community in the past and its declination in modern times. The formation of Nhat Tan Market and the influence of the urbanization had created a new status for Nhat Tan. Not only as well known agrarian village as before, it also became a marketplace promoting interrelationship between communities. All of the people who are daily users of Nhat Tan market said that there are people and merchants from surrounding communities and even other provinces come there for commodity purchase and business. Moreover, there is a fact that Nhat Tan market has been used quite regularly among Nhat Tan people. All of the surveyed people (100%) said that they did go to Nhat Tan market at least once or twice during their stay in this neighborhood while nearly half of them (or their family) visited this location weekly for grocery. Therefore, this market also helps to promote local community as it has been a daily communal location where people practically can take part in buying, selling, meeting, exchanging information etc. A group of local villagers as merchants had also formed a stably occupational relationship in the market.

Nowadays, Nhat Tan market is facing massive challenges. There is a growing trend in Vietnamese urban lifestyle affecting traditional markets in Hanoi, including Nhat Tan market. Recently, not all city people have consider local market as the only destination for daily items purchased. Because of food safety concerns and changing lifestyle, many take supermarkets, private stores, franchise convenience stores as alternatives. All surveyed young citizens of Nhat Tan market (about 35% of surveyed participants), especially people who originated from other places showed concern about food safety and they do not trust the food sold in the market. Another reason might come from the widespread of information technology in the modern time that leads to a new shopping mode with convenient online sale - buy and delivery. Respectively, people do not need to go out for shopping and hence traditional markets might also lose many customers.

Road network

The structure of road network has been remained, but its landscape and its facilities have changed. According to the villagers, village roads in the past were just dark, muddy routes with open gardens on either side and no streetlight. Houses along the main road and alleys showed no visual difference. Since the 1990s, when Nhat Tan village was recognized as an urban ward, all of its roads and alleys then were eventually covered with concrete, equipped with lights and cable lines so that these have been totally transformed into urban road network. According to Ms. Nga, a local woman who has lived here for all her life, most of houses in the village have been renovated into more modern types. They are now constructed with concrete wall, higher building density; especially houses along main roads and houses near the market.

In terms of activity, the main village road has emerged as vibrant commercial and multi-use space. In planned economy period, as a result of abandoning all private sector's commercial activities, village roads were quiet environment for slow movement, and were also spacious playgrounds for children. Nowadays, most of houses along main roads, have first floor used as stores, restaurants, or workshops. The main reason lies on the lost farmland while having no sufficient knowledge to access recent labor market except doing small businesses. Moreover, greetings, storytelling, shopping, social interactions and entertaining (playing chess, playing cards) of Nhat Tan local people have been widely known. Trading activities actually have transformed Nhat Tan village routes into town streets; and these roads-streets have become open spaces. All these make a vivid picture, suggesting a public forum in the city. Since traditional communal house, pagodas and temples are sacred places occasionally and sometimes exclusively used by villagers; main roads seem to be alternative public places for Nhat Tan villagers in the modern time. They are truly public domains for everyone, showing life diversity and vibrancy, having a modern breath and acceptance of new elements.



5. Discussion and Conclusion

The changes in form, function, and meaning of public space of traditional villages are summarized in the following Table 1.

With regard to the form, the village infrastructure has been retained; the spiritual center has been narrowed; the commercial space has been enlarged. With regard to the function, most of spaces have changed from one space-one function into multi-use one, except communal house which was a multi-purpose hall, originally and recently, its function has been restricted to ritual and cultural activities. In consideration of meaning, public space of village has become more important to villagers, especially in globalization context.

**Table 1.** Changes of Nhat Tan village's public spaces

	Form	Function	Meaning
Communal house (Dinh)	The architectural form has been well preserved. The area was narrowed	Loses administrative function Retains the ritual function Retains the socio cultural activities	Shows local pride Bonds the community and generations Enhances the connection with adjacent communities
Market	Enlarged and renovated from temporal stalls into market	Provides fresh food and commodity for local people and also for city people	Connector of farmers and city residents Supports the life of vulnerable group
Road network	Retained the original structure Being upgraded Changed landscape	Retains transportation function Develops commercial and social activities	A lucrative space A public forum

It helps to tighten the community of villagers living inside and outside the village, and to strengthen the relationship with the surrounding communities. In addition, it has also become a lucrative space and provide important sources to support villagers' life who are the suffered most in the globalization and urbanization process since they are not well-prepared or trained to adapt the new labor market. It reflects the transition (from closed and spiritual - production center community to open and more commercial one. It also sheds light on globalization process, rather than homogenize the culture and modernize the space following the modern planning theory, the people-led urbanism has resulted in flexible spaces which drive away from planner's concept in use and government's idea in order. The term "public space" in context of Vietnam, therefore, should be considered as "pseudo-public space" since people are always keeping on negotiation with the government to personalize the public spaces for fundamental living purposes.

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