



# A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW URBAN AREAS IN HANOI OVER THE PAST TEN YEARS AND THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH SURROUNDING VILLAGES - A REVIEW FROM VAN QUAN NEW TOWN

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**Abstract:** The first generation of new urban areas in Hanoi began exactly 20 years ago with Linh Dam as a pilot project. So far, over 200 new urban areas on different scales have been constructed throughout the capital city (Labbé, 2016), especially since 2008 when Hanoi was strategically expanded. These projects help solve housing problems to a certain degree and have brought back a modern look to the cityscape. However, there are numerous challenges in both technical and social aspects of the current urbanisation and housing programme which may have an even more negative impact on the local socio-economic development in the coming years if they cannot be properly considered and dealt with. The academic paper focuses on some of the most topical issues, such as traffic congestion, air and water pollution, lack of social contact between townspeople and villagers, etc. noted from the recent development of new towns in Hanoi with a specific case study - Van Quan, where an interaction between a typical new urban area and four adjacent villages is particularly noticeable and therefore requires an initial-but-comprehensive investigation.

**Keywords:** New town, old village, spatial planning, housing development, transformation, social interaction, social sustainability.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The birth of a new living concept

Before 1986, the housing sector in Vietnam was entirely subsidised and housing construction was delivered by the state on the basis of state-run schemes characterised with collective housing projects. From 1986 onwards, when the centralised plan economy was abolished, the state decided to partially hand over the leading role to non-state enterprises in some parts of the stage that had been previously regarded as “monopoly”, including housing supply. As a result, the construction of the old-fashioned collective housing terminated. The adoption of Land Law in 1993 proved that the land-use right became a kind of property that could be exchanged or transferred in the market. The concept of “new urban area” or “new residential quarter” was formulated and based on the sharing of urban planning and housing construction as well as the demand-and-supply mechanism of the open market. The state just makes policies and controls the implementation of planning and building projects.

A new town is a project-based living concept in major cities in Vietnam initiated in the early 1990's. After two decades, looking back to the formation and development of this concept, it is apparent that the concept has demonstrated its advantages, especially in terms of shaping a brand-new image for a city and creating a better living environment for the residents. New towns, when systematically developed, will not only provide a large number of housing units within a short time, but also pay due attention to spatial planning and landscape design between housing blocks that used to be almost ignored before. Apartments and family houses in these areas have become much sought-after over the years and today they are popular

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choices by the home-buying public, because they wish to settle in one place for a long time with a better living standard and a higher level of convenience that can be mainly provided in new urban areas. It means that urban development managers in Vietnam have succeeded in trying to incorporate housing fabrication into complete and complex projects in view of function.

In order to acquire land for new urban areas, the city authorities are ready to transform agricultural land in peri-urban areas into living quarters around existing urban cores. On the one hand, this initiative helps reduce the land price as an input of the subsequent urban development process. On the other hand, it may accelerate the urbanisation rate by enlarging the urban living space and hereby strengthening the attraction of cities through physical aspects, such as size and population. Most of the new towns have been located in peri-urban areas and surrounded by traditional villages where people still live on farming or handicrafts. As a consequence, a profound change in fabric and land use within and around a project site has been made and clearly seen. Paddy fields and vegetable farms have been replaced by new urban housing blocks with a high building density and busy commercial streets. In other words, in the same territory, two seemingly opposite lifestyles coexist: new urban areas representing a modern and civilised community while traditional villages standing for a so-called “self-transformation” from old to new models under the strong impact of urbanisation in general, and from the adjacent new towns in particular.

In terms of spatial planning, new towns have been constructed on the basis of synchronisation of the following three key factors: 1. Technical infrastructure, 2. Social infrastructure and 3. Housing units. One typical urban area may be identified with four basic characteristics: 1. New elements in spatial urban design, 2. Relative independence of the city in terms of daily activities, 3. Systematic planning of infrastructure and 4. Structure of the components of urban space as required [1]. Thus, theoretically, one new town can be regarded as a complete neighbourhood that has its own lifestyle, relatively independent of the city and its neighbouring settlements. This independence enables that new town to self-provide everyday life services for local residents to a certain extent on the one hand. On the other hand, it may bring about an interruption in the relationship between that new town and the old villages nearby. Consequently, “break points” in both space and lifestyle are likely to happen. In order to attract a greater number of home buyers, that project developer has heavily invested in advertisement programmes. In the current project management system, the developer is merely responsible for internal affairs and not interested in anything else that may occur outside the boundary of the project. Nevertheless, a city is expected to be a harmony of different living conditions and lifestyles throughout its territory, not just a simple mixture of living quarters or housing patterns.

### 1.2 Why Van Quan new town?

Van Quan-Yen Phuc new town (in short Van Quan) belongs to the second generation of new urban area development in Hanoi established shortly before 2006-the year marked with the promulgation of development regulations applicable to new towns. That was a boiling period for all enterprises and also full of challenges for them to cope with, as they embarked on developing new urban areas without preceding home experience. After the first two successful modelling projects in Hanoi (Linh Dam and Dinh Cong), Hanoi Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUD) continued to apply that new concept to other parts of the city. HUD eventually selected Van Quan-a new ward of Ha Dong town, which used to be an administrative centre of the former province of Ha Tay (currently becoming Ha Dong district of Hanoi city)-for a large modern housing project. This location is not so far from Hanoi city centre (for an effective management) and close enough (for an easy access). Actually, Van Quan was the first site in Ha Dong district and listed among the kick-off projects for the second generation of new urban areas in Hanoi. Started in 2003, Van Quan covers an area of 61 ha and provides home to approximately 14,000 inhabitants [2]. When completed, it is expected to symbolise a high-quality living environment as well as a driving force for the urban development in the southwest of Hanoi.

Van Quan is administratively managed by two people's committees: Van Quan and Phuc La. Surrounded by four villages (Trieu Khuc, Yen Xa, Yen Phuc and Van Quan, see Fig. 1), Van Quan new town makes a special case study and promises to give par-

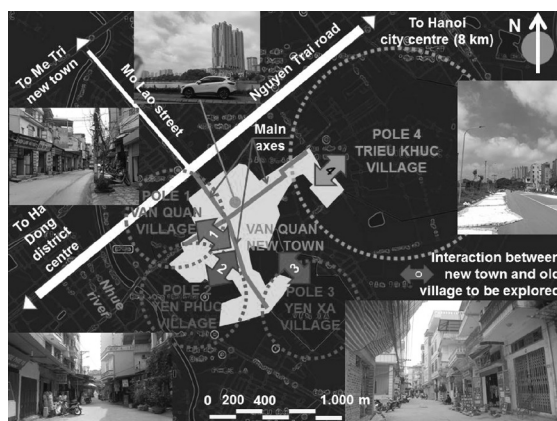


Figure 1. Van Quan new town and its surrounding four villages [9]



ticularly interesting examples of how a new town will interact with different villages at the same time. Both spatial and social transformations can be found here and interpreted in an interdisciplinary approach. After almost 20 years, Van Quan has now become a populous and busy residential quarter, denoting that the project developer has been successful in shaping a new living environment. But the counter-effect needs to be taken into account, such as land use, traditional jobs, long-standing rural lifestyles and customs have either considerably or dramatically changed within a short time because of the rapid urbanisation. The lessons learnt from Van Quan will be useful to deal with the problems and challenges elsewhere in the Red River Delta with similar conditions.

### 1.3 Objectives and methodology

This long-term study aims to better understand and clarify the complex interrelations between a new town and the old villages nearby, to improve one living concept that is still incomplete, and later to find out a more appropriate policy-making mechanism that will establish and consolidate a more socially sustainable development in the future. This article, as the first step, tries to give an overview of new town development and then an in-depth view of such a prevailing trend by providing a number of experts' opinions enlightening the early days of new towns before highlighting some interesting facts and figures extracted from the site survey outcomes which would demonstrate that Van Quan is a typical case study.

In order to realise these objectives, the team began with surveys and data collections. Based on detailed information gained from in-depth interviews with experts and opinions from questionnaires sent back by residents, the team will set up a wide range of criteria and tools for a comprehensive assessment at a later stage. At the first step, with data collections and analyses, it is possible to consolidate the team's preliminary hypotheses and propose a number of initial key findings for further investigations into the wide range of interactions/interrelations between Van Quan new town and the surrounding villages.



## 2. New town development in experts' points of view

As a key member of the inter-institutional research group, Assoc.Prof.Dr.Danielle Labbé from the Faculty of Urban Planning (University of Montréal, Canada) met and interviewed six experts who were initially and/or directly involved with the planning of new urban areas in Hanoi in the early and mid 1990's.

In the pre-1986 period (commonly known as subsidised economy planned and centrally directed by the government), urban housing was entirely constructed, allocated and managed by the state on the basis of norm-based distribution. The shift in the policy towards an open market economy in which the private sector was officially accepted for the first time paved the way for a revolution in mindset and viewpoint regarding the investment and development in housing for city inhabitants whose housing demand had been held back for decades-before, during and after the war [3,4].

The First National Congress on Urban Planning and Development in 1990 proposed a number of new requirements for a radical change in urban planning orientation, city construction and housing development management for city inhabitants [5].

In 1991, the state promulgated an act (No. 51-LCT/HDNN8, dated April 6th 1991) on housing (in short: 1991 Housing Act) in which housing ownership would be recognised and legally protected. In addition, the participation of individuals and organisations in housing development was encouraged. Thus, 1991 Housing Act made a significant re-direction in urban housing development policy, for instance the socialisation of housing development could be supported. Enterprises were allowed to invest in new living quarters designed in new residential concepts for city inhabitants. This change in policy making came from reality and complied with the rules in social development.

The reform of Land Law in 1993 also resulted in a new housing policy. The 1993 Land Law began to separate urban land-use management rural land-use management which were both controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture. In this watershed law, land should be divided into two categories: farmland and urban land. One crucial adjustment in 1993 Land Law was that urban land would be discretely managed. One year later, the Prime Minister approved of the management in building investment whereby urban management, especially in urban planning, could be clearly determined [5].

The Second National Congress on Urban Planning and Development in 1995 adopted important changes in the orientation for urban planning and management. The national network of towns and cities expanded quickly in both land coverage and population size on account of an improved economy. The Prime Minister approved of the orientation for planning all the cities and towns nationwide and the adjustment in

planning of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city. A variety of management and development policies for cities and towns has been quite comprehensively drafted and issued to attract more investment capital sources for building (including housing) projects. Another noticeable trend in urban planning was the changing role of stakeholders in the establishment, approval and implementation of planning projects in which the importance of private sectors would be emphasised. Also, the term “new urban area” or “new town” was used for the first time in 1995, when Hanoi began to realise the reverse side of the massive and spontaneous development of row-houses that spoilt the cityscape. The definition of “new urban area” or “new town” became officially endorsed with Decree No. 52/1999/ND-CP dated on July 8th 1999. According to this decree, “new urban area” or “new town” is a project-based new living quarter constructed as planned with a complete infrastructure system and connected with an existing city or town [5].

The Master Plan for Hanoi re-adjusted in 1998 took some revisions in both orientation and strategy: the city development should be based on both sides of the Red River with some industrial parks in the suburbs. In traffic planning, there would be three city ring roads while urban housing development was put to the forefront of the city development [5,6]. With regard to living concepts, most of the new housing projects between 1992 and 1998 were small in size (less than 2 hectares, primarily constructed for state officers, using the capitals from both the state and state agencies, with a partial contribution from the public) and those new housing projects failed to go in line with social/technical infrastructure systems. The following shortcomings of this kind of development might be noted: low-rise row houses made up an overwhelming part of all urban housing programmes up to that point of time, with inefficient land-use factor and no balance between social and technical infrastructure could be achieved.

Before 1998, the construction of new urban areas in Hanoi was rather limited to mini-projects as an exploration of the public demand. Typical new urban areas in that period, such as Linh Dam, Dinh Cong, Trung Yen, Dai Kim, Nghia Do, etc. started to be planned and built on a small scale in terms of investment and with a mix of row-rise and high-rise housing types. Enterprises just focused on the investment in housing construction while the city authority was responsible for technical infrastructure development. Therefore, the city authority insisted that all housing developers should invest properly in technical infrastructure systems in accordance with housing quality to ensure a high living standard for all city inhabitants [7]. In 1996, Ciputra became the first joint-venture project in partnership with one Indonesian corporation ever approved by the city authority. From Ciputra project, there were some lessons learnt: providing decent housing for middle-class to high-income residents was considered an advantage while the shortcomings in operation, land rental mechanism and land-use right could not be ignored [3,5].

From 1998 to 2001: this period started with Decision No. 108/1998/QĐ-TTg dated June 20th 1998 by the Prime Minister and ended up with Decision No. 123/2001/QĐ-UBND dated December 6th 2001 by Hanoi City People's Committee on the promulgation of the principles in investment and development of new urban areas, as well as housing renovation and improvement in Hanoi. These official documents determined the sharing of land for housing construction: approximately 60% for high-rise apartment buildings and 40% for villas and garden houses. The construction of new tube houses was not permitted.

The years 2001 to 2008: After Decision No. 123/2001/QĐ-TTg took effect, new urban areas were developed on the basis of the aforementioned land-use sharing. The planning of technical and social infrastructure systems as well as facilities for users in consideration of population size in each new urban area was carried out, for instance in Trung Van (Tu Liem district in 2003), Sai Dong (Long Bien district in 2004), Nghia Do (Cau Giay district in 2004) and other areas from 2005 onwards. In typical projects, such as Linh Dam, South Thang Long, Trung Hoa-Nhan Chinh, Cau Giay, Me Tri, Viet Hung, etc., new building technologies were applied for high-rise apartment building construction. These new towns were regarded as modelling examples in terms of modern and comfortable living environment, in sharp contrast to poor housing quality in old collective residential quarters (in Kim Lien, Trung Tu and Giang Vo) or overcrowded and chaotic with low-rise self-built houses. Decree No.2/2006/ND-CP dated on January 5th 2006 was enacted and the regulations specifically for new towns were drawn up. A new town project was defined as “an investment project in the construction of a well-planned urban area with both technical and social infrastructure systems that will serve living quarters and public service buildings. It may be a continuity of an existing urban area or an independent part of a city with its own boundary and function determined in accordance with the city planning approved by a competent state agency” [8].

From 2008 to date: Based on the Overall City Development Planning for Hanoi approved by the Prime Minister with Decision No. 1259/QĐ-TTg dated July 26th 2011, the zoning plan for urban districts (scale 1/2000) and for rural districts (scale 1/5000) previously approved in the 2000-2006 period





referred to the size of a new urban area (from 20 to 200 ha) and the location (usually along main city roads). Other aspects included land-use planning, landscape architecture and technical/social infrastructure planning.



### 3. Van Quan new town from the perspective of local residents and neighbouring villagers

In the theory of modern urban planning, the local community plays an extremely important role in securing the success of any planning project. Their voices should be heard and considered for an enhancement of living quality in general and the consolidation of social communication in particular as one of the greatest problem that a modern society must face today. Van Quan new town offers an interesting case study for the examination of the urban - rural interrelations and interactions, because it does not only have one or two villages nearby as normally found elsewhere across the capital city's territory, but four in total. A

**Table 1.** Public opinions of changes over the past ten years in Van Quan and two adjacent villages [9]

No.	Area Issue	Van Quan town (19 participants)			Yen Phuc village (76 participants)			Yen Xa village (54 participants)		
		B (+)	S (o)	W (-)	B (+)	S (o)	W (-)	B (+)	S (o)	W (-)
01	Traffic circulation	14	5	0	65	8	3	50	4	0
	Percentage	73.7%	26.3%	0.0%	85.5%	10.5%	4.0%	92.6%	7.4%	0.0%
02	Traffic connection	13	4	2	56	2	18	36	12	6
	Percentage	68.4%	21.1%	10.5%	73.7%	2.6%	23.7%	66.7%	22.2%	11.1%
03	Religious buildings	9	8	2	29	47	0	37	17	0
	Percentage	47.4%	42.1%	10.5%	38.2%	61.8%	0.0%	68.5%	31.5%	0.0%
04	Public buildings	8	8	3	33	40	3	33	17	4
	Percentage	42.1%	42.1%	15.8%	43.4%	52.6%	4.0%	61.1%	31.5%	7.4%
05	Land quality	3	12	4	5	28	43	1	18	35
	Percentage	15.8%	63.2%	21.0%	6.6%	36.8%	56.6%	1.9%	33.3%	64.8%
06	Water quality	3	5	11	22	11	43	14	4	36
	Percentage	15.8%	26.3%	57.9%	28.9%	14.5%	56.6%	25.9%	7.4%	66.7%
07	Air quality	4	5	10	13	7	56	6	9	39
	Percentage	21.0%	26.3%	52.7%	17.1%	9.2%	73.7%	11.1%	16.7%	72.2%
08	Inundation	10	6	3	32	6	38	34	4	16
	Percentage	52.7%	31.5%	15.8%	42.1%	7.9%	50.0%	44.7%	7.4%	47.9%
09	Education quality	15	3	1	52	23	1	43	10	1
	Percentage	79.0%	15.7%	5.3%	68.4%	30.3%	1.3%	79.6%	18.5%	1.9%
10	Health-care service quality	12	6	1	63	13	0	40	11	3
	Percentage	63.2%	31.5%	5.3%	82.9%	17.1%	0.0%	74.1%	20.4%	5.5%
11	Shopping and commerce	16	2	1	65	11	0	34	15	5
	Percentage	84.2%	10.5%	5.3%	85.5%	14.5%	0.0%	63.0%	27.8%	9.2%
12	Leisure and entertainment	15	2	2	54	13	9	32	19	3
	Percentage	79.0%	10.5%	10.5%	71.1%	17.1%	11.8%	59.3%	35.2%	5.5%
13	Urban - rural relation	15	2	2	21	12	43	9	5	40
	Percentage	79.0%	10.5%	10.5%	27.6%	15.8%	56.6%	16.7%	9.2%	74.0%
14	Income	13	6	0	52	23	1	40	13	1
	Percentage	68.5%	31.5%	0.0%	68.4%	30.3%	1.3%	74.0%	24.1%	1.9%
	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>84.3%</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>56.6%</b>	<b>7.9%</b>	<b>35.5%</b>	<b>40.7%</b>	<b>27.8%</b>	<b>31.5%</b>

Note: B (+) Better; S (o) Same; W (-) Worse

large-scale survey was conducted in September 2017 (Phase One) and the group received feedback from 149 people (19 in Van Quan new town, 76 in Yen Phuc village and 54 in Yen Xa village) [9].

Out of 149 interviewed residents, 111 (almost 75%) have been living there for more than 10 years, denoting that they understand their places well enough. Within the scope of a paper as a starter of a series of academic writings focusing on new town development in Hanoi, only the most topical issues that attract the attention or concerns of the local people have been chosen for analyses, such as traffic, daily life services, environment, social contact, culture, quality of living, etc. as presented in Table 1.



#### 4. Initial key findings and arguments

Table 1 shows many similarities between Yen Phuc village and Yen Xa village in 12 out of 14 categories, except in category no. 3 (religious buildings) and category no. 4 (public buildings). This may be explained that the religious and public buildings in Yen Xa village have been actually better conserved and probably more activities take place there than in Yen Phuc village, although the urbanisation rates in the two villages are almost the same. Both villages are affected by inundation in the rainy season, around 50% in both cases, perhaps due to the lack of a systematic drainage planning for these recently urbanised villages and the natural water network (ponds and canals) disappeared.

Some remarkable differences between these two villages and Van Quan new urban area can be highlighted: in category no. 5 (land quality), category no. 7 (air quality), category no. 8 (inundation) and especially noticeable in category no. 13 (rural-urban relation), when 79% of the urban residents have a positive view of the town-village relation whereas the villagers in Yen Phuc and Yen Xa find it rather negative, 56.6% and 74% respectively. The reason for a more positive rating of land quality in Van Quan new urban area is that the new-comers, unlike villagers, did not witness the entire transformation of farmland into urban residential land as well as the exhaustion of fertile paddy fields after a few years of being confiscated by the local authority for building purposes. When the two villages have been urbanised, the villagers can see a flux of new people arriving to live next to them or near them, in place of their good neighbours having moved out of the villages for some reasons. It often takes a long time for two strangers become close to each other. Thus, in the meantime, the villagers cannot help feeling nostalgic about the past and prudent in their daily contact with those strangers. This attitude is quite understandable.

The results also reveal that environmental pollution remains a serious problem, most notably in terms of air quality (73.7% in Yen Phuc and 72.2% in Yen Xa said worse) and then water quality (56.6% and 66.7% respectively). Over a half of the surveyed residents in Van Quan new urban area and almost three quarters of those interviewed in Yen Phuc and Yen Xa complain about the noise, exhaust gas and dust from vehicles and business activities in and/or around their settlements. Even those who thought that the living quality would be higher than 10 or 20 years ago, they had to admit that air and water pollution as an annoying problem should be solved, otherwise their option to live in Van Quan might be wrong.

The majority of people involved in the investigation found that their new lives have been better (54.4%) or remained unchanged and thus acceptable (35.3% of the remaining) since Van Quan new town was constructed and brought into use, despite all the inconvenience in terms of environmental impacts it has brought to them, because they appreciate so much the improvement of the social infrastructure with all the facilities and services which offer them many job opportunities and a higher level of income. The statistics in the following categories: no. 9 (education), no. 10 (health care), no. 11 (shopping/commerce), no. 12 (leisure/entertainment) and no. 14 (income) of Table 1 speak for themselves, with at least 59.3% and at most 85.5% considering the changes positive or feeling satisfied. As long as nothing serious happens, people still find it worth living in Van Quan and the adjacent neighbourhoods. In reality, environmental and economic factors are equally important. But so far they have not yet been matching with each other in Van Quan. Exchanging one good thing (clean environment) for another (higher income/better services) while it is not necessarily going that way, will people have to eat humble pie?

Another outstanding feature of the current development is that the impact from a new urban area on an adjacent village seems to be stronger than the reverse influence. In principle, when they co-exist, they need to make full use of each other, most clearly reflected in everyday services and activities. Villagers, if they belong to the middle class and when the town is not a gated and guarded compound like Ciputra, can enjoy much better facilities in the new urban area, for example a sports hall, a mini-mart, an English language centre, a children playground, a public park or flower garden, etc. which are not available in



the villages. Meanwhile, the new urban area has brought new services to villagers and offers them good job opportunities, such as baby-sitting or car-washing. Townspeople can gain certain benefits by buying good-but-reasonable home-made food and other rural specialities from the villagers. Hereby, a symbiosis may be formed. Furthermore, the development of the village may be either introvert or extrovert, largely depending on the interrelation(s) and/or interaction(s) with the town and in some circumstances, the type of boundary (open, semi-open or closed, single or multiple connection points)-between them can help establish such a close link and secure a win-win situation as one of the most fundamental conditions for a more socially sustainable urban development.



## 5. Conclusion

It is undeniable that new towns in Hanoi, despite some shortcomings in planning, construction, operation and management, have provided a large number of house-buying or apartment-purchasing people with a wider range of choices and proved to be a modelling living concept. This development has been and continues to be indispensable in the current urbanisation. However, in order to secure sustainability as the ultimate goal, social issues must be taken into account along with technical solutions in developing new urban housing projects, no matter how large they may be or no matter where they are located. Should a new town be in direct contact with traditional villages with a rich culture and a long-standing tradition, special attention is always required, because this is the most sensitive case and complicated situation, where socio-cultural problems arise all the time. Thus, the bilateral town - village relation can be a multi-episode story line and make a long-term research project to pursue. Similarly, a thorough sociological study is "a must". It helps city planners and project managers understand more about the general contexts, specific enquiries and the reasons behind every change (normally negative) as a consequence of an inappropriate policy or decision. It is vital to ensure that the benefits of the local community, both urban and rural inhabitants if they live next to each other, especially the marginalised and underprivileged groups, must be put forward and carefully analysed before a planning process begins, because the level of satisfaction of residents will always be the most important indicator to measure the success of every urban development project, and housing is not an exception.

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