

6.1 Evaluation

6.1.1 hypothesis evaluation

The thesis plan started off with the aim to design an alternative, more flexible planning and design framework for 'new urban areas' in Vietnam and more specifically at the urban fringe of Hanoi. The hypothesis, based on first observations, was that with the introduction of new typologies, the plan of Sudico could be made more flexible.

While this could have been true, early on in the research it became clear that a more fundamental solution for more flexible new town design, that could become a more widely applicable alternative model for other cities in Asia, would be more relevant. The analysis of the plan of the developer Sudico, of Nam An Khanh uncovered not only problems in the design of the plan related to typologies, but also issues related to the flexibility of the planning and design. To address these issues in the financial model, planning model, stakeholder model and in the urban architectural model, it was important to come up with a strategy that was fundamentally different from the current practice.

The research question - "In what way can flexibility, understood as the ability for modification and adaptation in plan and process, be incorporated in the contemporary urban planning model and the urban design of new urban areas in Hanoi?" - touches on the field of politics and economy of Vietnam, while it profoundly affects the daily life of people and the way they can be part of and influence this environment. It clearly transcends the discipline of urbanism.

6.1.2 competition evaluation

This graduation trajectory started with the Vertical Cities Asia studio research. The objective from the competition was to "research into urban density, domesticity, work, infrastructure, [...] nature, ecology, structure, and program, and a holistic integration and [a] quest for visionary paradigm will be the challenges of the urban and architectural invention" (Vertical Cities Asia, 2013)

While the competitions objective was originally research on urbanization in Asia in high density, in the end the competition entry took an alternative focus on centralities, connectivity and the real urgent problems of Hanoi in housing living and the process of urban development. But, it did not succeed to come up with a financial model that was not based on speculative presumptions. The question how to urbanize in a resilient and sustainable way remained unanswered. Therefore,

the competition gave important insights in the way, foreign consultant and foreign models dictate urban development in Hanoi, but it did not give the head start for this thesis. Paradoxically, this thesis could be seen as a critique on the blue-print approach of the competition entry.

The theoretical part gave the starting point with answers on the reason of the lack of flexibility. It showed that uncertainty is an important aspect. More uncertainty means that more flexibility becomes necessary. Further research into Vietnam and specifically Hanoi showed that the socio-economic and cultural context are very dynamic, and therefore reducing the effectiveness of blue-print plans.

6.1.3 critique

After the visit to Hanoi a feeling of concern started to grow: are these generic, commercially developed New Urban Areas really the cities of the future? The new Asian lifestyle, people crave for? Can 'good' cities arise from plans that are purely based on economical considerations; cities that incorporate few, if any, of the lessons learned in the last decades about new town design? Could the design of these cities make use of the insights and conceptual approaches used in urban design in Europe, to counteract these negative aspects?

The design of Nam An Khanh clearly showed it was falling back on the same principles that were used in Western new town planning in the second half of the 20th century. Keeton (2011) described them as "modernist master plans with large building plots separated by wide motorways, while a strict zoning scheme determines whether these plots are to be filled with residential tower blocks, villas, or offices. There is no combination of functions, there are no lively urban streetscapes, there is no small-scale building, there is no flexibility; there is a great uniformity of housing supply, except this time instead of subsidized rentals for workers we find commercially developed housing for the (upper) middle class." These developments can now be found all over Hanoi and all over Asia.

It is often argued that "the issue of sameness and difference in cities remains an ideological and cultural question for planners, architects, governments and citizens" (Den Hartog 2010). But urbanists should be the ones to step forward, to break the status quo between politicians and developers! In this thesis I have argued that some agreement should be made between municipalities and private developers to prevent speculation, to make plans more user oriented and to give these developers responsibilities over a longer period. Land and cities are a valuable resource. It is sad that towns are built purely as a financial product. But the





138. Secondary connections through the garden and orchard zones, bordering the core neighborhoods, are vital for the proposed community life; not urban it's not a village, nor the generic suburban life as we know it so well from many other plans.

question remain if we, as urbanists have enough power to influence and eventually change this, considering the corruption, nepotism and huge financial stakes involved.

new town debate

This thesis showed that purely profit driven development will eventually lead to cities that are not necessarily most pleasant for users, real people that have to use it, and often lack the resiliency and flexibility that is necessary to stay successful on the long term. This project is relevant for cities Asian context, since it proposes a alternative model for the purely profit driven developments that now dominate new town production.

New urban areas in their current form can become a future problem, a thread for the resiliency of the city. New towns age quickly according to Koolhaas (1995), but are not replaced gradually. Adaptations are difficult to make, the lack of function differentiation prevents local economies to take over. Are they therefore disposable products? That is not what cities are. The huge investments of financial means and effort in the production of cities, and the later division of ownership, makes it unlikely that they will be demolished. This is the dilemma that urbanism can address. Project developers need to make a profit. People need a place to live and benefit of a system that allows local economy and community to flourish. The balance between the two needs to be regulated, and since in many countries government is not able to do this, urbanists need to take responsibility in these situations. It is also uncertain what will happen with them in 50 years from now, when the buildings are at the end of their technical lifetime. It seems that there are little opportunities for adaptations or modifications. If whole cities are built with these kind of new towns, it could become a heavy burden for next generation, financially as well as socially. It can be argued that the importance of flexibility in urban planning and design is underestimated or ignored in many of these projects.

alternative

6.1.4 Design evaluation: What do we change?

In this thesis, an approach is proposed that is more user-oriented, more flexible and more resilient. But these are all notions have various interpretations, and are used by the stakeholders in different ways. To make it real, a pragmatic approach becomes necessary to deal with these notions. Urbanists have to deal with the current practice and context and have to realize to what extend they can change the system; Lindblom therefore argued that "In a rapidly changing environment [...] uncertainty is so great that the only sensible approach for an organization is

one of adjustment in incremental steps as the environment changes". A step by step development is proposed that makes use of strategies like urban catalysts, temporary uses, place making and long term visions. These are all concrete design tools that have been tested and proven to work in places like Amsterdam and London and Berlin. The design tactics and solution that were chosen are for a large part based on experience in the European context. Many of these solution have never been tried in the Asian context and therefore it is unclear if they are really applicable. Never the less they seem to have great potential even in this different context, because of their practical nature. Case studies of plans that dealt with change in a more flexible way showed that alternative strategies are available and could be tested in Hanoi.

The positive part of this solution is that it proposes a solution where not only the project developers and the financial sector benefit. A new balance is sought in the proposal for a between the stakeholders in order to foster local economy, community and spatial quality and resilience on the long term. But since there are no examples of these kind of cooperations between the stakeholders it remains uncertain if it will ever become reality. It depends in the end on the willingness of the government to regulate urban processes more tightly and on the project developers to accept that making profit is not their only task.

But, by analyzing the interests of each stakeholder it is possible to find common interests. It is important to realized that the project developer still needs to make a profit. The villager needs to find a job outside agricultural sector, while users need to find a home, a community and a urban environment that fits their needs. The government has an agenda in their 5 year plans that they want to realize. For instance a certain production of housing and a increased economic output. All these interests have to be respected. The task for the urbanist is to find the common interests and to show where possible cooperation could happen. The government has not taken up this task till now (what we as Europeans would expect), so other models that regulate the balance between the stakeholders become necessary.

Conclusion

This thesis started with the question; *“In what way can flexibility, understood as the ability for modification and adaptation in plan and process, be incorporated in the contemporary urban planning model and the urban design of new urban areas in Hanoi?”*

A new balance between the stakeholders can help to ensure more resiliency, in a step by step development that makes use of concrete tools. Nevertheless, a new model can only be successful when all involved stakeholders benefit. Some of the power of Sudico has to shift more towards users, neighboring villages and the city in order to bring back a balance between supply and demand and a balance between profitability and the resilience and sustainability of the city. This thesis proposed a pragmatic, step-by-step re-development, continuously evaluated upon its success. Intelligent regulations ensure a guaranteed minimum spatial quality while they foster sustainability and flexibility. Therefore, ensuring a balance between supply and demand and a balance between profitability of the developer and the spatial quality that users demand. The approach is highly contextual; it takes the existing situation as a starting point, and explores the flexibility that is already available.

Systems in Hanoi need to change. What is built now are ready made, generic products, what is needed is a process that guides urban development. There is no way to create the resilience and a diversity that is necessary to respond to the rapidly changing culture and lifestyle in Hanoi with the current planning a design mechanisms. The question if Hanoi wants to change, remains an open question and is also extremely political in nature. Project developers risk huge losses on investment, the government seems to have other priorities and is largely dependent on the income of development rights, local stakeholders have (too?) little power to influence the powerful top-down plans, nepotism and widespread corruption only add to the toxic cocktail. It forms a situation like a Gordian Knot - hard to untangle, almost impossible to solve without losses for one of the stakeholders.

This thesis shows that the current troubled housing market provides opportunities to experiment with new strategies for the development of new urban areas around Hanoi. A strategy that could accommodate architectural typological experiments, new lifestyles, and more sustainable financial incentives. The local, unique conditions that once formed the basis of communities in the city and in the peri-urban region, remain an important opportunity for future designers, policy and decision

makers to incorporate local identity, local knowledge and local initiative in a global, maybe even generic, planning approach. New plans can make use of this by integrating existing settlements in the new town design.

Hyper dense low-rise districts and new urban areas are built according to foreign models based on top-down implemented blue-print plans dominate Vietnamese cities. There is little in between. Therefore, the missing segment between urban and village lifestyles would add to the diversity of the city. The combination of models provides an alternative, more flexible, urban architectural model.

The addition of new user groups can create an impulse in the development of new urban areas. Middle class families - equipped with increased financial possibilities and a globalized mindset- might become the key to solving many of the problems in the current housing market. In fact, by only allowing them to become part of the space production system would create opportunities for developers to exploit this new market segment. The middle class starts to become a more powerful stakeholder in the civil society and can be organized, in collectives to start small scale developments.

New ways

In order to find new ways of doing urbanism we have to start thinking from the position of the city. One always has to keep in mind what could result in solutions that are feasible and sustainable in the long term, what the resilient ways or methods could be that serve Hanoi best. The current practice of urban development is, for a dominant part, based on purely profit based development. It has led to bubbles, a destabilized market where over-production of certain typologies has led to vacancy and ghost towns, while a pressing need for for instance affordable housing is still not solved. This thesis proposes to start developments in the first place from the interest of the city.

The main conclusions derived from this thesis would be that a new balance between the stakeholders and a step by step development that makes use of concrete tools can help to ensure more resiliency. The framework for development, with its step by step approach with concrete measures, would be most valuable for further research to test upon its feasibility. The new balance between the stakeholders can ensure that other values apart from making a profit, like flexibility and sense of community, can be fostered in the planning and design of new towns. In this way everyday life of the people, the users, can become central again in the way Vietnam thinks about the future of its cities.

Recommendations

This thesis proposes an alternative approach in urban planning and design that is new in the Asian context. Tools that foster flexibility are borrowed from the European context and proposed in a design culture and a socio-economical context that is completely different. Therefore it is recommended to use a diversity of these tools in new developments, to test them in the Asian context upon their effectiveness and to select the ones that work in practice.

Further research needs to be conducted on image control of the infill. Various experiments in the Netherlands pointed out that people's first and most important intentions are to build the largest possible house. The quality of materials and the detailing of facades remains an issue in for instance the 'new Leyden' project by MVRDV (2014).

The method - a framework, a zoning plan with functional and spatial flexibility and a variety of tools for a flexible infill and regulation that rewards sustainable and resilient design - is also applicable in other locations. Therefore it is recommended to also transform other new towns in a similar way in order to create more diversity in suburban living environments that appeal to various socio-economical and cultural groups of people. At the same time it would reduce the spatial fragmentation in the urban fringe and improve the local economy.

Use a diversity of tools that can foster flexibility in planning and design, since the tools need to be tested in the Asian context.

To conclude, a last word about the implementation and further development of the posed ideas. An expert group that consists of professionals from the Netherlands guided by the Dutch embassy, developers and government officials from Vietnam and researchers from local universities, could form a think tank on the further implementation of the ideas proposed in this thesis. The connection with practice is essential; major cities in Vietnam and in many other Asian countries are built or planned in this decade. Any change in the mindset on resilient planning and design has happened as soon as possible. Hanoi has no time for a lengthy academic discussion. Even though the crisis slowed urban development down, the speed of urbanization will most likely not decrease. People need homes, a living environment. Therefore, immediate action in Hanoi is necessary in order to improve its urbanism and the futures of its people.



Flexibility

*An alternative development strategy
in new urban areas in Hanoi.*

*Once again, as described by Labbe (2010);
“a break with previous space production mechanisms”.*