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## **THE LOGIC OF PLACE-MAKING TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE NEW URBAN AREAS IN HANOI: FROM ZERO TO HERO?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In recent decades, hundreds of master-planned KDTMs (new urban areas) have developed on the urban fringes of expanding cities in Vietnam. They are promoted as a new urban planning concept in the post-reform policies. The governments are very proud of this model as it has solved the problems of housing production and housing supply simultaneously, and at the same time, improving the quality of life, well-managing urban space development, changing the face of the city, attracting investment capital. As a key tool in the housing and urban space development of Hanoi - “from zero to hero” - these projects show the ambition to transform the greenfields to animated KDTMs. Based on the results of the survey on KDTMs in Hanoi, this article discusses the KDTMs’ planning concepts, developing the methods to transform KDTMs into attractive and livable residential neighborhoods, moving toward the sustainable operation of the KDTM model.

Key Words: Place-making, Attractive and livable place, Sustainable neighborhood, KDTM (new urban area)

## 1. INTRODUCTION: SITUATION AND BACKGROUND OF KDTMS

Since 1986, after Doi moi (renovation), by entering a new phase of economic reform, globalization, metropolization, etc., Vietnam has introduced a new housing development strategy. After starting off the first 7 experiments in 1997-1998, the model of KDTMs (Khu Do Thi Moi - new urban area) has been implemented massively in sub-urban areas of Hanoi: green areas of agricultural production were filled quickly by buildings and became newly living areas of the city (Tran 2014, Tran 2016, Tran 2018). In recent decades, hundreds of master-planned KDTMs have developed on the urban fringes of expanding cities in Vietnam. They are promoted as a new urban planning concept (Tran 2015), a great deal of attention for the urbanization process in the post-Doi moi era (Labbé & Boudreau 2011).






According to Vietnamese housing policies, the model of KDTM creating a modern residential environment under the form of investment package which covers three important factors (National Assembly 2012): “KDTM = Technical infrastructure + Social infrastructure/facilities + Housing,” as a most important shift in the ideology of place-making, with the ambitious strategy to promote the growth of urban space in both quality and quantity, through the synchronized investment method. The governments are very proud of this model as it has solved the problems of housing production and housing supply simultaneously, and at the same time, improving the quality of life, well-managing urban space development, changing the face of the city, attracting investment capital. However, people are quick to respond to this housing model, and the real estate market of KDTM is formed, but are residents really satisfied with the quality of the living environment in KDTM?

It has been argued that the urbanization of Southeast Asian countries can be explained by industrialization and globalization of economic activities (McGee 1998). All activity sectors, population groups and newly developed areas of Hanoi have been vastly reshaped by trends of globalization and competition between world cities, and by planning processes, funding and management decisions (Leducq & Scarwell 2018). However, much of the master planning process in Vietnam is increasingly based more on ideas rooted in physical design (not socio-economic realities): spatial plans for Vietnamese cities remain heavily prescriptive with an emphasis on physical planning (i.e., creating cities “by design”) and on permitted land uses without necessarily taking account of the underlying socio-economic needs or market realities for that same city or area, which may be considerably more complex (World Bank 2011).

KDTMs, like new towns of China, thanks to a strong top-down, state-driven planning, and no organized resistance could be planned and built at a breakneck speed (Tomba 2014). KDTMs, which promote spatial, functional and social segregation within Vietnamese metropolises (Labbé & Boudreau 2011) are disconnected from an existing urban fabric, and developed within a short time-span, provide little authentic cultural and social context for inhabitants. Often a critical mass of an existing social core is required to provide a sense of place, history, context, and belonging - all of which help cities grow and remain resilient in hard times (World Bank 2011). Chang & Huang (2008) offer a cautionary tale of how a “geography of everywhere/nowhere”: an urban environment that looks like anywhere else participates in a fourfold process of “transworldment”, “enworldment”, “unworldment”, and “deworldment”.

KDTMs are hybrid products of government-led, entrepreneur-driven planning and self-organizing space production by the residents (Tran 2015). For market imperfections and shortcomings or manipulation in management, investors only focus on building houses for sale, while public service facilities are often ignored with uncertain promises to “do it later” regardless of planning approved (Trinh 2014). Achieving the vision of lively-safe-sustainable-healthy cities has become a general and urgent desire. Thus the importance of life in public space, particularly the social and cultural opportunities as well as the attractions associated with a lively city will be received attention (Gehl 2010).

[Table 1] Brief information on the surveyed KDTMs

KDTM	Linh Dam	Viet Hung	Van Quan	Ecopark	Times City
Project perspective					
Year of commencement	1997	2005	2004	2007	2011
Distance to the city center (km)	10	10	11	17	6
Area size (ha)	200	210	61	500	36
Population scale (people)	25.000	26.000	14.000	40.000	12.000
Number of surveyors	47	46	56	64	10

This article discusses the KDTMs’ planning concepts: (1) Differences between evaluations and practices - are KDTMs really “attractive and livable”? (2) The current KDTM-making - “from zero to hero”, is that a path to sustainability? (3) Towards a sustainable KDTM model - what makes KDTMs (more) attractive and livable? The foundation of this paper based on desk study for the research questions. We define and form hypothesize the ways of creating an attractive and livable place for KDTMs. We conducted attractiveness and livability of the KDTMs in Hanoi (Table 1) with a survey according to 2 groups and with the same content of the questionnaire: 223 residents of KDTMs (selected randomly) and 50 experts (including 29 residents and 21 non-residents of a KDTM) who are working in the areas of expertise in urban planning and architecture of training institutions, research institutes, and

design offices.

## 2. PLACE-MAKING IN THE FORM OF NEW CITIES ON GREENFIELD LANDS: FROM STARTING POINT OF ZERO

In 2008, Hanoi's boundary had extended to the west to ensure the resource of land for the development of new towns; this has been seen as the "modernization" of the peri-urban area, with a large amount of greenfield and scattered villages, has become "a place full of hope, full of surprises, but also full of anxiety and uncertainty - a rich metaphor for development" (Leaf 2008), and the suburbanization are "interesting" stories in both positive and negative terms in the Vietnamese cities in transition (Gubry et al. 2010). The traditional cities-making in Vietnam based on the spontaneous demand of people without planning; this leads to rampant constructions and disorder in the spatial organization in neighborhood units. The globalization provides the opportunities for the penetration of Western culture and the adaptation of local people. "The cityscape has changed dramatically, with the construction of skyscrapers in new urban areas outside the old city" (Leducq & Scarwell 2018). These investment projects produce a new urban pattern, mainly adopt Western theories and concepts (Labbé & Boudreau 2015), which presents "modernization" to Vietnamese, and many of them have been designed by the foreign planner. Meanwhile, these projects show the ambition to transform the greenfields, "from zero to hero", to residential areas with full facilities, with modern architecture style which are transplanted without thorough considerations of the local context. This development trend leads to a similar image of these projects, in which the modern style of architecture has been widely applied to make a difference with the existing environment and to create communities with a new lifestyle. Like comment of Gehl (2010), modernists rejected the city and city space, shifting their focus to individual buildings and this ideology continue to affect the planning of many new urban areas. If a team of planners was asked to reduce life between buildings radically, they could not find a more effective method than using modernistic planning principles.

The World Bank has warned that rapid development of KDTMs in Vietnam causing an unsustainable environment for investment because of "building too much and too fast" (World Bank 2011).

"Building too much" - a series of KDTM projects are continuously constructed on the Hanoi's peri-urban. Through the advertisement and luxurious perspective of these projects with high-rise building, the developers show their ambition to transform the greenfield into modern, attractive and livable cities, and provide "standardized" living environment. In fact, the over-supply of the housing market has led to the emergence of ghost-KDTM in Hanoi (Tran 2018). Although many citizens could not access to housing, a large amount of vacant housing still exists in KDTM. One interesting fact in the comparison between ghost town in other countries and ghost-KDTM in Vietnam is that: while housing in ghost town could not sell out, housing units in ghost-KDTM transacted multiple times among speculators but have remained largely uninhabited (Jacques, Labbé & Musil 2017).

"Building too fast" - KDTMs gather a large number of residents and creating communities - the "small-societies" inside the "general-society" of the whole city. Instead of gradually generating new social relations such as the relations in the traditional community which based on the relationship of "countrymen fellowship," "kinship," "school fellowship," "colleagues", and "assembly fellowship" (Tran 2018). The developers immediately shape new social relations by organizing residents to live as neighbors in a new community which easily caused conflicts. They want quickly circulate the capital and generate profits through constructing and selling houses as soon as possible.

From these assessments (are also our hypothesis), we have reason to question the sustainability in the development of KDTM. Can these KDTMs, which were industrialized produced, create a livable and attractive living environment?

## 3. TOWARD SUSTAINABLE KDTMS FROM THE SITUATIONAL KDTMS: DO THEY REALLY BECOME THE HEROS?

- 1). Linh Dam - "awakened the whole South gateway area of Hanoi Capital, which used to be a pond, lake and low - lying field, and this is a potential model for replication in cities across the country."<sup>1</sup> Under another point of view, "this KDTM will no longer have the opportunity to have an integrated service center as the initial expected and therefore it has been transformed into a typical bedroom-town with a population size equivalent to that of a small city, becoming a model of dependent residence, due to its increasing dependence on the outside, a lack of internal resources due to the loss of opportunities to create common space, service activities and in place jobs," Khuat (2016) doubts about the "paradigm," attractiveness and livability of this KDTM.
- 2). Ecopark - "has become a green urban area model of Vietnam and regional countries, is also the beginning of a great journey that the residents can experience the values of community-culture-people."<sup>2</sup> Ecopark aims to become a symbol city of 5E: (E1) Eco, (E2) Emotion, (E3) Edu-entertainment, (E4) Economic, (E5) Elite, also considered as one of the representative for KDTM mainly aimed at the wealth of segments of urban population (Labbé & Boudreau 2015), creating a trend of "upper strata living", "high-class living," enjoying

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<sup>1</sup> <http://hud.com.vn/content/khu-do-thi-kieu-mau-linh-dam-hoang-mai-ha-noi>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ecopark.com.vn/gioi-thieu/tong-quan-du-an>

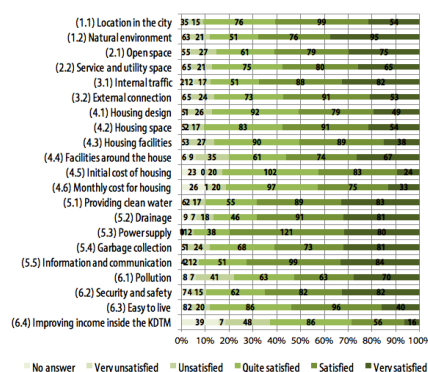
new life. However, behind the luxurious Ecopark are the plights, the difficulties of next-door farmers who are “struggling” when losing cultivated land.<sup>3</sup>

- 3). Viet Hung - “built project according to the criteria of KDTM model and many social infrastructure works and urban infrastructure works of Viet Hung are completed with high quality and synchronization to serve the needs of people in urban areas.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, Viet Hung is quite struggling to attract people due to the separation from the city by the Red River. So, this KDTM is broken down to transfer to secondary project owners for deployment and exploitation. In the survey in 2012, this KDTM is highly appreciated and satisfied from the people (Trinh 2014).
- 4). Van Quan - located on the adjacent field of Ha Tay<sup>5</sup>, “completed in just over three years of construction, has quickly attracted people and formed a residential area with high living conditions.” However, this KDTM also received the evaluation of “ messy and sleazy surrounding KDTM,” with complaints of its residents.<sup>6</sup>
- 5). Times City - has been built with “the idea of a modern eco-friendly of Singapore,” “becoming an important factor, awakening the potential, contributing to changing the face of the southern area of the Capital and bringing residents a youthful living space, modern and comfortable.”<sup>7</sup> This special KDTM<sup>8</sup> “for the rich” was rebuilt from the land of an old industrial park and caused many controversies, contradictions by the different ways of viewing.

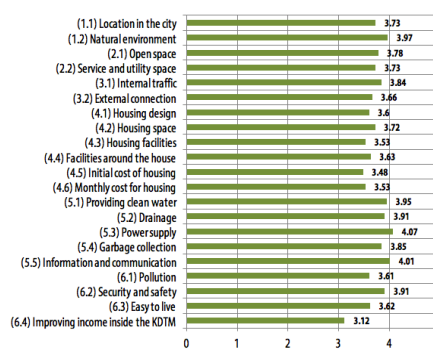
Based on fieldwork and references on ways to create a place for residents, we have established 6 significant factors along with the component indices to evaluate over 5 incremental levels by the residents of KDTM:

- Location and natural conditions: (1.1) Location in the city, (1.2) Natural environment;
- Public spaces: (2.1) Open space, (2.2) Service and utility space;
- Transportation: (3.1) Internal traffic, (3.2) External connection;
- Dwelling: (4.1) Housing design, (4.2) Housing space, (4.3) Housing facilities, (4.4) Facilities around the house, (4.5) Initial cost of housing, (4.6) Monthly cost for housing;
- Technical infrastructures: (5.1) Providing clean water, (5.2) Drainage, (5.3) Power supply, (5.4) Garbage collection, (5.5) Information and communication;
- Living environment: (6.1) Pollution, (6.2) Security and safety, (6.3) Easy to live, (6.4) Improving income inside the KDTM.

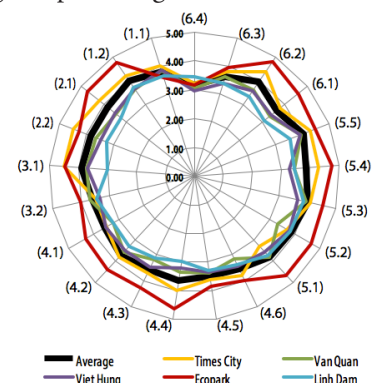
The survey results show that people expressed “very satisfied” the most in 3 factors (i) Natural environment, (ii) Information and communication, (iii) Providing clean water. Meanwhile, the evaluation of the “very satisfied” is lowest in 3 factors that relates to the economic problem which are (i) Improving income inside the KDTM, (ii) Initial cost of housing, (iii) Monthly cost for housing. If grossing-up two positive levels “very satisfied” and “satisfied” then the order will be (i) Power supply, (ii) Information and communication, and (iii) Providing clean water. It is worth noting that 3 factors are rated “very satisfied” and “satisfied” below 50% which are (i) Improving income inside the KDTM, (ii) Initial cost of housing, (iii) Monthly cost for housing. People expressed their attitude “very unhappy” at the factors of (i) Internal traffic, (ii) Facilities around the house, (iii) Drainage, Pollution, Improving income inside the KDTM. If counting on both levels of “very unsatisfied” and “unsatisfied,” the factors: (i) Improving income inside the KDTM, (ii) Pollution, (iii) Facilities around the house have highest percentage.



[Figure 1] The level of satisfaction of the residents about the KDTM they are living



[Figure 2] The average assessment score of the residents on the KDTM they are living



[Figure 3] Comparison of evaluation scores of 5 KDTMs

If converted to calculate the score on a scale of 5, most the factors gain score between 3 and 4, in which, 2 fac-

<sup>3</sup> <https://vov.vn/kinh-te/dia-oc/bat-cap-thu-hoi-dat-nong-dan-thanh-thay-kien-804898.vov>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hud.com.vn/content/du-khu-do-thi-moi-viet-hung-long-bien-ha-noi>

<sup>5</sup> In 2008, Ha Tay province is merged to Hanoi.

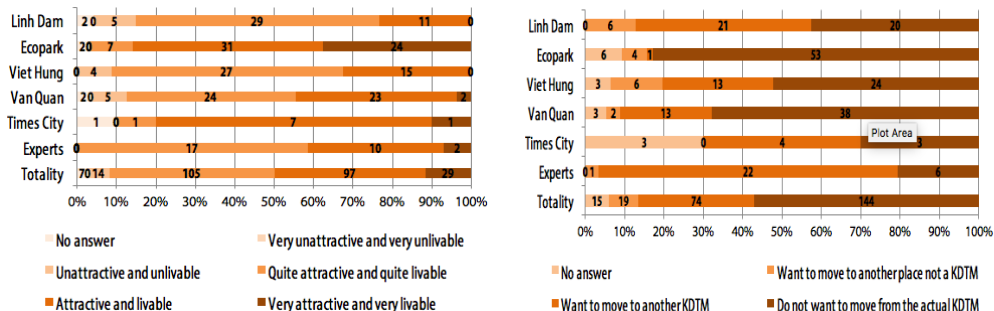
<sup>6</sup> <http://hanoimoi.com.vn/Tin-tuc/Xa-hoi/856943/lon-xon-va-nhech-nhac-bua-vay-khu-do-thi-van-quan---yen-phuc>

<sup>7</sup> <http://timescityminhkhai.com>

<sup>8</sup> Time City is a “pseudo-KDTM” case: this area is not a real KDTM but has similar area scale and population with a KDTM.

tors gain scores approximately 4 (Natural environment, Providing clean water), 2 factors gain higher scores than 4 (Power supply, Information and communication). Three lowest scores belong to the factors: (i) Improving income inside the KDTM, (ii) Initial cost of housing, (iii) Monthly cost for housing, Facilities around the house. The detailed data analysis shows that Ecopark is rated more positively than other three KDTMs. Only the index of the position is rated lower (due to being farthest from the center), the remaining indicators of this KDTM are higher than the average value, between points 4 and 5, i.e., from “satisfied” to “very satisfied.” The assessments of (pseudo) KDTM Times City are only for reference, but also shows that some factors of this KDTM are higher than the average value. Interestingly, both Ecopark and Times City are considered “cities for the rich” because of the housing prices, housing amenities and service utilities are much higher than the rest of the KDTM, which are considered as “cities for all.”

About 10% of people rated KDTMs at the level of “very attractive and very livable.” It is noteworthy that the



majority of those assessments belongs to the people at Ecopark (24/29 reviews). Most people rated KDTMs from the level of “quite attractive and quite livable” (42.9%) to the level of “attractive and livable” (39.6%).

[Figure 4] Evaluation of 5 KDTMs in terms of attractiveness and livable [Figure 5] Residents' desire for future KDTMs environment

Only 5.7% of respondents said “unattractive and unlivable,” and none of the cases rated “very unattractive and very unlivable.” 60.1% of those with answers accepted to stick with the KDTM they are living, 31.2% want to transfer to another KDTM. The interesting point is up to three-quarters of experts (also residents of KDTMs) were asked to transfer to another KDTM compared to more than one-fifth of the respondents who wanted to transfer to a KDTM. Thus, experts may have higher requirements and visualizations of new urban quality because nearly two-thirds of experts assessing KDTMs they are living are “quite attractive and quite livable.”

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS ON THE SURVEY RESULTS AND NEW RESEARCH QUESTIONS GENERATED

Thus, it seems that the natural environment in KDTMs is different from the existing residential areas because of the relatively large ratio of unconstructed areas and integrated natural elements, that become central spaces, controlling construction spaces that people highly appreciate. The most appreciated factors mainly belong to urban technical infrastructures, while the quality of the KDTMs internal spaces has not yet met the expectations of the people, especially the transportation and utility spaces around the building. The KDTMs are designed “for the future,” therefore using cars is becoming more and more popular. Thus, the streets inside the KDTMs always overloaded by the circulation of private vehicles and parking. Linh Dam is a typical example, where the parking lots are not integrated into the buildings leading to the open spaces of KDTMs be used for this function that makes people feel impact of the traffic. The residents of KDTMs must spend a significant amount of money to buy houses and pay monthly service expenses to maintain their lives in KDTMs. These service expenses which are compulsory, and there are no other options, so conflicts often occur between the KDTM owner and the residents. Unlike traditional residential areas with “lucrative housing,” housing in KDTMs is only used for residential purposes. Many people do not have the concept of improving income right in their housing. Finally, if the house price more reasonable, the amenities around the house more diversified, KDTMs will be more attractive.

- We also question the solutions that people think it is necessary for their KDTMs to become more attractive and livable, we have discovered some contradiction points of KDTMs and formulate new research questions as follows:
- Increasing vs. decreasing population density and construction density: this question is noted in Linh Dam.
- KDTM of the first generation built more than 20 years ago: the more attractive and livable KDTMs will attract more people to move in, gradually increasing the density, however, if exceeding a “threshold” of density at some points, the attractiveness and livableness will decrease. So how to determine this “threshold”?
- “Popularization” vs. “high-end”: a “high-quality” KDTM (Ecopark) relatively different from the popular life in the city, meanwhile, a “popular” KDTM (Van Quan) crowded with many street trade activities, is judged to be “without controlling”. “Popularization” to create life activities and vibrant and bustling street activities, while “high-end” to control the natural and social environment and avoid bullying. So how to reconcile these two opposite processes?
- Speeding up vs. slowing down the process of making KDTM: “speeding up” to complete the construction

of KDTMs, without causing adverse effects and ensuring adequate services and life benefits for people. But it is necessary to “slow down” to avoid investment risks for KDTMs owners. So how to control the pace of KDTMs construction?

## 5. CONCLUSION: CITY OF PROJECTS OR/AND CITY OF PLACES?

Is that creating a place through KDTMs projects that are being equated with substance construction, which means the project owners try to create the spirit of the place through the infrastructure that hits the psychology of the Vietnamese, after the substance difficulties of the war period and subsidized economy, that expect the improvements in the residence environment? It seems that the philosophy of developing KDTMs is still more inclined to “the place of new technical infrastructure” than the “place of new social communities.” However, Vietnamese people like to buy houses not only to stay as usual but also as a way to keep assets and benefits for the future. Therefore, are KDTMs mostly satisfying the number of houses for the future? The synchronization between 3 factors - technical infrastructure, social infrastructure, and housing - is overlooked in reality: the number of houses is maximized, not adequate with the other two factors. The city is “residentialized” and KDTMs become “sleeping towns” (Trinh 2014) - a way of developing spaces more and more popular in Vietnam. KDTMs projects today are neighborhoods, places of tomorrow. Sustainability in the current Hanoi-(re)making and imaginations of the change of views on KDTMs towards sustainability through their attractivity and livability for improving the sustainable KDTMs.

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