



The misuse of urban planning in Ho Chi Minh City



Du Huynh

Fulbright Economics Teaching Program, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 September 2014

Received in revised form

6 February 2015

Accepted 14 March 2015

Available online 23 March 2015

Keywords:

Urban planning

Urban development

Ho Chi Minh City

ABSTRACT

There are two main findings in this research. First, urban planning has failed to shape urban development in Ho Chi Minh City. As in many cities in the region in their early development stages, planning has had less influence in shaping urban development than market forces. Second, while urban planning has not been successful in fulfilling its conventional role, it has been successful in serving as a “facilitation device” for the city’s government to: 1) negotiate with the central government to achieve greater fiscal and policy autonomy; 2) seek international donors’ financial and technical assistance; and 3) encourage private businesses to participate in building the city. In the circumstances of Vietnam – a country in the process of decentralization—the facilitation role of urban planning has no doubt been helpful to the municipal government in its efforts to mobilize resources for its a few megaprojects and programs. Since some megaprojects and programs have been wasteful, the facilitation role constitutes a misuse of urban planning and should be abandoned. Instead the municipal government should confine its use of urban planning to that for which it is intended—namely shaping urban development in ways that serve social (as well as market determined) purposes. This is what has been absent in Ho Chi Minh City and what needs to be restored to put urban development on a better footing.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Urban planning, as defined by Taylor (1998) and widely cited, is a technical and political process dealing with the control of the use of land and the design of the urban environment, including transportation networks, to guide and ensure the orderly development of settlements and communities. It has occurred since the dawn of civilization, but actual modern planning (modernist planning) began post 1850 (Benevolo, 1967; UN-Habitat, 2009). The importance of urban planning has been recognized in both academia such as in Hall (2000, 2002) and Taylor (1998) and in reality that all developed and well-organized cities have experienced through development stages based on good plans. However, the problem is that urban planning is viewed as weak and ineffective in many places (Belsky et al., 2013; Bertaud, 2004; UN-Habitat, 2009; World Bank, 2009). This makes underdeveloped cities unable to deal with negative externalities of rapid urbanization and industrialization.

All cities in East and Southeast Asia have, more or less, faced difficulties and problems with urban planning, especially in their early development stages. As most countries were once colonies, the planning process had been in charge by colonial planners and

most diffusion of Western urban planning models to the region occurred before the World War II (UN-Habitat, 2009). Ironically, master plans in this period had initially been considered too ambitious and impractical, but they became outdated shortly after their introduction due to rapid urbanization (Kim & Choe, 1997; Nguyen, 2008; Silver, 2008). For example, the projected population of HCMC by 2000 was only one million in its original 1943 plan, but the actual population surpassed five million in 2000 (HIDS, 1997; Nguyen, 2008). The projected population of Seoul by 1959 was 700,000 in its 1934 plan, but the actual number surpassed three million in 1963 (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2010). Similar situations also happened in other cities (see Atkinson, 2006; Silver, 2008; Yuen, 2009; Yusuf & Saich, 2008).

Since domestic planners were in charge after the colonial liberation following the end of World War II, the state of urban planning in East and Southeast Asia has evolved and separated into two opposite directions – successful and problematic. Municipal governments have tried to build their planning capacity and to design plans for their own cities based on Western planning theories (Kim & Choe, 1997; Silver, 2008; UN-Habitat, 2009; USAID, 1972). For example, the 1966 master plan of Seoul, the first plan made by the Koreans, was heavily borrowed from London’s master plan (Kim & Choe, 1997). However, none of these cities has immediately achieved their practical master plans. It has taken

E-mail address: duht@fetc.edu.vn.

decades for certain cities to produce partially practical plans in which they play a conventional role in shaping the city's development, whereas others have still been struggling in designing workable plans. For example, it took over two decades (1966–1988) for Seoul to achieve an acceptable master plan (Kim & Choe, 1997), while others such as Jakarta and HCMC have still been struggling to find appropriate approaches (Huynh, 2012; Silver, 2008). Nowadays, cities in the region can be arranged in a wide spectrum from highly successful, competitive and livable cities such as Hong Kong, Singapore, and Tokyo to problematic ones such as HCMC, Jakarta and Manila (AT Kearney, 2014; EIU, 2014; Site Selection & IBM, 2013).

A major problem of troubled Asian cities is that urban planning has focused too much on currently emerging issues. Traditional approaches to planning in the region, as UN-Habitat (2011) points out, have focused on the physical dimension, i.e., building and maintaining infrastructure and services, but this focus on 'hardware' is sorely inadequate when it comes to managing the growth of mega urban faced by many big cities. Thus, urban planning in these cities has tended to constrain the development of cities instead of facilitating their growth.

Urban planning in Vietnam is also not effective (Coulthart, Nguyen, & Sharpe, 2007) and HCMC is a typical case. Consistently, urban planning in HCMC has never been an effective tool for the process of creating a built environment since the introduction of the first master plan in 1862. After being ignored during the central planning period (1975–1985), HCMC's urban planning under the unified Vietnam only began in the early 1990s, and it has since been confronted with many issues. Indicators and goals set within plans have usually not been achieved so that these plans are essentially just the government's wish lists (Kim, 2008). Weaknesses in urban planning have been repeatedly acknowledged by both the municipal and central governments (CPV, 2002, 2012; HCMC-CPV, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2012).

However, it is surprising that HCMC has achieved high economic growth and created a fairly harmonious society despite repeatedly failed planning. A number of megaprojects shaping the city such as Saigon South Development Project, East-West Highway, and the upgrading of highly polluted canal system have been completed. Spontaneous housing development is rampant, but the status of slums is moderate (World Bank, 2011). A majority of the city's households owns their houses in urban areas in which the rich and the poor live together and traffic congestion is not serious as observed in Bangkok in the late 1990s and Jakarta nowadays (Huynh, 2012). These outcomes might be acceptable for a while, but a failure of utilizing the conventional roles of urban planning is likely to cause serious problems for the city in the near future.

This study seeks to answer two questions: *what has been the role of urban planning in forming and governing HCMC over the last two decades, and what are the implications for its future planning and development?* Answering to these questions, I suggested that urban planning with its conventional role has failed, but it has acted as a negotiation tool to help govern the city. This role might be "innovative" in the case of Vietnam, but it is redundant and wasteful.

Utilizing a normative approach, I documented related information and data from the city's statistics, plans and governmental documents, and other sources. GIS maps were generated to examine the city's spatial and demographic changes. I also interviewed those who knew the issues well to sharpen critical points. Then I applied a narrative methodology to show rationales and support main findings. The rest of the article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a brief history of urban planning in HCMC; Section 3 analyzes the role of urban planning in contemporary HCMC; and Section 4 presents the conclusions and policy recommendations.

2. A brief history of urban planning in Ho Chi Minh City

HCMC, formerly Saigon, was established in the late 17th century by the Nguyen Dynasty. However, modern urban planning was only introduced from the mid-19th century when Vietnam became a French colony. The city's first master plan was designed by French infantry colonel Coffyn in 1862 (Le & Dovert, 2003; Nguyen, 2008). This plan was intended for an area of 25 km² accommodating a population of 500,000. Initially, it had been considered over-ambitious and infeasible, and just a few elements of the plan such as housing typologies and sizes for different groups were implemented. However, the plan already became outdated in the early 1900s. The city's size in 1931 was 51 km², twice as large as in that of Coffyn's plan (Nguyen, 2008: 182).

The second plan was designed by the French military official Betruax and considered a good plan. Many ideas in this plan were applied between 1890 and 1945 (Nguyen, 2008). The third plan ("the 1943 spatial plan") was design by Pugnaire, another Frenchman in 1943 when the city's population was approaching 500,000 (USAID, 1972). This plan was for a population of one million by 2000 (Nguyen, 2008), however, the actual population was around one million in 1945 (Thrift & Forbes, 1986: 154) and 5.2 million in 2000 (DOS-HCMC, 2011: 20). After nine years of the first Indochina War (1945–1954), the city's population reached 1.7 million in 1954 (Thrift & Forbes, 1986: 154). Since then, many plans have been introduced, but none realistic.

The first attempt at urban planning made by the Vietnamese was under Bao Dai's government in 1951. Unfortunately, no practical policies had been implemented in this period (USAID, 1972). Urban planning was approached more seriously under Ngo Dinh Diem's regime (1953–1963). In 1958, the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Planning undertook the development of a new land use plan which appeared primarily to be a revision and extension of the 1943 spatial plan. The plan was created for a design population of 3 million in an area of 675 km². In 1959, Ngo Viet Thu, a well-known Vietnamese architect developed a scheme entitled, "*La Conurbation De Saigon Cholon*", which was exhibited in Paris and Rome in 1959. The main concept of these plans was the development of an administration center between the agglomerations of Saigon and Cholon. There were also two more plans, one in 1965 and the second in 1968. The former was designed for the 2.5 million population of Saigon Metropolitan Area and 1.7 million population of Saigon – the Vietnam South's capital; the latter was only designed for the 1.7 million population of Saigon (USAID, 1972). The final work completed before 1975 considered as a master plan was "*Dialectics of Urban Proposal for the Saigon Metropolitan Area*" by USAID (1972). This report proposed the city's 30-year plan.

Even though some plans had been drawn, urban planning in Saigon during the Vietnam War barely succeeded (Le & Dovert, 2003) as the city became more crowded and disorganized. Its population at its peak in April 1975 was about 4.5 million (Thrift & Forbes, 1986: 154), nearly triple the projected population in the 1968 plan. This was a big burden and the new government had made the situation even more complicated due to its failed central planning for over a decade.

In the de-urbanization period after 1975 when a national policy forced urban residents to move to rural areas to establish new agriculture-based economic zones (Thrift & Forbes, 1986), there was essentially no urban planning transpiring in HCMC. The five-year plan style – a major planning method of the socialist world (Kornai, 1992) – was applied and the party resolutions were the main documents guiding the city's governance. Thoughts of the communist world were applied during this period (Dang, 2008). The city's population fell to a low of 3.2 million in 1984 (Gainsborough, 2003: 112). Urban service provisions were severely

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1047809>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1047809>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)