

Proposal for panel (single session, 90 minutes, 4 presenters)

EuroSEAS conference 2022

28 June-1<sup>st</sup> July 2022

Paris

Convenor: TRAN Khac Minh

[tran.khac\\_minh@courrier.uqam.ca](mailto:tran.khac_minh@courrier.uqam.ca)

Postdoctoral fellow, Canada Research Chair in Small- and Medium-Sized Cities in Transformation

Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

Title: Transnational urban modelling in the city making in Southeast Asia

Description: This panel aims to shed light onto how new urban models and policies have driven urbanization in Southeast Asia. We organise a single panel composed of four papers in which our panelists will present a range of case studies focusing on different city making trajectories. This format allows us to create an in-depth discussion on the diversity and the complexity of the transnational urban policy in this region.

Abstract: Globalization since the last decades of the 20th century have yielded major changes in the urban production across Southeast Asian countries, more specifically through the circulation of urban policies and models. This panel underlines the need to decipher the role of the transnational urban modelling, either by overseas investment, consultation or design in the production of cities. It is also to mention the predominant role of discourses and ‘innovative’ models such as smart, green and sustainable city, as one of ways to attract private investment. These shifts in Southeast Asian city making paradigm also rely on initiatives, promoted by real estate developers and international urban planning professionals, which have been becoming nowadays determinant actors of the urban growth machine. Furthermore, this panel seeks to analyse the evolution of the practices of local actors (public authorities, urban planners, entrepreneurs) that are influenced by foreign planning approaches, and residents’ reflections of these. Through knowledge exchange and collaborations, these actors have been appropriating and reformulating transnational urban policies and models to create their own development models adapted to local specificities and objectives. Our case studies comprise a range of urban production dynamics in Southeast Asia: (1) urban planners’ perception of foreign influences in urban planning of Hanoi, capital of Vietnam; (2) the transformation of Sihanoukville, a coastal mid-sized city of Cambodia, following the massive arrival of Chinese investments; (3) the perceptions of Hanoi’s urban residents who flocked to purchase apartments in foreign-inspired

condo developments; (4) international urban policies and models in the making of metropolises in Ho Chi Minh City Metropolitan Area (southern Vietnam) through the introduction of new urban-industrial forms and new town concepts, highlighting the degree to which the discourses of urban real estate developers and the municipal government regarding the benefits of transnational urban modelling have been accepted or not. Together these empirical cases will provide a complex portrait of urban modelling as well as discourses and practices of urban modelling in Southeast Asia.

Presentations:

1. “Planning the next Singapore model: Perception of urban planning processes and foreign influences on urban planning of Hanoi (Vietnam)” by PHAM Thi Thanh Hien (associate professor, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada), Sarah TURNER (full professor, McGill, Canada) and Natalie OSWIN (associate professor, University of Toronto)
2. “Urban contemporary transformation of Sihanoukville (Cambodia) under Chinese influence” by Robin LAILLE (Ph.D. candidate, Université de Montréal, Canada)
3. “‘Hanoi’s now like any city in the world because the planning is patched together’ – residents’ reflections on Hanoi’s current development trajectory” by Sarah TURNER (full professor, McGill, Canada)
4. “International urban policies and models in the making of metropolises in Southern Vietnam: the case of the state-led new town development in the Hô Chi Minh City Metropolitan Area” by TRAN Khac Minh (postdoctoral fellow, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada)

## Presentation 1

### **“Planning the next Singapore model: Perception of urban planning processes and foreign influences on urban planning of Hanoi (Vietnam)”**

PHAM Thi Thanh Hien (Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada),  
Sarah TURNER (McGill, Canada), Natalie OSWIN (University of Toronto)

Singapore constantly grabs global attention due to the city-state’s rapid socioeconomic development over its 57 years of independence. Singapore has come to embody a model of efficient, growth-oriented urban design, governance and development; namely the 'Singapore model'. City and national governments around the world are looking to Singapore for urban growth lessons, while Singapore's government ministries, as well as private companies are keen to actively export this model and urban planning expertise as a key sector for Singapore's economic growth. Nonetheless, little is known about the articulation and travels of the 'Singapore model' and the important impacts it has on urban design elsewhere. As such, in this paper we focus on this increasingly praised, influential urban design model. Specifically, we investigate the perceptions of Vietnamese planning and architecture experts, regarding the ways by which the Singapore model has been imported and implemented in Vietnam’s capital city Hanoi, and its impacts on Hanoi’s urban form.

This study is based on 19 in-depth interviews with key players shaping Hanoi’s urban form and growth, namely architects, urban planners, academics, government planners, construction engineers, and journalists. While Hanoi’s municipal government is strongly embracing the Singapore model, our key informants had a range of convincing observations and criticisms regarding how and why the Singapore model has been transferred to Hanoi.

Informants noted that the majority of Vietnamese state officials see the Singapore model as admirable and highly desirable, with the model associated with rapidly modernising the city, encouraging green spaces, and improving the housing stock. Singapore based companies are also considered to bring expertise in construction and urban design. Nonetheless, our informants were slower to praise the Singapore model and the Singapore-based real estate designers, investment companies, and consultants bringing it to Hanoi. Criticisms ranged from concerns over misleading designs, and the lack of related infrastructure, to the speculation-oriented approach and motivations of some companies. More broadly, there were also frustrations voiced regarding the inability of Singapore-based designers and planners to take the specificities of Vietnamese culture, heritage, and way of life into account. In this paper we dig deeper into

the range of critiques that we heard about both the Hanoi municipal government and its embrace of the Singapore model, and concerns over the Singapore-based operators. The degree of candour of our informants' responses exposed the degree to which the Singapore model is highly doubted as a logical approach for Hanoi's future plans.

## **Presentation 2**

### **Urban contemporary transformation of Sihanoukville (Cambodia) under Chinese influence**

Robin LAILLE (Université de Montréal, Canada)

To show that Sihanoukville is under the influence of a Chinese globalisation, the presentation will focus on the Chinese communities who are in Sihanoukville. This work on the Chinese communities of Sihanoukville represents one aspect of my master thesis.

In the presentation, I will show that the presence of Chinese communities is an important factor, among others, of the Chinese globalisation. I will rapidly talk about the Chinese communities in Cambodia and then describe how the Chinese are organized in Sihanoukville since the investments boom of the mid-2010s.

The presentation will demonstrate that there are many different Chinese communities in Sihanoukville and that these communities are well-organized. Indeed, the results of my research show that the Chinese presence in Sihanoukville understand tourists, businessmen, criminals, workers, etc. Even with these differences, this presence is organized in communities who are not always spatially organized but often organized with the new technologies like social networks (WeChat, Telegram...).

The aim of the presentation is not really to give numbers of the Chinese presence in Sihanoukville but more to show how these communities are organized in the city in a context of a boom, a pandemic and other crises.

### **Presentation 3**

#### **‘Hanoi’s now like any city in the world because the planning is patched together’ – residents’ reflections on Hanoi’s current development trajectory.**

Sarah TURNER (McGill University, Canada)

The foremost goal of the ‘Hanoi Capital Construction Master Plan to 2030 and Vision to 2050’ is to transform the capital city of Vietnam into the world’s ‘first sustainable city’. It is proposed that this be achieved by combining mixed-use, high-density developments, with advanced public transportation, both facilitated by foreign direct investment, including for real estate. While capturing wide-spread attention, these ambitious plans have not been without critics. The contemporary gated communities, new urban areas, mega-malls, and skyscrapers rapidly appearing across Hanoi’s urban landscape have meant that “Hanoi has experienced a process of destruction, privatization and commercialization of public space” (Söderström and Geertman 2013). Following the release of an updated Plan with a ‘Vision to 2045’, the Vice-President of the Vietnam Urban Development and Planning Association added that current planning “lacks cohesion”, with limited or no consultation amongst those implementing specific projects (VietnamNet 2020).

Newly built residential condominium projects now crowd the city’s skyline. These are celebrated by city officials and real-estate developers alike as the ultimate in luxury – and sustainable – city living. Yet, to my knowledge, to date no research has focused on the opinions and experiences of urban residents now living in these complexes. And more broadly, what are their views, as middle and upper-class residents, of Hanoi’s current development trajectory?

In this paper I draw primarily from interviews completed with 51 residents residing in Hanoi’s new condominium projects. I explore these residents’ reflections on their new dwellings, and their core likes and dislikes regarding the rapid changes occurring around them. I also investigate their levels of awareness of the urban policies being implemented, and detail their thoughts on who stands to gain the most (and least) from the city’s rapidly changing urban form.

## Presentation 4

### **International urban policies and models in the making of metropolises in Southern Vietnam: the case of the state-led new town development in the Ho Chi Minh City Metropolitan Area**

TRAN Khac Minh (Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada)

Since the implementation of the *Doi Moi* reforms in the mid-1980s, the Vietnamese economy has been experiencing a spectacular restructuring achieved by combining globalized industrialization, urban megaprojects and modern infrastructures. Forming a large metropolitan area, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and its neighboring provinces has emerged as the economic spearhead of Southern Vietnam. In HCMC and its neighboring industrialized provinces, such as Binh Duong, Dong Nai and Ba Ria Vung Tau, provincial authorities seek to achieve their ambitious plans by combining industrial park development, advanced logistical and transportation infrastructures, with new town megaprojects. Since the early 2000s, foreign urban models, imported and implemented by international and national developers and consultants, has become an important source of inspiration for the making of new urban planning paradigms. By focusing our analysis on the conception and implementation of new town projects, we seek to understand how international policies and models have become a determining driving force of the making of metropolises in the largest urban region of Vietnam. Specifically, we scrutinize the diverse ways by which provincial authorities readapt and incorporate international urban models into their new town strategies, by focusing on their functional and economic zoning orientations and the globalized urban forms implemented by developers. Finally, we dig deeper into the provincial new town programs to examine how these ambitious plans help the emerging provinces to strengthen their position in the competition with HCMC and determine the regional construction trajectory through the emergence of transprovincial corridors.

This study is based on 14 interviews with urban planners and officials from Binh Duong and HCMC People's Committees and specialists from several developers such as Becamex, a large state-led company and a key player in the urban development of the HCMC Metropolitan Area. Drawing from these interviews, I explore the way authorities assess international urban models to selectively incorporate them in state-led new town development programs. Information collected from these interviews also reveals many weaknesses of these programs showing how they failed to readapt international models to take local specificities into account, which leads to multiple problems in the implementation of these ambitious megaprojects.