

**DISCOURSES ON POLITICAL REFORM AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN EAST
AND SOUTHEAST ASIA IN THE LIGHT OF NEW PROCESSES OF REGIONAL
COMMUNITY BUILDING**

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Governance and Participation in Vietnam

by

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Preface to the Paper Series

The present discussion paper series of the Institute of East Asian Studies accompanies a research project entitled *Political Discourses on Reform and Democratisation in Light of New Processes of Regional Community-Building*. The project is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and supervised by Thomas Heberer.

The central topic of interest is, as the title of the project suggests, the influence exerted on the political reform process by political discourse. The papers published in this series address the public political discussion at the national as well as the transnational, regional level. Accordingly, the papers display a variety of discourses that have emerged in different countries and centre round different political issues. Contributions from authors of the region are particularly welcome, because they reflect an authentic view of the political discussion within the local public. By integrating and encouraging the local voices, the project team intends to compile a collection of papers that document some important debates and states of the research process.

The current political discourses in East Asia are primarily analysed in case studies of two authoritarian states (China, Vietnam), a multi-ethnic, formally democratic state with strong authoritarian features (Malaysia), and a democratic state with significant parochial structures and patterns of behaviour (Japan). In addition to these case studies, contributions from and on other countries of the region are included to provide a broad scope of comparable discourses.

While Claudia Derichs and Thomas Heberer are the editors of the paper series, a project team of eight members conducts field work in East Asia and brings forth regular proceedings. Research reports other than discussion papers shall be published in refereed journals and magazines. Detailed proceedings leading to the final results of the research project will be published as a book. The project team is composed of research fellows associated with the Chair for East Asian Politics at the Gerhard Mercator University of Duisburg. The team members are: Karin Adelsberger (area: Japan); Claudia Derichs, Ph.D. (Malaysia, Japan); Lun Du, Ph.D. (China); Prof. Thomas Heberer, Ph.D. (China, Vietnam); Bong-Ki Kim, Ph.D. (South Korea); Patrick Raszelenberg (Vietnam); Nora Sausmikat (China); and Anja Senz (China).

Paper No. 1 of the series provides a detailed idea of the theoretical and methodological setting of the project. Each discussion paper of the present series can be downloaded from the university server, using the following URL: <http://www.uni-duisburg.de/Institute/OAWISS/Publikationen/index.html>. Suggestions and comments on the papers are welcome at any time.

Duisburg, June 2000

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GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION IN VIETNAM

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Introduction: Concept of governance

Governance is distinct from government and refers to the relationship between civil society and the state, between rulers and the ruled, the state and society, the government and the governed.

1. Context of the Policy of Economic Renovation (*Doi Moi*), Governance, and Participation

Before the introduction of 'Economic Renovation', the concept of governance was practically unknown in Vietnam. Since planning constituted the focal point of all government activities, government administration was more common than governance.

1.1. The Vietnamese Political System

The economic transition of Vietnam is characterized by a shift away from the socialist system towards a market economy. Politically, the leadership continues to build a 'new' model of socialism integrating market elements. To help understand the context of both voluntary actions and governance, a look at the political system of Vietnam may prove useful.

Table 1: The Political System

Level	Communist Party	Legislative	Executive	Mass Organizations
Center	Politbureau Central committee	National Assembly	Cabinet Ministries	Fatherland Front, Youth League, Women's Federation, Trade Union, Farmers' Association etc.
Provinces, three major cities	Province / city committee	Provincial / Municipal People's Council	People's Committee Departments	Same (at the province/city level)
District	District committee	District People's Council	People's Committee Services	District level
Sub-district	Party cell	Sub-district People's Council	People's Committee Limited number of administrative services	Sub-district level
Neighborhood blocks	Party cell		Police	
Neighborhood units				People in charge elected among neighborhood members

The Vietnamese administrative system used to be a top-down process. In the central planning system, the government took charge of every aspect of people's lives from the distribution of food, clothing, to housing, education, health care and employment. Policy makers and the government at all levels were assigned the task of thinking for the people, thinking in place of the people and acting for the people. As the government of a poor country, however, not all basic needs could be met and not all living conditions improved. Therefore, it attempted to allocate existing resources as equally as possible. Nevertheless, privileges benefiting high-ranking government cadres did exist.

True to the principle that "the revolutionary achievements are carried out by the people", the government applied the Marxist concept of mass mobilization (always in a top-down

fashion). The Vietnamese Communist Party's mass mobilization section, in close cooperation with organizations such as the Women's Federation, the Communist Youth League, the Labor Union, the Farmer's Union, developed methods and campaigns of mass mobilization. The main objective was to provide explanations for government policies in order to help the people understand these policies and convince them to execute top-down actions for implementing those policies. The ultimate objective of mass mobilization is to guarantee the full success of government policies.

The term “mass participation” was a familiar one, although this concept did not trigger the same connotations as the kind of 'participation' we are talking about here. Under the subsidy system, model to emulate and spheres to act in were directed and organized. There was no room for individual initiative, not even for taking care of one's own life.

Under the subsidy system, political functions and objectives prevailed. For the people, their participation was very weak. People executed social activities and tasks with a feeling of obligation. There was no room for diversity, no concept of governance.

Why did this mechanism work? The answer is that in a subsidy system, people's life (food, residence, employment...) depends on the government. Residence control was a strong tool, especially in urban areas. At the time, people could not survive in the cities if they did not get an official residence registration. The provision of food and clothing stamps, housing, employment, education and health care depended on the availability of said residence document. If workers were not able to get employment in the cities, they had to stay where they were.

1.2. Renovation and social change in Vietnam

In 1986, Vietnam entered a new era of social and economic development, i.e. the transition from a subsidy system to a market economy known as “doi moi” in Vietnamese. Economic growth has been steady, the average annual increase of GDP was 7.9% for the 1991 - 1994 period.¹ The private sector has been officially recognized as existing, and the value of foreign investment projects amounted to \$19 billion in 1996.

Up to September 1999, there were 63 industrial parks (IP) and 3 export processing zones (EPZ) in 27 provinces and cities. 850 companies, both local and foreign, have invested \$7.48 billion in these zones which employ 137,000 workers. In 1999, IP and EPZ produced \$1.7 billion, representing 20% of the GDP.²

The living standard has improved, but the gap between rich and poor, between cities and rural areas is widening. Integrated in the globalization process, Vietnam is also facing new problems of economic adjustment that translates into a reduction of social welfare. People have more freedom to develop their economic activity, but the government does not subsidi-

¹ Dang Duc Dam, Vietnam's Economy – World Publishing House (The Gioi), Hanoi 1995.

² Conference on industrial parks and export processing zones 1991–1999 in Binh Duong, 21-22 October 1999.

dize basic social services anymore. The improvement of the quality of education, health care, housing and other social welfare depends on the collaboration of people. The government coined the slogan “Government and people collaborating together”, to call for people’s participation in developing education, building and upgrading housing, and improving the immediate environment of poor residential areas.

Due to demographic pressure and immigration, the population of HCM City is growing at an annual rate of 3.5%. The city faces a housing shortage and urban degradation. Unemployment and the low skills of the poor are obstacles to the improvement of their living standards. In order to reduce the gap and move towards equitable development, the authorities of HCM City launched a program of poverty alleviation in ’92. National organizations and international NGOs participate actively in this program.

In terms of human resources, HCM City has an advantage that is the presence of professionals in social work and community development. Therefore, they have rapidly developed various activities based on the participation of population at grassroots level.

We can note contradictions that occurred during the transition period:

- a) Economic growth but the rich– poor gap is widening;
- b) Rapid urbanization, development of the informal sector;
- c) Less control, increasing social problems: prostitution, delinquency, drug addiction, unemployment;
- d) New construction projects yet housing shortage;
- d) Environmental problems: deforestation for cash crops, flooding, pollution, no respect for the environment.

The civil society can participate in actions for reducing these contradictions, given that the authorities are overwhelmed by this task and are more focussed on economic growth.

1.3. Governance and participation in Vietnam’s political system: strength and weakness

In the Vietnamese political system, the overall leadership of the Communist Party is consolidated. The Party and the government attempt to reconcile the dynamic elements of a market economy with the current political system. To obtain this objective, administrative reforms are necessary: to strengthen legislation, the role of elected bodies, people’s participation, the rule of law.

The government cannot subsidize everything, so it calls for people’s contributions. In order to improve the quality of education and health care - while the national budget is very limited, education and health care are no longer for free - people have to pay for a quality welfare service. A new term has appeared to indicate people’s financial participation in developing education and health care: the “socialization” of education and of health care. This term seems confusing in English, but it is more and more used in Vietnamese. We can say

that the “socialization” of social services means the participation of different actors of the civil society in social welfare.

In the trend of globalization, Vietnam has received more information and impact of international conferences, namely those of Rio on Environment, of Copenhagen on Social Development and of Beijing on Women. The impact of international agencies and foreign NGOs on different policy making levels, in particular the national level, has been significant. By means of project implementation, training, seminars, study tours, they have transferred experience and models of local development to Vietnamese organizations which are successful in other developing countries. Saving credit groups, women centered projects, participatory approaches all have become familiar to developers.

People’s participation at the lowest level is account for by participatory research: Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) in poverty studies, community development projects. Project developers emphasize the collaboration between the people, researchers, local authorities and professionals. This approach has resulted in a better comprehension of the overall socio-economic situation, of people’s needs.

Resettlement plans: In the trend of rapid urbanization and of industrialization, several urban renovation projects have to deal with the relocation of people. Formerly, social studies were almost absent in resettlement projects. The government had only one alternative for people from slum clearance areas, that is to build multi-storey residential units to resettle them. Recently however, things have changed. Applying the guidelines of sustainable resettlement, urban planners have by now understood the necessity of social studies in urban project elaboration and implementation. People’s aspirations and needs have been taken into account in resettlement plans. The collaboration between the various levels of administration, urban projects, researchers, professionals, and households has been strengthened. The Tan Hoa–Lo Gom canal sanitation project mentioned below will illustrate this trend.

Legislation: Democracy at the local level (*dan chu o co so*) is a decree issued by the government, no. 29/1998/ND–CP promulgated on 11 May 1998 concerning “regulations for implementing democracy at the commune level”. Its objective is the mobilization of people’s resources for socio-economic development.

The decree distinguishes different levels of participation:

- Issues that should be disseminated to the people: land use, budget.
- People’s participation and decision: financial contribution, local regulations, internal affairs, constitution of village contracts (*huong uoc*).
- People participate but local authorities decide: planning, the implementation of national programs, compensation for removal from land.
- People supervise and control: People’s Councils’ activities, grievances, budget expenditures, construction of infrastructure.

Remarks: The regulations constitute an important step towards the institutionalization of local democracy. Still, they need to be improved because:

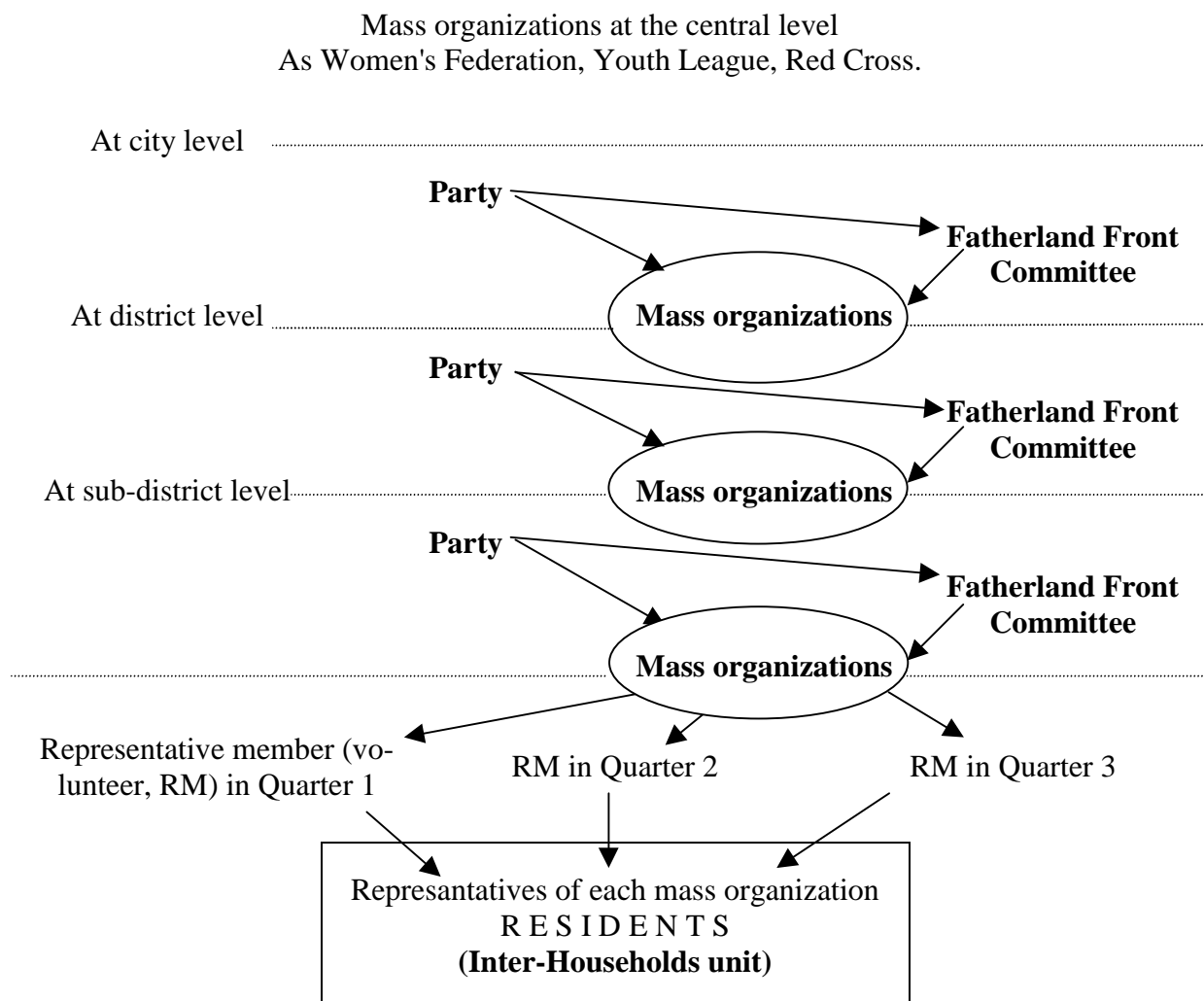
- Heavy tasks are assigned to the village chief; these tasks do not correspond to his capabilities and allowances.
- People have a say only in issues related to their financial contributions, to the security of their communities.

1.4. Actors of governance

Such actors are: Communities, mass organizations, local authorities, institutions, researchers and teachers, religious groups, NGOs, international agencies.

Coordination between actors is needed. The role of mediators is distinct from government but mediators have interest to closely cooperate with the government, they need the government support in order to play the role of liaison between people and the government.

Figure 1: Organizational structure of the mass organizations at each level



2. Governance, Case Studies and Spheres of Governance

2.1. ENCO – EPFL Project

A scientific cooperation between the Environment Committee (ENCO) of Ho Chi Minh City and the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (Switzerland). Project duration was 6 years, from 1994 to 2000.

Initiatives for implementing governance actions came from Vietnamese researchers. Spirit of the project: Interdisciplinary approach and participation at local level. The actions were supported by research at the municipal level. Pilot projects in environment management have been developed and techniques of community development applied. Within this project, experimental actions were conducted in two areas from '94 to '99: The subdistrict (ward) 15 of Binh Thanh district (SD15/BT) and subdistrict 10 of district 8 (SD10/D8).

Principles:

A model of participation and self-help already familiar to the population, has been used: the group of saving and credit with loan rotation. But instead of income generation as the current system, the project introduced new objectives such as improvement of housing and environment.

The professionals who have been trained in social work and community development assist people in empowering themselves. The professionals facilitate the meetings and discussions of the population so the population can identify their needs and demonstrate their capability of coming up with feasible alternatives. Financial assistance from ENCO is minimal.

A small group is consolidated before expanding the project. The success of the group's activity attracts the curiosity of the neighbors who in their turn feel the need to be integrated into the project. Thus, people's awareness is raised and they will be more committed to the activity they will identify and develop. This approach is the opposite of the traditional communist communication campaign which aims at covering all areas in a program designed as a top-down process.

2.2. Actions in SD10/D8.

Characteristics of the project area

Subdistrict 10 of district 8 is located in the south west of the outer ring of the urban districts of HCM City. The area is lowland surrounded by two canals. The majority of people are poor. They are not able to afford housing. Most houses do not have toilets. Using public toilets on the canals is common practice among the residents, and waste is discharged into the canals. The population is not well educated and lacks awareness of environmental protection.

Credit for building private toilets

Since 1996, city authorities have developed projects of cleaning the canals and eradicating the toilets on the canals. District 8 and subdistrict 10 had to comply with this policy and started to demolish public toilets on the canals. The area has no land available for building public toilets, the only alternative is to build private toilets. The population also expressed the need of building toilets inside their houses yet lack the means to do so. The community workers sent by ENCO held several meetings with the population to help them organize groups of saving and credit. ENCO offered small funds to this credit program that provides the households with a complementary fund, yet this doesn't cover the expenses for building toilets. The community workers encouraged the households to put aside some savings for this purpose. Thus, the people made an effort and raised their sense of responsibility. After six months of running the project, 8 households have built toilets in their houses with their own money and that of ENCO through the group of credit. The households have totally reimbursed the fund. Sessions of evaluation of the groups have been held with the participation of community workers. All members were satisfied with their new toilets. Their neighbors began to request to organize their group of credit to build private toilets. From 1996 to 1999, the project has helped more than 300 households build private toilets based on the scheme of loan rotation with modest funding amounting to no more than \$ 2,800.

As the credit groups meet regularly to discuss their activities related to the construction of the toilets, members became more aware of the protection of the immediate environment and are more convinced that they themselves are able to improve it. They stated that the sewers are obstructed by all kinds of waste, even by human excrements. They proposed that the community workers help them organize the drainage of the sewers and install new sewers. They are ready to participate in the action and to pay the fees. This initiative has led to a second undertaking which is the drainage of the sewers.

The neighborhood group looked for a worker who accepted to install new sewers, mobilize the youth in the area to clean the sewers and collect money from the households to cover the fees. Apart from the community worker, ENCO sent a hydrologist on the spot for technical assistance. This action reflected the usefulness of an interdisciplinary working team and the linkage between people, practitioners and technicians.

During the campaign, people in the area have been witness to the hard work done by the young. They became more committed to protect their area and the new sewers. They discussed and decided to equip the sewers with steel grille to prevent waste from getting into the sewers. This action has echoed: Now, other neighborhood units requested the community workers to help them clean the sewers.

2.3. Actions in subdistrict 15 (Binh Thanh district)

The project area is located northeast of the urban districts of HCMC next to the Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe canal which winds through five central city districts. The banks and parts of the canal itself have been for many years occupied by squatters. Using toilets on the canal and discharging all kinds of waste into the canal are common practice among the population

living along the canal. It also receives waste water from sewers all around the city and thus became very polluted. Since 1993, city authorities have implemented a project of squatter clearance and resettlement of people living on and along the canal within a range of 20 meters at each side of the canal. In subdistrict 15/BT, precarious housing involved in this project has been cleared since mid-1996 and the operation will continue until the end of 1997. In these operations, many toilets on the canal have been destroyed. To replace them, district authorities have provided people with public toilets newly built on the ground. However, the toilets were still closed many months after construction, since there was no water available. When our project started to gather people's opinions and needs, people living in the area proposed to bring in water and open the public toilets. The hydrologists of ENCO were in charge of choosing the location for a well and drilling it, the community worker facilitated meetings of people in the neighborhood units to discuss the regulations of management of the public toilets. The people have found a woman who accepted to manage the toilets. ENCO just offered technical assistance, the fees for drilling the well and small funding to help running the operation at the beginning. In the long term, the project should be auto-financed. After six months of experimentation, the public toilets and the well have been more and more used by the population in the neighborhood.

Credit fund and garbage collection

In the past, there was no garbage collection in the area. Employees of the public works company could not reach squatter areas because of the deficiency of the lanes. The community worker suggested people to discuss about a solution for garbage collection as a means to support the city campaign "do not litter" launched in 1995. She informed them that ENCO is ready to provide people with a small credit for housing and environmental improvement. Following people's discussions, it was agreed that credit be offered to households which accepted to collect garbage in the neighborhood. The credit would be granted to the collector to purchase a cart for carrying garbage. People accepted to pay \$ 0.5/month to the collector, the rate applied in the city. After six months, the garbage collector has reimbursed the credit, now he and his family own the cart as a means of carrying out his income generation activity.

The above mentioned activities of pilot projects have lead to a new cooperation between the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and ENCO for urban environment rehabilitation in ward 15 of Binh Thanh District.

SDC project "*Interdisciplinary Approach of flooding problem in ward 15, Binh Thanh District, Ho Chi Minh City*" from 01/1998 to 06/1999

Project Objectives:

- Identify causes of flooding in the area
- What did the inhabitants do to reduce flooding?
- Bring assistance, financial and technical, to the inhabitants after their initiatives to reduce flooding
- Experiment with appropriate technology and low cost tools for reducing flooding
- Disseminate the results by means of seminars

Project content:Research:

- Survey and modeling of the drainage system in the area; detect and identify causes of flooding
- Rapid appraisal of people's needs related to environmental improvement, of the youth's needs related to environment issues
- Study social and organizational aspects, the role of actors in the local system of waste management
- Study the relationship between water and people's behavior as well as between practice and diseases

Programs of community development in the area.

- Improve the community infrastructure: Financial and technical support for reducing flooding: installation of sewers, manholes, cementing lanes. The inhabitants participate in all steps of the project implementation: design, fund raising, the contribution of labor and money, monitoring and maintaining the works once completed.
- Train the inhabitants in communication skills, micro credit techniques, community development; organize meetings and discussions on health, public hygiene and water quality.
- Organize a scheme of waste collection in the community based on a participatory approach. The inhabitants, local authorities, private collectors, and the Labor Union discuss responsibilities and the organization of the network. Finally, an agreement is concluded between collectors and inhabitants and approved by local authorities.
- Implement environmental education for the young integrating knowledge, awareness and actions.
- Provide people with micro credits for building private toilets.

Figure 2: Three components of environmental management

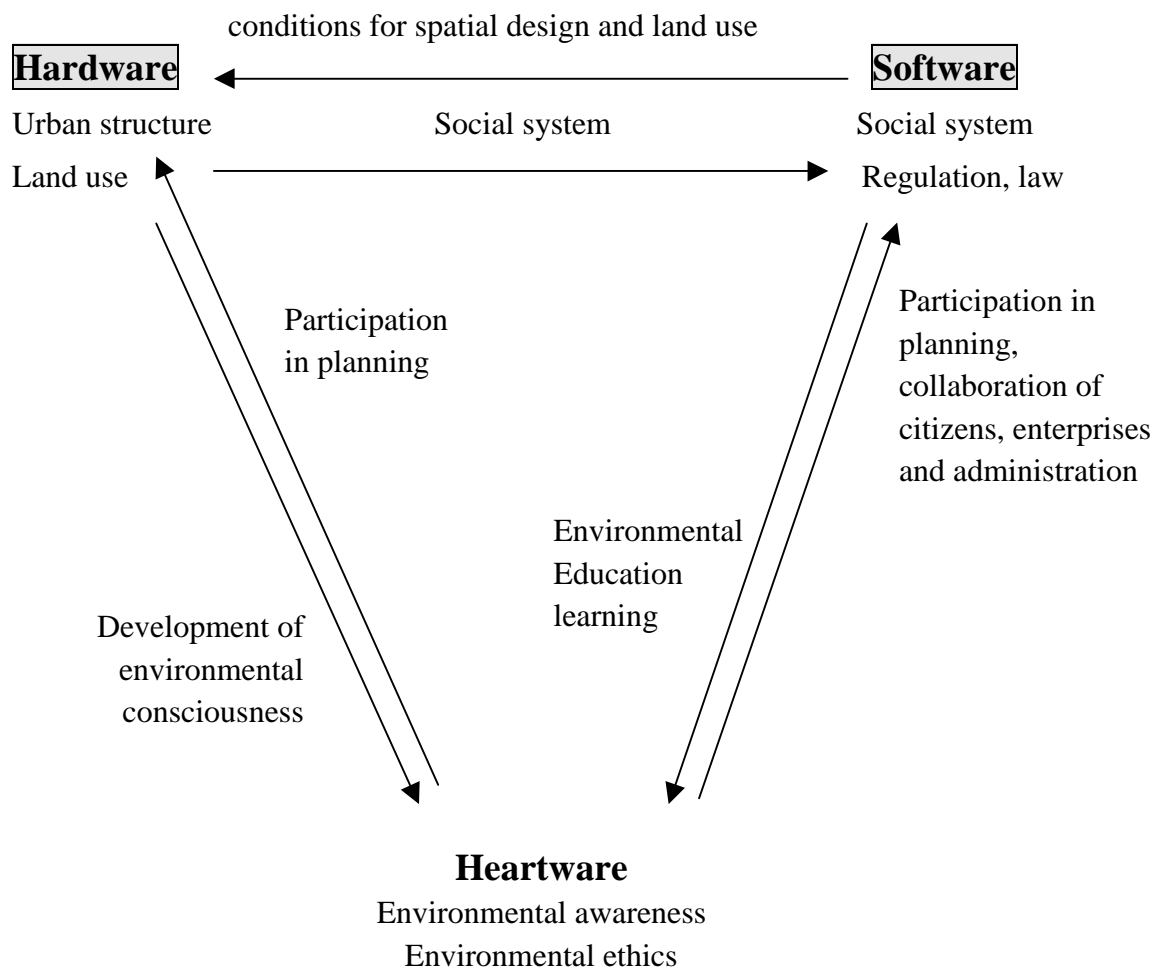
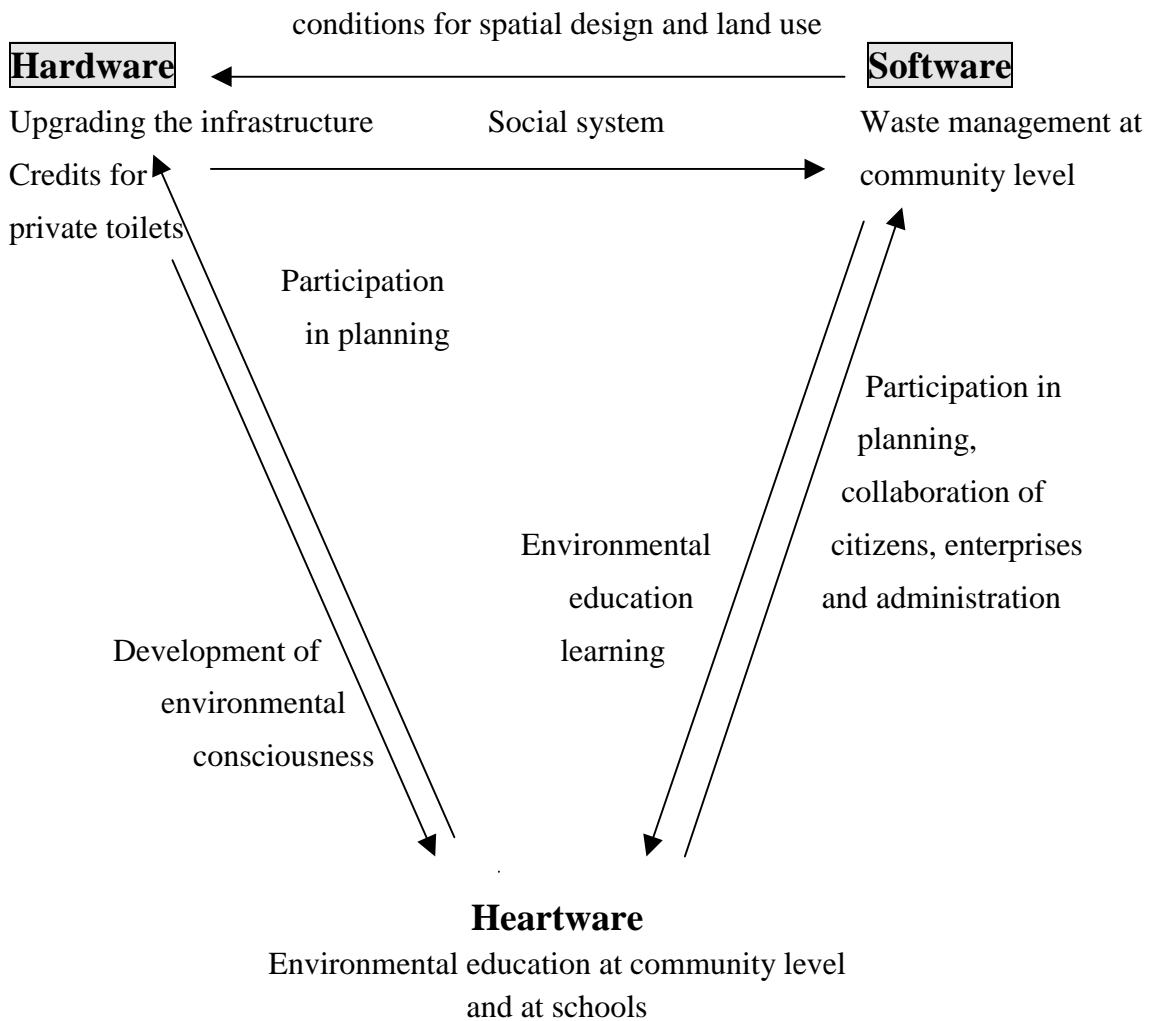


Figure 3: Three components of environmental management



Discussion

Interdisciplinary work has been developed and has proved its efficiency at the local level. There is ground for the integration of the activities of researchers, practitioners and the population in a participatory approach.

Researchers and practitioners can create a synergy of actions by trying to link city policy to local action. What is new is that the method of approach based on the voluntary participation of the population is applied right at the first phase of the identification of the project objectives.

Researchers and practitioners may face a constraint in developing the bottom-up process, that is the gap between two ways of thinking. One way is from the local leaders who are more used to communist-style mass campaigns and who want to see rapid expansion of the

project, albeit that the results might be unsustainable. The other one is the participatory approach which requires more patience and work for raising awareness among the people. In our specific project, the developers had to convince local leaders patiently so they would, on one hand, accept the new approach, and on the other wait for the people to have enough time building their capacity. Training local leaders to participatory approach will facilitate cooperation between different development actors at the local level.

The application of successive steps of people's empowerment processes, from welfare, resources approach up to awareness and participation have been validated during the development of the actions at local level.

In financial terms, projects run with the participation of the population are low cost and can prevent fund embezzlement.

2.4. National Program of Poverty Alleviation

This is an example of integration from the local to the national level. Spheres of action: Socio-economic development. Micro credit for income generation, vocational training. Strengths and weaknesses: Provision of credit, nationwide activities through mass organization networks, yet lack of professionals, weak follow-up. The process of integrating NGO methods into a national program should go from flexible to administrative.

Poverty Studies in the Period of Economic Renovation

Since the launching of *doi moi* (1986), important progress in economic growth, political reform and in democratization has been achieved. Emerging problems of the period of transition: The gap between the rich and the poor, between cities and rural areas is widening. Studies on poverty are quite recent, they have been carried out merely since the 1990s, and are more focused on rural than on urban poverty.

Criteria and Indicators of Poverty in Vietnam

In Vietnam, the Statistical Office defines the poverty line on the basis of a per capita daily energy intake of 2,100 calories. This definition of poverty is based on a calculation parting from kilograms of rice translated into monetary terms.

Food intake per person per day: less than 2,100 calories, unable to meet basic needs such as clothes, housing, education, and health care. In terms of rice quantity this translates into the minimum expenses/person/month varying between 15.1 and 16.2 kg. Three levels of poverty have been identified in Vietnam:

- Hunger: below the vital minimum, i.e. income/person/month is less than 12 kg of rice.
- Absolute poverty: Income/person/month is less than 15 kg of rice.
- Relative poverty: The living standard is lower than the average living standard of the region.

Translated into monetary terms³, this means that in 1993, the poverty line was defined by an income/person/month equal to 50,000 dong (\$4.5) in rural areas, and to 70,000 dong (\$6.5) in urban areas.

1994: 76,000 dong in rural areas and 102,000 dong in urban areas.⁴

There are six indicators for a poor commune: Shortage of electricity, roads, dispensaries, schools, markets and drinking water.

According to these criteria, there were at the end of 1997 2.6 million poor families, i.e. 17.7% of the total number of families in Vietnam. The proportion rises to 40% in remote areas. There are in the whole country 1,300 communes classified as very poor. In terms of numbers of communes, landless households occupy 10–15% of all households.

Ho Chi Minh City

The results of a survey carried out in 1992 by the Committee for Poverty Alleviation of HCM City indicated that the per capita monthly income of the poor is 72,500 dong, equal to 1/7 of the one of the upper middle class, which higher than 500,000 dong.

In 1992, the year Ho Chi Minh City launched this program, families with an annual per capita income of less than 500,000 dong were considered poor. The definition of minimum income has been modified according to the increase in the cost of living.

In 1998, the minimum income was fixed at 3 million dong/person/year for urban districts. This is equal to 250,000 dong/person/month (\$19), and 2.5 millions dong for suburban districts, which is equal to 208,000 dong/person/month (\$16).

Under those criteria, there were 180,000 poor families in HCM City at the end of 1996, i.e. 15–20% of all families in the city. In 1998, this number was reduced to 11.8%. The objective for the year 2000 is to reduce this number even further, down to 10%.

Strategy of poverty alleviation

In 1992, a large program of poverty alleviation named the «Hunger elimination and poverty reduction programme (HEPRP)» was established, first in HCM City, then in other provinces. At the national level, there are two programs gathering important funds: HEPRP and the job creation programme. In 1995, HEPRP funds were up to 260 billion dong. The job creation program also reserved 30% of its funds, equivalent to 260 billion dong, to support the poor.

Ho Chi Minh City has mobilized massive resources for the poverty alleviation programme. Up to September of 1999, 102 billion dong were made available for the city's poverty alleviation funds. In addition, mass organizations raised their own funds. The HCM City Women's Federation holds 30 billion dong and has supported 22,000 women.

³ \$1 = 14,000 Dong.

⁴ General Statistics Office: Results of a poverty survey in 1993.

For the 1998-2000 period, nine important projects for poverty alleviation have been established. Those projects are concentrating on the following spheres: Construction of infrastructure, promotion of professional activities, micro credit, education, health care, assistance to ethnic minorities, and technical training for production.

The widespread technique is to provide micro credit to the poor with low interest for income generation. The scheme has been inspired by a Grameen Bank model. Vietnamese mass organizations, especially the Women's Union, and foreign NGOs participate in poverty alleviation actions by means of providing funds for micro credits. Foreign NGOs and Vietnamese professionals apply principles and techniques of community development providing poor women with credit, but also vocational training, saving techniques, formation of mutual aid groups etc.

Remarks

The program has been considered a success, since a lot of families in all the localities of Vietnam have got out of poverty and built new sustainable living conditions. Nevertheless, the program has some weaknesses :

- It did not reach the poorest as they are considered not able to reimburse. Illegal residents in towns could not benefit from the program because they do not have registrations.
- The program encountered a specific difficulty which is the high rate of non-reimbursement because of lack of capacity building, or of technical assistance.

2.5 Tan Hoa–Lo Gom canal – a sanitation and urban upgrading project through an integrated approach including community participation

This is a Belgian government-sponsored program supported by Belgian and Vietnamese specialists who are committed to the spirit of participation. It is an example of the positive impact of bilateral cooperation on urban policy. Two major changes brought about by the project in terms of urban resettlement policies were:

- to recognize the rights to resettlement for temporary residents who are affected by housing clearance,
- to provide affected people with several alternatives for resettlement according to their needs.

Context

The governments of Belgium and Vietnam signed an agreement on the 25th of June 1997 to cooperate in the implementation of Tan Hoa–Lo Gom sanitation and urban upgrading based in HCM City. Tan Hoa-Lo Gom is located in the southwest of Ho Chi Minh City and covers a drainage basin of 19 km² with 500,000 inhabitants. The canal is highly polluted, affects the quality of the environment and causes flooding in the area.

Project objectives

The project has two general objectives:

- to improve the quality of life in Tan Hoa–Lo Gom (THLG) by reducing pollution, urban upgrading, and developing economic and community activities,
- to strengthen the capacity of the local community and city institutions.

The project is based on seven strategies: solid waste collection, canal maintenance and re-shaping, waste water treatment, institutional strengthening, awareness raising and community participation, urban planning and socio-economic support.

Accordingly, eight pilot projects are implemented in an integrated way: Solid waste collection support; investment in transportation equipment; industrial solid waste reduction; canal cleaning and embankment upgrading; industrial waste water reduction and pre-treatment; waste water treatment; surface water treatment; housing relocation; socio-economic actions for poor and relocated people.

These pilot projects should be designed and implemented through a specific approach articulated around the following ideas:

- to be a bottom-up project involving large community participation at all steps;
- to favor links between different fields and administrative departments involved in environment and urban management
- to follow the guidelines of the UN Agenda 21 by promoting sustainable and respectful environmental solutions
- to integrate all related aspects of the seven strategies within each pilot project;
- to support the poorest of the district.

Activities: Community participation and awareness raising. Collaboration project specialists, social workers, inhabitants, local authorities, mass organizations at ward and district levels.

4 focuses:

- Surveys: A large scale survey has been carried out in order to assess people's living conditions and their aspirations about their future economic and housing conditions. A second survey and in-depth interviews have focussed on people who are affected by the project resettlement plan.
- Social workers' activities: They are the direct link between the project and the inhabitants. They act as mediators for people and authorities. First of all, their main tasks are to raise awareness of the people to take on their own responsibility for the improvement of their immediate environment. Secondly, they have to enable people to participate in the project activities at all steps, from design to implementation. To achieve these objectives, the social workers act as mediators and work with the inhabitants, local mass organizations, neighborhood leaders, local authorities (in-

cluding the people's committee and the police), informal waste collectors, other inhabitants' representatives. Social workers, or community development workers, play an active role in strategies pertaining to solid waste, relocation, and socio-economic assistance.

- Awareness activities in the school curriculum: One of the best ways to develop people's environmental awareness is to create an impact on the young. The aim is to implement environmental education at 4 schools in District 6. At the end of this activity, tools and methodology will be provided to the Department of Education and Training in order to extend this type of activities to other schools in the city.
- TV spots, awareness campaigns and documentary films: 2 TV spots will be developed and shown on HCM City-TV as part of an environment campaign. A longer film will be shot for school and community meetings.

2.6. The Women's Federation and its broad range of activities

Income generation and micro credit, scholarships for poor students, vocational training for women. The Federation is most active in governance and participation. Thanks to its strong political status, combined with the Committee for the Advancement of Women, it is able to access policy makers at the national level. As an illustration, we will mention its role in the elaboration of chapter 10 of the labor law. This chapter consists of 10 articles on women's rights at work.

2.7. The Fatherland Front

This very large organization coordinates the actions of mass organizations. In the nineties, the Front has launched a wide campaign named "**People Build New Life in the Community**". Methods of community development are needed to make this program successful. So far, due to the lack of professionals in this field, it is carried out thanks to volunteer actions of organizations in the community. The results are therefore somewhat mixed.

2.8. Charitable activities:

Charitable and solidarity actions have been strengthened during the *doi moi* period, as the living standard of a part of the population has been improving. People are more able to do charitable work. A lot of donations from the Vietnamese are poured into varied activities and programs in health care, education, elderly, handicapped children, and emergency. This potential is highly appreciated. Charitable actions are still needed for the handicapped and the elderly because there is no welfare system in Vietnam. The elderly have to rely on their children, so life is really difficult for those who do not have children, or for those who do have children but are too poor to support them.

3. Discussion and Recommendations

- Talking of governance in Vietnam, we must not forget the particularities of its political structure with a strong emphasis of the top-down process and a highly organized society. At the present time, people and policy makers are learning to use the tool of democracy. Training for a participatory approach is really needed not only for the people but also for policy makers. We need capacity building and training at all levels: decision makers, professional and the people. The training objectives are to change ideas about methods of governance: They should be people-centered. Politicians should listen to the people and identify people's needs with the participatory approach.
- Good coordination between authorities, mass organizations and other mediators, donators, and NGOs is indispensable for the success of the projects.
- To strengthen the capacity and empower the autonomy of the commune and ward authorities so they can fulfill their tasks.
- Blockage at upper levels: Many initiatives and actions at grass-root levels have been successful on a small scale, but some actions failed once they have been recognized by the authorities. This is mainly due to the fact that whenever initiatives have been rapidly and mechanically duplicated on a larger scale without sufficient training and profession, initiatives turned out to be purely administrative or bureaucratic, hence difficult to control. People pay less attention to quality (capacity building) than to quantity (number of beneficiaries). They also tend to manage projects in a homogenous form, leaving little room for diversity.
- Incoherence among macro policies and local actions is a hindrance to governance, e.g. costs of education vs. low salaries.
- Mediators share tasks with local authorities because they are overwhelmed by the work (especially at the ward level). Mediators contribute resources (material and human), skills and techniques of implementation.

Table 2: Degrees of Participation at the Local Level

Actors at local level	Welfare	Implement activities designed by other people or authorities	Consultation	Elaborate planning, implement and evaluate alternatives	Decision making, impact on policy
Inhabitants	XXX	XX	X		
Active members in community	XX	XXX	X		
Local authorities, Party, people's Committee	XX	XXX	XX	X	X
Mass organization	XX	XXX	XX	X	
Professional		XX	X	XXX	X
Researchers		XX	XX	XXX	X
Foreign NGO			XX	XXX	X
Local donors		XXX	X		
Religious groups		XX	X	XX	
External donors			X	XXX	X

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