Shortcomings of an Idealized Urbanity: Ghost Urban Areas and the Asynchronous Territorial Development of Hanoi

OLIVIER JACQUES, DANIELLE LABBÉ, AND CLÉMENT MUSIL

ABSTRACT. This paper examines the recent emergence, on the periphery of Hanoi, of large real estate projects that began construction during the 2000s but have now remained unfinished or, even when completed, largely uninhabited. These "ghost urban areas," as the local press calls them, epitomize some of the problems which emerged in Hanoi when a model of urban development that aimed at realizing an imagined urban future, formulated by state planning agencies, encountered the highly speculative reality of Vietnam's property market. Ghost urban areas reveal how the state's planning orientations and discourse—conveying ideals of urban "modernity," "civility," and particularly "synchrony"—instead generated dysfunctional, incomplete, and disconnected places. Based on a survey of thirty-nine ghost urban areas, a cartographic analysis, interviews with key actors, and a critical study of policy documents, this paper reveals multiple scales and forms of what we call "asynchronous territorial developments." Around Hanoi, these developments involve vast tracts of agricultural lands forcibly appropriated yet left fallow, planned infrastructure and amenities that stay unbuilt for indefinite periods of time, and housing units transacted multiple times among speculators but have remained largely uninhabited and out of reach for a majority of urban households. Ultimately, we interrogate how these various territorial asynchronies, both generated by and plaguing ghost urban areas, shape their livability and inhabitants' experience.

KEYWORDS. ghost towns · land resource · peri-urbanization · speculation · Hanoi

INTRODUCTION

The appearance of so-called ghost cities in Asia has garnered a great deal of media attention lately. In recent years, the emphasis has mainly been on China (e.g., *Daily Mail Reporter* 2010; Yung 2014; Shepard 2015), although ghost cities also emerged in other parts of East and Southeast Asia at various points in the last three decades, such as in the wake of

the 1997 Asian economic crisis (e.g., Sheng and Kirinpanu 2000; Sajor 2003; Firman 2004). What is less well known is that an analogous phenomenon has recently emerged in Vietnam. On the periphery of Hanoi, the city on which this paper focuses, several large real estate projects were approved and began construction during the 2000s but have now remained unfinished or, even when completed, largely uninhabited. The domestic press refers to these places as "abandoned projects" (*dự án bỏ hoang*) or, using an especially potent neologism, as "ghost urban areas" (*khu đô thị ma*).

A small number of studies have explored the ghost city phenomenon in developing East and Southeast Asia, with a focus in recent years on China (e.g., Chi et al. 2015; Woodworth 2012; Sorace and Hurst 2016). Much of this literature takes either a descriptive approach to the study of ghost cities (attempting to quantify, characterize, or map them) or propose financial-economic analyses emphasizing the role of property bubbles and their underlying causes (financialization of real estate, lax domestic credit policies, rampant speculation, etc.). We acknowledge the value of these approaches and recognize that ghost cities throughout rapidly urbanizing Asia are often outcomes of the speed and relative newness of development, coupled with the inexperience of development companies and market volatility (cf. Mera and Renaud 2000).

In this paper, we suggest that a fuller understanding of the ghost city phenomenon in developing East and Southeast Asia requires a broadening of analytical perspectives. It calls, in particular, for greater attention to the mediating role of the state during successive stages of the urban development process. In positioning the state more centrally in the analysis, we agree with conceptualizations of Asian urbanisms as a phenomenon shaped by governmental attempts to put urbanization, particularly the urban space production processes, in the service of nation-building objectives (MacKinnon 2011; Yooil 2012; Shatkin 2017). In line with this view, we apprehend failed enclave urbanism through the notion, put forth by Sorace and Hurst (2016, 305) in reference to China, of the "ideological commitments" by states to rapidly modernize national territories and society by gearing rapidly growing cities toward an imagined urban modernity.

In what follows, we explore the relationship between this ideological commitment and the emergence of ghost urban areas in Hanoi. We do so through the lens of the ideal city discourse put forward by the state (and to an extent by developers too) to foster and

justify the particular form it wishes Vietnam's planned urban expansion to take. In taking this approach, our purpose is less to characterize Hanoi's failed peri-urban enclaves (although we do sketch a portrait of the phenomenon) or to identify the financial and economic factors that led to them (although we take these factors into consideration). Rather, we interpret Hanoi's ghost urban areas as one of the most problematic expressions of a vast state-led project to put the post-*đổi mới* urbanization process in the service of national development and modernization, notably through the production of master-planned communities.

In this paper, Hanoi's ghost urban areas are understood as failed outcomes of a model of urban development central to state planners' urbanization-as-modernization strategy, the so-called new urban areas (*khu đô thi mới*—hereafter NUA). These are large-scale peri-urban land redevelopments dominated by the residential function, which may also include commercial spaces, high-rise office towers, private amenities (e.g., schools and medical clinics), and exclusive recreational spaces (e.g., golf courses, fitness centers). NUAs are mainly developed for profit by private corporate actors (sometimes in partnership with local governments). Most projects are geared toward the rising professional and middle classes, although some of them include resettlement and social housing (Labbé and Boudreau 2011; Tran 2015).

For two decades now, the post-reform Vietnamese state has been promoting this model as a means of encouraging domestic and foreign corporate actors to build large, mixed-use compounds and infrastructure as the periphery of existing cities. These new peri-urban spaces are meant to accommodate growing urban population, produce more and better infrastructure, and ultimately make space for a new urban-industrial economy. NUAs' role, however, goes beyond these functional and economic transformations. Within broader national modernization ambitions pursued by the Vietnamese state, NUAs also ought to act as catalysts and receptacles of an imagined urban modernity.

Various ambitions are entrusted to NUAs to realize this goal. Among them, NUAs are expected to assemble the conditions of a so-called urban synchrony (*đô thị đồng bộ*). Put simply, this means that the vast estates planned and built on the city's periphery should rise from the ground fully formed rather than incrementally. By the time residents move in, they should find a functionally balanced and complete living environment that meets all their needs while also being socially and technically in sync with the rest of the city. The case of

ghost urban areas, explored in the rest of this paper, shows that, in contrast to this purported role as vectors of urban cohesion and completeness, NUAs can—and do—generate various socio-spatial disconnections and shortcomings.

We call this phenomenon "asynchronous territorial development" and show that it is multiform and multi-scalar. A first and most obvious material-functional asynchrony is observable in large ghost projects that have forcibly appropriated and leveled vast tracts of agricultural land without redeveloping them. Such idle projects are not only wasting productive croplands but also failing to produce the infrastructure and amenities needed by preexisting peri-urban populations. On a smaller scale, a similar form of material-functional asynchrony is observable within those projects that are largely built but where occupancy rates are very low and basic services lacking. Another form of aesthetic-cultural asynchrony emerges from the promotion of selective enclaves of new lifestyles, leading to social estrangement from the existing, vernacular city. Finally, a financial-economic form of asynchrony results from rampant speculative practices that keep NUA housing out of reach of a majority of urbanites. This influences owner-occupiers' views of their living environment, which they tend to assess through exchange rather than use value criteria.

Ghost urban areas are certainly not representative of all NUAs. These deviant cases instead epitomize the gaps that have opened up between the ideal city imagined by the state and the actual urban spaces produced on the urban periphery. The exploration of these gaps (or asynchrony) in this paper relies on data collected as part of a wider project on Hanoi's peri-urban development conducted between 2013 and 2016. This includes a database of Hanoi's NUAs, which allowed the identification of thirty-nine ghost urban areas. Through secondary documents, field visits, and a survey questionnaire administered to occupants, we characterized each of these projects in terms of land surface and usage, completion and occupancy rates, and planned versus built infrastructure and facilities. We further draw on interviews conducted with a dozen individuals involved within local and national governments, the real estate industry, and academia and with owner-occupiers in three of Hanoi's most problematic ghost urban areas.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Part 1 discusses key components of the Vietnamese state's ideological commitment to modernize the country through planned urban developments. We focus, in particular, on the notion of "urban synchrony," a key element

in the official urban modernization agenda that new urban areas are supposed to realize. Part 2 sketches a portrait of Hanoi's NUAs. Using the case of ghost urban areas, we show how this predominant model of urban development fails to meet the state's ideal city discourse. We demonstrate that an asynchronous city is emerging around Hanoi with deficiencies that cut across scales: from the micro-local shortcomings of individual projects to macro-territorial land wastage on the metropolitan scale. Part 3 explores the skewing of housing markets spurred by NUAs and its effects on owner-occupiers' mind-set. This discussion focuses on the urban experience of households inhabiting three of Hanoi's most dramatic and dysfunctional ghost urban areas.

Ultimately, we show that the modernizing ambitions entrusted by the state to NUAs could simply not withstand the highly speculative and corrupted reality of Vietnam's property market. In this context, the state has tended to confine its role to the discursive realm. Incidentally, weak state controls during project implementation and commercialization have allowed speculative practices to have a much greater influence on the structuring of Hanoi's periphery than the modernity and synchrony ideals that NUAs were supposed to deliver.

URBAN MACHINES THAT WORK

The central governments of developing Asian countries have long linked planned urban development to overarching agendas of national modernization (Woodside 1998; MacKinnon 2011; Yooil 2012). Since the 1980s, many national governments in the region fostered the production of large master-planned communities, effectively renewing the parameters of this modernization-urban planning linkage (Phillips and Yeh 1987; Shatkin 2017; Keeton 2011). In the context of extremely rapid economic growth and integration into a global economic system, national governments used this strategy to enroll corporate actors in a state-backed experiment with global influences, private forms of planning, neoliberal modes of governance, new forms of citizenship, and the production of new urban built forms (Shatkin 2017; Roy and Ong 2011). As they "rose in the East," to borrow Keeton's (2011) words, central states tried to use "Asian new towns" as a means of channeling and mediating global capitalist forces while continuing to pursue national modernization ideals.

The NUA model of urban development in Vietnam is no exception. In the 1990s, as urbanization began to accelerate, state planners

formulated and entrenched this new model of (peri)urban development into the national planning framework. New urban areas rapidly became an important component of large cities' master plans. Echoing arguments put forth by states elsewhere in the region, Vietnam's national leaders and government planning agencies (the Ministry of Construction in particular) argued that this new urban development model could solve important problems faced by Vietnamese cities. NUAs, these actors explained, would not only help relieve housing shortages but also, through land-based-financing methods, serve as a leverage to upgrade and expand infrastructure (especially roads) (see Labbé and Musil 2014 for further discussion).

Hanoi's planning authorities did succeed in attracting investments in the production of NUAs, and avoided to further burden the state's limited budget. During the 2000s, over two hundred projects were licensed on the province's territory. While a majority of projects were invested by domestic firms, many of them indirectly tapped into foreign capital. In that sense, the Vietnamese state managed to channel global capitalist forces into a new urban form. As mentioned in the introduction and further discussed in the next section, the NUA model of urban development is not only meant to generate more housing and produce new and better infrastructure around existing cities. This model is also—and perhaps as importantly—expected to engineer a new, modern urban future. Planning authorities did much more poorly on that front. But before we get into that discussion, let's first describe the state-defined ideals that NUAs were meant to materialize.

An Urban Ideal Triptych

In both policy texts and the media, this transformative purpose of NUAs is most often conveyed by three ubiquitous terms: "modern/ modernity" (*hiện đại*), "civilization/civility" (*văn minh*), and "synchrony" (*đồng bộ*). These terms are regularly used to characterize the ideal Vietnamese city imagined by the state. In fact, their pervasiveness in policy documents has turned them into a prominent triptych of urban ideals, or ideological commitments toward a better urban future, made by Vietnamese planning authorities in view of a rapidly urbanizing population.

NUAs are but one of the many mechanisms used by the state to foster the two first components of the urban ideal triptych—that is,

modernity and civility. A wide range of state-led development plans, programs, and campaigns seek to modernize and civilize various aspects of the nation, from its economy to its customs and culture. NUAs, however, play a specific role in the state's vast national betterment enterprise: they are envisioned as a means to modernize the Vietnamese space-economy by turning agrarian territories into areas for urban-industrial usage (Van Suu 2009a). They are also seen as the vectors of a new "urban civility" (*văn minh đô thị*), fit for the post-đổi mới era (Harms 2009, 2014a). As explained by Harms (2009, 183), urban civility campaigns in Vietnam have long sought to construct the moral parameters of the "civilized" or "cultured" person. More recently, these campaigns also championed the idea of "urban order" (*trật tự đô thị*) to mitigate unmodern urban forms and practices (e.g., self-built housing, street vending, the parking of vehicles on sidewalks, etc.).

It is nevertheless the third component of Vietnam's triptych of urban ideals, the so-called quality of urban synchrony (*đồng bộ đô thị*), that new urban areas ought potently to actualize. The Vietnamese term "*đồng bộ*," translated in this paper as "synchrony," combines two closely related ideas: "*đồng*," which refers to the action of bringing similar individual units together, and "*bộ*," which refers to the articulation of different elements so that they function as a whole, like soldiers forming an army or the built components of a machine.

The ideal of urban synchrony can be traced back to the earliest policy texts about NUAs and has since remained an important guideline in the state's discourse about this model of urban development. At the most basic level, this notion entails the compliance and compatibility of projects with official urban development plans. It also calls for the production of complete neighborhoods wherein housing areas are served by all the "technical infrastructure" (roads, energy and water provision networks, etc.) and "social infrastructure" (schools, clinics, public spaces) needed "to ensure a stable life and convenient living and working conditions for the people" (Hanoi People's Committee 2001). All of these components further need to be built in full, simultaneously, and on time. Moreover, synchronized projects need to have "efficient" and "sustainable" connections not only internally but also with the rest of the city (Ministry of Construction 2008b).

The language of urban synchrony put forth by the state is further relayed by developers. It regularly features in the promotional materials

Figure 1. First master plan of the Splendora NUA with caption "Vietnam's new sun rises from the west."
Source: Developers.

that they produced to advertise their projects to buyers. For instance, the promotional website of the Nghia Đô NUA emphasizes the "high value" of its "works and architectural space synchronization" (HICC1 2011). The North QL32 NUA is similarly marketed as a "different ideal living space . . . because it is a complete urban area with modernly synchronized technical infrastructure, social infrastructure, [and] landscape architecture" (Lideco 2016).

An Ideal City Away from the Existing City

As suggested by the above-cited ads, the notion of urban synchrony goes beyond the objective of developing functional urban environments by ensuring that the various parts and functions of NUA projects are built simultaneously and assembled like clockworks. Lurking behind these functional intentions is the promise of a reformed urbanity—a new (modern and civilized) city that will avoid the shortcomings and dysfunctions (or asynchrony) of the existing city. As promised in an advertisement for a large redevelopment project to the West of Hanoi called Splendora, NUAs will be like a "new sun" rising on Vietnam's urban future (see figure 1).

The promise of a new urbanity is expressed through implicit and explicit rejections of the urban conditions that prevail in the inner city and in unplanned peri-urban zones. In both developers' advertisements and state policies, NUAs' "modernist logics of planning, efficiency, order, and 'urban civility'" (Harms 2016, 21) are contrasted with the "other" urbanities of the inner city and its self-built edges, condemned as retrograde, uncivilized, and asynchronous. Already by the mid-1990s, Hanoi's planning authorities issued a document that specified how NUAs would avoid replicating the weaknesses of the existing vernacular city. To this end, this document required that new urban areas (a) be high-density neighborhoods but less so than the overcrowded city core, (b) develop infrastructure and green spaces (lacking in the inner city) that meet international planning standards, (c) have their roads entirely constructed by developers rather than by local inhabitants as in self-built urban zones, and (d) avoid pitfalls faced by the Soviet-inspired collective housing built prior to the reforms by carefully coordinating the integration of a diversity of functions within projects (Hanoi People's Committee 1995).

Another telling example of this approach is found in a 2008 circular (15/2008/TT-BXD) of the Ministry of Construction (2008a)

that stipulates what is an exemplar (*kiểu mẫu*) NUA. The listed criteria insist on the importance of a controlled aesthetic, calling for uniform, ordered, and harmonious buildings (art. 3a); aesthetically balanced green spaces and street trees (art. 2e); and regulated outdoor advertisement boards (in terms of positioning, size, and color) (art. 2i). All of these characteristics stand in obvious opposition to the supposedly unaesthetic vernacular built forms of the existing city with its hodgepodge of architectural styles, self-constructed billboards, awnings, and porch roofs.

Here again, developers echo state planners' discourse. The rejection of the existing city is a selling point in their marketing of NUAs. To give only one particularly telling example, an ad for the NUA Splendora states: "Our goal is to build a convenient new city for transportation with synchronous design; a distinction compared to the old-quarter, the center of Hanoi" (Splendora 2016). A few developers have in fact pushed this desire for distinction beyond negations of the vernacular Vietnamese city by promoting their projects as "Westernized" living environments. For instance, three projects on the city's southwestern periphery (respectively called Mỗ Lao NUA, Phu My-Dream Home, and the Goldsilk Complex) are marketed as constituting a "European space in the heart of Hanoi." The Splendora project mentioned above is similarly heralded by its developer as "on par with economic centers such as New York, a center of fashion and culture as Paris, a center for tourism and recreation as in Dubai or Sydney; a symbol of global life" (Splendora 2016).

In these examples, social and urban distinctiveness is bolstered by developers with images of sophistication and wealth, aspirations that dovetail neatly with the ideals of modernity and civility promoted by the state. However, rather than synchronizing the new planned environment with their milieu, these distinctive living environments generate a form of cultural disconnection, an aesthetic estrangement from the rest of the city. As Waibel (2006, 47) puts it: "The ambivalent wishes of simultaneous distinction from other societal groups and integration into a specific lifestyle or peer group are served by the new urban areas, which are developing into selective vanishing spaces within the city."

In these different ways, the NUA model is branded as the promise of a better urban future—one that reorders the existing city by negating it. In new urban areas, state and developers pledge, homogeneity will

organize, planning will supersede spontaneity, and civility will generate new lifestyles fit for a developed nation. Assessing whether this Vietnamese triptych of urban ideals is in fact realized by NUAs is a challenging task, especially given the vague and largely immaterial character of the Vietnamese notions of modernity, civility, and synchrony. As we will see in the next section, a portrait of Hanoi's ghost urban areas begins to delineate tangible scenes of asynchrony between the built form and these ideological commitments.

HANOI'S GHOST URBAN AREAS: PORTRAIT OF AN ASYNCHRONOUS CITY

Between 1994 and 2015, 252 NUA projects were approved on Hanoi's territory (see figure 2). The deployment of this model of urban development across the province was particularly intensive between 2003 and 2009. Nearly half of Hanoi's NUAs (129 projects) were approved during this urban property boom. Echoing the earlier experiences of other cities in developing Southeast Asia (e.g., Sajor 2003; Mera and Renaud 2000; Sheng and Kirinpanu 2000), Hanoi's boom was spurred by a combination of factors including years of sustained national economic growth, deregulation of the commercial banking sector, and the country's entry into the World Trade Organization, which was followed by massive private capital inflow into the country.

NUAs became attractive investment opportunities for foreign and domestic investors, as demonstrated by the large number of projects approved during the six years of the boom. However, when both domestic credits and foreign capital inflows suddenly dried up, in 2008–2009, investors and developers had no choice but to dramatically slow or scale down NUA projects. By the late 2009, the construction of many redevelopments had come to a full stop, leaving entire sectors unbuilt or with only bare-shell buildings.

The ghost urban areas of Hanoi are, in large part, the result of this property market bust. At the time of our survey, in the summer of 2016, about a third Hanoi's NUAs were still under construction while another half had yet to break ground. Within the remaining projects, a small subset (about thirty-four) could be considered completed. The rest were either under construction or, as is the case with the thirty-nine ghost urban areas portrayed in this section, had seen their construction halted and were standing idle. These stalled projects shed a crude light
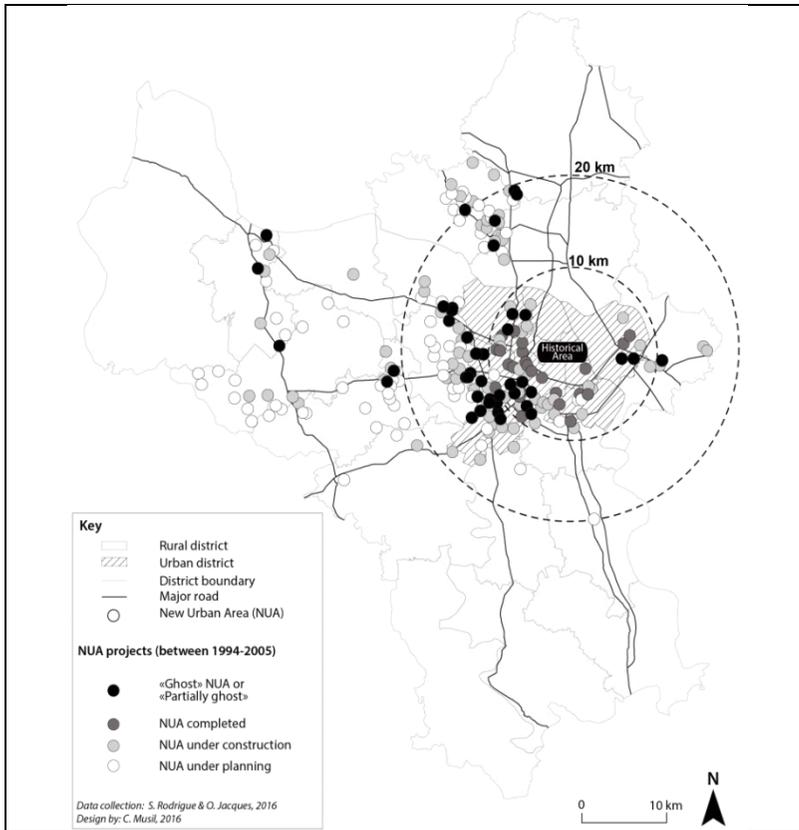
Figure 2. Thirty-nine ghost urban areas in Hanoi (black), amongst 252 NUA projects approved between 1994 and 2015. *Source:* Authors

on the ways in which a volatile economic environment derailed the state's ambitions to use planned property development as a means of modernizing the country's cities.

Inside Ghost Urban Areas: Phantom Materiality and Visible Absences

The uninhabited residential units in ghost urban areas are perhaps the most visible marker of the erosion of NUAs' intentions, as originally defined by state planning agencies. As shown in figure 3, by 2016, only 56 percent (or thirty-nine thousand) of all the residential units planned
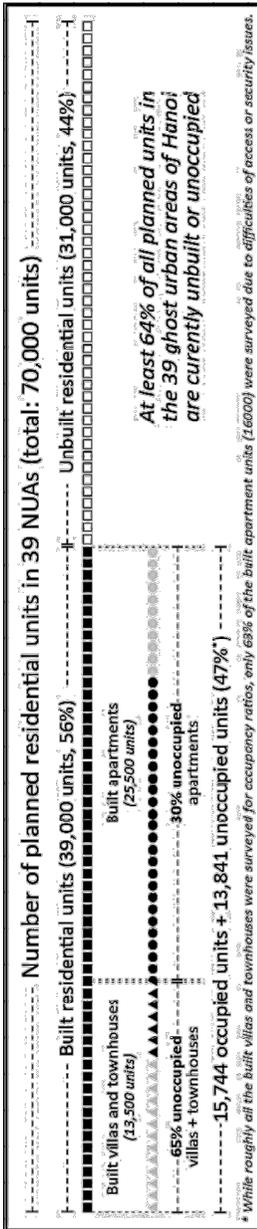
Figure 3. Planned versus built, and built versus occupied housing units (divided by housing types) in the thirty-nine ghost urban areas of Hanoi. *Source:* Authors.
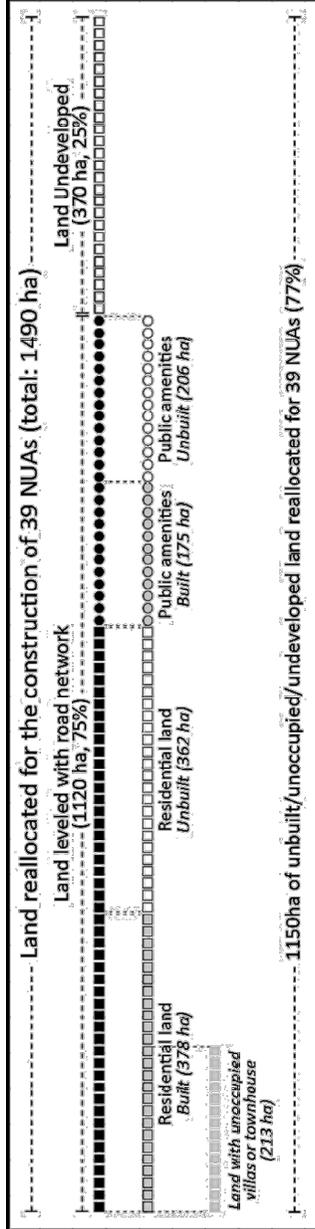
Figure 4. Developed versus undeveloped land (divided by housing types), built versus unbuilt residential land and public amenities. *Source:* Authors.

in ghost projects had been built. By then, 47 percent of these built units were unoccupied, a rate that reaches a confounding 65 percent if we only consider single family housing types. This represents a total of over nine thousand uninhabited townhouses and detached houses called "villas" in Vietnam.

These low occupancy rates can partly be explained by severe infrastructural deficiencies. Taken as a whole, 25 percent of the land allocated to Hanoi's ghost urban areas lack a proper road network (see figure 4), a situation that greatly limits access to them. Such infrastructural shortcomings match assessments by the domestic press according to which some NUAs have become isolated and disconnected from the rest of the city (Anh and *VnMedia* 2012). This situation is aggravated by the fact that two in every five ghost urban area projects are fenced, gated, or both. Other shortcomings plague portions of these projects where a functional road networks has been built. Most importantly, less than half of the land originally planned in these zones for nonresidential buildings and amenities (e.g., offices, schools, hospital, commercial areas, green spaces, etc.) was developed at the time of our survey.

These absences greatly reduce ghost urban areas' livability. A survey questionnaire administered to 141 residents shows that a vast majority deplore the lack of public services, facilities, and infrastructure in the NUA where they live. Many mentioned the discrepancy between the current situation and the developers' promises of complete and synchronized urban places, as advertised in master plans and promotional materials. Residents also resent the lack of public facilities in their vicinity and complain about having to rely instead on unofficial services and amenities such as small private kindergartens, noodle shops, or fresh vegetable stalls informally set up by neighbors in their houses or by temporary occupants and squatters in unoccupied buildings.

The situation in ghost urban areas echoes broader infrastructural shortcomings observed in the rest of Hanoi's NUAs. Here again, the reality of project implementation betrays the state's ideals and discourse about NUAs' unique ability to produce functionally "complete" urban environments. A critical assessment of the production of amenities and infrastructure in purportedly completed NUAs, conducted by the Association of Cities of Vietnam, concluded that "none ... have used land according to approved plans, especially with regard to basic [physical and social] infrastructure systems like schools, medical facilities, markets and space for community activities" (Vu 2011, 1).

Moreover, as experts interviewed for this project remarked, when social infrastructure do get built in NUAs, they often take the form of private and exclusive services instead of the public amenities originally planned. This situation is not only problematic for the residents of deficient NUAs but also for surrounding populations living in spontaneously urbanized zones, which state planners originally expected would be able to access the amenities and services featured in NUAs' master plans (interviews, Hanoi, December 19 and 21, 2016).

"Wasted" Productive Landscapes

Another major discrepancy between the state's territorial synchrony ideals and the actual implementation of NUAs concerns the land conversion process. Most of Hanoi's NUAs are built on large tracts of forcibly appropriated farming land situated in densely settled territories. We estimate that, over the last two decades or so, land-grabbing for these redevelopments has dispossessed approximately 130,000 households of access to croplands on which they held use rights. Taken alone, the ghost urban areas identified in this study occupy 1,490 hectares and have prevented approximately 7,400 households from having access to croplands. Yet, at the time of our survey, nearly 80 percent of this once productive agricultural territory was either leveled but unbuilt (937 hectares) or occupied by uninhabited housing units (213 hectares).

As the recent literature on land takings for urban development in Vietnam shows, agricultural land expropriations destabilize preexisting socioeconomic dynamics, leading in many cases to the impoverishment of the surrounding peri-urban populations (Van Suu 2009a, 2009b; DiGregorio 2011; Labbé 2015). For peasants, this situation is harder to bear when the project for which they lost their land stays undeveloped or uninhabited for extended periods, as is the case with ghost urban areas. Years after years, as emphasized in the domestic press, these people watch the rich and productive lands (*bờ xôi ruộng mật*) that they used to farm lying unused and yet they cannot bring it back into cultivation, if only temporarily, since developers purposefully level fields and destroy their irrigation systems as soon as they get their hands on them (VIR 2015; Đai doàn ket 2014). In the words of a Vietnamese blogger, ghost urban areas "are turning agrarian territories into dead land regions (*vùng đất chết*)" (Lê 2015).

In his work on Ho Chi Minh City, Erik Harms (2012, 2014b) has described the process of state-sponsored peri-urban land redevelopment

as "clearing the wastelands" (*khai phá đất hoang*). "Lands slated for development," he writes, "are imagined and described as empty wastelands even when they are already inhabited and being used for productive purposes" (Harms 2014b, 313). Bui et al. (2010) similarly argue that Vietnamese policies treat farmlands as an underused or low-yielding resource whose full value can only be unlocked by redevelopment into more profitable urban-industrial functions. As Labbé (2016, 154) puts it, the state's discourse on the need to make space for projects such as NUAs seeks to diminish "the harm done to the dispossessed . . . by suggesting [that their use of the land] was of little good anyway."

Planning authorities give away peri-urban agricultural land to developers and, in doing so, put an end to associated livelihoods in the name of functional efficiency and economic modernization. The official discourse on NUAs negates vernacular territorial dynamics by turning attention away from the needs of peri-urban population and, instead, toward the potentialities of purportedly empty spaces. But as demonstrated by the case of ghost urban areas, the reality of project implementation is at odd with this justificatory discourse. In an attempt to explain this problematic outcome, the next section discusses the capitalist market logic embodied by ghost urban areas and ways in which it eroded, co-opted, and ultimately stripped NUAs of their ability to materialize the state's ideals of urban modernity, civility, and synchrony.

SPECULATING ON URBANITY: THE FINANCIAL UNDERSIDE OF NUAS

Hanoi's NUAs are not only socially and spatially laid out as isolated (sometimes gated) enclaves of new urban expectations. They also feed into what we could call a market asynchrony that orients housing production away from the needs of the vast majority of Hanoi's households. To understand this situation, we need to look at the role of the rampant real estate speculation practices that have defined the urban property market which reemerged in Vietnam during the reforms. As we will see, hundreds of abandoned houses have become capitalist accumulation spaces—with hundreds of housing units being actively transacted by actors who will never live there. The material and psychological outcomes of these speculative practices pushes NUAs' urbanity further away from the state's ideals (see figure 5).

Figure 5. A street scene from the Lideco NUA (with 9.71 percent occupancy rate). Visible are two types of unoccupied units—bare shell (left) and plastered (right, background)—but also unbuilt fallow land at the forefront. The streetscape clashes with the imagined Westernized (European) environment promoted by the developers. *Source:* Authors.

Supply/Demand Asymmetry

In an environment marked by corrupted and lax planning controls (Labbé and Musil 2014), the central and local states in Vietnam have been, by and large, unable to control problematic developer behaviors. This includes a tendency to produce NUA properties meeting their own financial interests and those of property speculators rather than complying with planning policies or developing accessible or livable places for future user-occupiers. Three main problems have emerged in NUAs in general and in ghost urban areas in particular that demonstrate weak state controls during the implementation and commercialization of projects.

The first problem concerns the unaffordability of housing built in NUAs. A high-ranking official from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) estimates that only 20 percent of the urban population can afford 80 percent of the housing formally produced in Hanoi's NUAs (interview, Hanoi, July 5, 2013). Illustrating this gap, the average annual income per capita in Vietnam was about USD 1,900 in 2013, whereas townhouses in NUAs were selling at between USD 1,400 and USD 5,600 per square meter (Hồng and VietnamNet 2014). Property values in NUAs are so high compared to the financial capacities of households, a strategist active in the Vietnamese banking sector remarked, that they have remained unaffordable even during the major economic downturn of the late 2000s when they dropped by 40–50 percent (interview, Skype, June 16, 2013).

The second problem, closely connected to the first, concerns the type and size of housing units. Because they generated the highest and fastest return on investment throughout the 2000s, high-end properties and units with the largest square-footage came to dominate the formal property market. By the early 2010s, detached villas (120–800 square meters in size and selling for USD 150,000–4.5 million) and townhouses (50–200 square meters in size and selling for USD 70,000–1.1 million) proved to be completely disconnected from the average urban household's purchasing power. Moreover, at the height of the urban property boom (circa 2006–2008), planning authorities turned a blind eye on developers slashing down on essential elements of approved plans that could not be sold. A senior state planner interviewed for this study explained that these elements included access and internal roads, public spaces, and schools (interview, Hanoi, June 13, 2016).

The third problem, discussed earlier, relates to developers' tendency to delay considerably or even forsake the construction of amenities and infrastructure in NUA projects. The result can be glaring as is the case with three of Hanoi's most problematic land redevelopments, the Vân Canh (see figure 6), Lideco, and Geleximco NUAs, to which we shall come back below. These projects have very low occupancy rates and are plagued by major infrastructural shortcomings. They only have small access roads, their inner road systems are incomplete, and they offer few if any amenities. This is despite the fact that their housing production and sales (almost exclusively villas and townhouses) are well under way.

During the property market frenzy of the late 2000s, these problems had limited implications for buyers and developers. As remarked by a local real estate consultant, "buyers' expectations [then] were not oriented toward [actual] real estate products. Rather, homes were seen only as an investment opportunity" (interview, Hanoi, June 10, 2016). Both developers and speculators had lost sight of issues related to the quality of the housing and to the livability of the built environment produced, commercialized, and transacted. But when the property market began to cool down (circa 2009), Hanoi was left with dozens of NUAs offering only high-end and very large housing units completely at odd with the financial means and needs of the vast majority of urbanites looking for an actual place to live.

This is a grave issue not only due to the important housing needs that remain unmet in Hanoi but also in terms of the capital sunk into failed real estate projects. As emphasized in a recent governmental report, as of late Feburary 2014, unoccupied houses represented an estimated USD 4.3 billion on the national scale and USD 4 billion in Hanoi alone (*DtiNews* 2014). As our MoNRE informant emphasized, rather than participating in the strengthening of the national economy, these investments immobilized capital that could have supported industrial development while also wasting precious land resources (interview, Hanoi, July 5, 2013). Worse still, developers' massive defaults on loan repayments since 2009 have shackled state and commercial banks in Vietnam with bad debts that continue to drag down national economic growth to this day (see, for instance, IntellAsia.net 2015).

The Vietnamese state did try to fix these problems, generated both by property developers' behaviors and by the real estate crash of the late 2000s. Since 2009, the Hanoi Department of Natural Resources and Environment has been periodically investigating stalled NUA

Figure 6. An abandoned street of the Vân Canh NUA, with an 11.5 percent occupancy rate. *Source:* Authors.

None of these public measures have significantly resorbed the important problems posed by ghost urban areas in Hanoi. The state indeed seems unable (or unwilling) to control the implementation and commercialization stages of NUA development. This is despite the fact that developers, in implementing projects, obviously strip this model of urban development of much of its ability to attain the territorial cohesiveness and completeness objectives so prominent in the state's general planning orientations and discourse.

Speculation and the Rationalization of Asynchronous Places

The financial component of the asynchronous territorial development spurred by NUAs in general, and by ghost urban areas in particular, also bears upon the experience of actual owner-occupiers. This comes across clearly in exploratory interviews with residents in the three previously mentioned ghost urban areas of Hanoi. These interviews suggest that, rather than criticizing the absence of state-led implementation mechanisms, or simply the developers for failing to produce the ideal urban environments promised in policies and promotional material, residents tend to rationalize their situation by falling back on the exchange value of their property.

The thirteen owner-occupiers interviewed for this study bought their homes after 2011–2012. As discussed earlier, this period was marked by a significant housing price drop. Experts in the real estate sectors told us that speculative transactions then came to a near halt. For a rare moment in the post-reform period, most buyers of NUA properties in Hanoi then were households looking for an actual place of residence. In contrast to speculators, these future occupiers paid attention to developers' reputation and to their reliability in building NUAs in full and according to approved plans, and cared about the livability of neighborhoods. For instance, one interviewee complained about delays in the construction of a public space near his house. Another lamented the low occupancy rate in his NUA. Another still commented on the poor community life in his neighborhood (interviews, Geleximco NUA and Vân Canh NUA, November 19, 2016).

Contrary to our expectation, such critiques about incompleteness, deficiencies, and absences did not, however, figure very prominently in residents' answers. Obscuring obvious shortcomings of the neighborhoods they inhabit, owner-occupiers' preoccupations tended to concern the profitability of their housing investment. The very

urban ideals of modernity, civility, and synchrony seemed to have receded behind financial concerns, generating yet another form of asynchrony on the household scale.

Illustrating this, some owner-occupiers downplayed the discrepancy between the state's propaganda and the developers' marketing slogans, or the specific promises of complete living environments made by investors and the actual reality of inhabiting a ghost urban area. These interviewees told us that these problems are not that bothersome given that they bought their house at a "lower price." This discounted price, they explained, lowered their expectations toward their future place of residence. Moreover, many mentioned that since property values have gone up since they bought their property, they are, in the end quite content with it.

Another telling example of residents' investment-oriented mind-set emerged when we asked them about the uninhabited or abandoned (*bị bỏ hoang*) houses around them. Half of our interlocutors responded that they did not get what we were talking about or else disagreed with our use of the term "abandoned." Some of them in fact corrected us, stating that these houses were not abandoned at all since they had all been sold. This is an apparent submission to the logic of property speculation, a snub to the visible signs of abandonment: empty streets, grass growing on porches, and moss covering the unplastered walls of empty houses.

CONCLUSION

At the entrance of some ghost urban areas surveyed in this study, an ostentatious gateway marks the passage from the "existing city" to a supposedly new, modern, civilized, and synchronized urban enclave. Echoing the triptych of urban ideal so prominent in the state's discourse about NUAs, promotional billboards grace these gates that forecast the beautification processes to come, sketching the spacious contours of an imagined city with new urban functions and lifestyles. Similar to other new town projects that emerged elsewhere in developing East and Southeast Asia, NUAs disseminate the "images, dreams, fantasies and desires of urban modernity [that] have colonized the political imaginary [and] economic circuitry" (Sorace and Hurst 2016, 320). But in the case of ghost areas, these billboards and visions are now weathered; the contours have faded and so is the urbanity promised by state planning agencies.

The failed land redevelopments discussed in this paper may later come back to life, following state sanctions or the next real estate bubble. For now, however, these places reveal some of the problematic outcomes of the state's ideal city discourse with regard to NUAs, places where homeowners would enjoy a fully finished quality home, in a vibrant neighborhood, plugged on performing infrastructure, supplied with adequate services and spaces, and benefiting from easy connections to regional amenities. Few if any of Hanoi's NUAs have fully realized such promises, and ghost urban areas are a long way from there. Instead, these places suffer from a technical-material form of asynchrony: blocks after blocks of bare shell and unoccupied constructions, dirt roads that do not connect, and hectares of erstwhile agricultural land leveled but unused. Such severe infrastructural deficiencies undermine the imagined urban future promised by the state. In the meantime, a peasant visiting the land (and associated livelihood) forcibly taken away from him would only find a few arrivistes enjoying the "the fresh breathable air" of empty streets and the "peacefulness" of numerous abandoned houses (interview, Geleximco NUA, November 19, 2016).

By looking at NUAs through the lens of the state discourse about the ideal city they are supposed to actualize, this paper also revealed less apparent form of aesthetic and socioeconomic asynchrony. NUAs are conceived as enclaves of modernity, with formal and stylistic choices that explicitly negate historical and vernacular forms of Vietnamese urbanity. A strong speculative form of asynchrony is also sustained by another contextual negation: NUAs ignore the housing needs of urbanites, syncing instead with the financial interests of a highly volatile property market. In the late 2000s, the "property fever" was such that developers and speculators lost sight of the actual use value of homes and quality of urban environments to solely consider their exchange value and investment profitability.

NUAs' "ghostly" feel results from tensions at play when Hanoi's urban environment is speculated upon, when land transformation promises synchronize only with half-baked urban productions, when all shortfalls are still felt as spectral potentialities. Yet, the failures of urban synchrony are rationalized by residents who tightly hold onto their housing investment. Land productivity yields—in its goals, offer, scale, and shape—to the demands of a small economic elite. Urban ambitions toward modernity, civility, and synchrony are then draped under a broad, state-sanctioned, and socio-spatial climate of speculative risks and calculations, outweighing the necessary implementation of such notions as urbanity, community, culture, or livelihoods.

As "new" ruins, ghost urban areas epitomize the velocity of Asia's urban growth: they are prodigious and decadent, excessive and pragmatic, partly innovative but mostly manufactured.

Echoing this view, Antoine Picon (2000) opened his essay "Anxious Landscapes: From the Ruin to Rust" with an outlook on the peri-urban as a "territory of emptiness." Echoing the case of NUAs, mainly designed for speculative purposes, Picon highlights Le Corbusier's ambiguous distress in creating modern environments that would become objects of consumerism. The ghost urban area's incompleteness might in fact be seen as truly modern: functionalism's extreme rationality is reactualized in an environment of economic calculations. Yet the vital pulse of urbanity vanishes when lifestyles are rationalized and idealized, when urban ecologies are ventured and speculated upon, and when the resulting urban form is disconnected from its milieu.

In the meantime, the situation on-site offers a few moments of spontaneous spatial reappropriations: fallow lands turned into vegetable or herb gardens, street corners domesticated by tea stands, informal pathways connecting unfinished roads, or empty ground floors hosting casual billiard parlors and motorbike repair shops. In such scenes, the ghost urban areas of Hanoi appear, once again, to be haunted back by the very patterns of improvisation they vowed to eradicate. On a deeper level, these scenes confirm the urban asynchrony uncovered by this paper: idealistic, rationalistic, or speculative conceptions of space may fail to acknowledge the city as a space of fluidity and vibrations, a space where multiple unpredictable convergences are in fact the ones that sync with one another.✤

REFERENCES

Anh Đào and VnMedia. 2012. "Lạnh người những đô thị nghìn tỷ bị bỏ hoang" [The Chills of Trillions Spent in Abandoned Urban Areas]. Baomoi.com. July 13, 2012. http://vnmedia.vn/VN/bat-dong-san/tin-tuc/91_303082/lanh-nguoi-nhung-do-thi-nghin-ty-bi-bo-hoang.html.

Bui Duc Tinh, Tran Huu Tuan, Tran Phong, Bui Dung The, and Bui Thi Tam. 2010. "Chapter 19: Local Vulnerability and Adaptation to Extreme Climate Events along the Central Coast of Vietnam." In *Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction: An Asian Perspective*, edited by Rajib Shaw, Juan M. Pulhin, and Joy Jacqueline Pereira, 393–416. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Chi, Guanghua, Yu Liu, Zhengwei Wu, and Haishan Wu. 2015. "Ghost Cities Analysis Based on Positioning Data in China." arXiv preprint arXiv:1510.08505.

CIEM (Central Institute for *Economic* Management). 2009. *Vietnam Access to Resources Household Survey: Characteristics of the Vietnamese Rural Economy (2008 Survey)*. Hanoi: Statistical Publishing House.

Đại đoàn kết. 2014. "Lãng phí, hoang hóa bờ xôi ruộng mật: Bài 1" [Wasted and Fallow "Fat Land": Lesson 1]. April 9, 2014. http://www.tonghoidiachat.vn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=453:lang-phi-hoang-hoa-b-xoi-rung-mt—bai-1&catid=11:t-vn&Itemid=18.

Daily Mail Reporter. 2010. "The Ghost Towns of China: Amazing Satellite Images Show Cities Meant to Be Home to Millions Lying Deserted." *Daily Mail Online*, December 18, 2010. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1339536/Ghost-towns-China-Satellite-images-cities-lying-completely-deserted.html.

DiGregorio, Michael. 2011. "Into the Land Rush: Facing the Urban Transition in Hanoi's Western Suburbs." *International Development Planning Review* 33 (3): 293–319.

DtiNews. 2014. "Investors Rush to Lower Luxury House Prices." *DtiNews.vn*, April 9, 2014. http://dtinews.vn/en/news/018/34164/investors-rush-to-lower-luxury-house-prices.html.

Firman, Tommy. 2004. "New Town Development in Jakarta Metropolitan Region: A Perspective of Spatial Segregation." *Habitat International* 28 (3): 349–68.

Hanoi People's Committee. 1995. "Thông báo 80/1995/TB-UBND cuộc họp về quy hoạch xây dựng các khu phố mới tại thành phố Hà Nội" [Notice 80/1995/TB-UBND of Meeting on the Planning and Construction of New Neighborhoods in the City of Hanoi]. Hanoi.

——. 2001. "Quy định 123/2001/QD-UB những nguyên tắc về quản lý đầu tư xây dựng các khu đô thị mới, cải tạo, sửa chữa nhà ở trên địa bàn Thành phố Hà Nội" [Decision 123/2001/QD-UB on the Regulations on the Investment and Construction of the New Urban Areas, on Housing Renovation and Repair in Hanoi City]. Hanoi.

Harms, Erik. 2009. "Vietnam's Civilizing Process and the Retreat from the Street: A Turtle's Eye View from Ho Chi Minh City." *City and Society* 21 (2): 182–206.

——. 2012. "Beauty as Control in the New Saigon: Eviction, New Urban Zones, and Atomized Dissent in a Southeast Asian City." *American Ethnologist* 39 (4): 735–50.

——. 2014a. "Civility's Footprint: Ethnographic Conversations about Urban Civility and Sustainability in Ho Chi Minh City." *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 29 (2): 223–62.

———. 2014b. "Knowing into Oblivion: Clearing Wastelands and Imagining Emptiness in Vietnamese New Urban Zones." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35 (3): 312–27.

———. 2016. *Luxury and Rubble: Civility and Dispossession in the New Saigon*. California: University of California Press.

HICC1 (Hanoi Investment and Construction Joint Stock Company No. 1). 2011. "Khu đô thị mới Nghĩa Đô [PLEASE PROVIDE TRANSLATION]." Accessed November 19, 2016. http://hicc1.com.vn/duan/khudothimoinghiado.aspx.

Hồng Khanh and VietnamNet. 2014. "Biệt thự bỏ hoang: Không lối thoát" [Abandoned Villas: No Way Out]. SHS. August 26, 2014. http://batdongsan.vietnamnet.vn/fms/doi-song-do-thi/110297/biet-thu-bo-hoang--khong-loi-thoat.html.

IntellAsia.net. 2015. "Bad Debts Bedevil Vietnam Banks." IntellAsia. November 18, 2015. http://www.intellasia.net/bad-debts-bedevil-vietnams-banks-481169.

Jehan, Shahzadeh N., and Thanh Nga Luong. 2008. *Vietnam's Real Estate Market: Can It Sail Through the Capital Puzzle*. Beppu: Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.

Keeton, Rachel. 2011. *Rising in the East: Contemporary New Towns in Asia*. Amsterdam: Sun Architecture.

Labbé, Danielle. 2015. "Once the Land Is Gone: Land Redevelopment and Livelihood Adaptations on the Outskirts of Hanoi, Vietnam." In *Towards Balanced Growth: Alternative Development Models and Redistribution Mechanism*, edited by Mely Caballero-Anthony and Richard Barichello, 148–80. Singapore: Nanyang Technological University Press.

———. 2016. "Critical Reflections on Land Appropriation and Alternative Urbanization Trajectories in Periurban Vietnam." *Cities* 53:150–55.

Labbé, Danielle, and Julie-Anne Boudreau. 2011. "Understanding the Causes of Urban Fragmentation in Hanoi: The Case of New Urban Areas." *International Development Planning Review* 33 (3): 273–91.

Labbé, Danielle, and Clément Musil. 2014. "Periurban Land Redevelopment in Vietnam under Market Socialism." *Urban Studies* 51 (6): 1146–61.

———. 2017. "Les 'nouvelles zones urbaines' de Hanoi (Vietnam): Dynamiques spatiales et enjeux territoriaux." *Mappemonde*. September 2017. http://mappemonde.mgm.fr/author/danielle-labbe/.

Lê Hiếu. 2015. "Urban Areas without People in Hanoi." Zing.Vn. December 2.

Lideco. 2016. "Dự án KĐTM Bắc QL32 [PLEASE PROVIDE TRANSLATION]." Accessed November 19, 2016. http://lideco.vn/.

MacKinnon, Malcolm. 2011. *Asian Cities: Globalization, Urbanization and Nation-Building*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Mera, Kōichi, and Bertrand M. Renaud, eds. 2000. *Asia's Financial Crisis and the Role of Real Estate*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe.

Ministry of Construction. 2008a. "Thong tu 15/2008/TT-BXD ve viec danh gia cong nhan khu do thi moi kieu mau" [Circular 15/2008/TT-BXD on the Assessment of Model New Urban Areas]. Hanoi.

———. 2008b. "Vietnam Building Code: Regional and Urban Planning and Rural Residental Planning (QCXDVN 01:2008/BXD)." Hanoi.

Phillips, David R., and Anthony G. O. Yeh, eds. 1987. *New Towns in East and South-east Asia: Planning and Development*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Picon, Antoine. 2000. "Anxious Landscapes: From the Ruin to Rust." *Grey Room* 1 (Fall): 64–83.

Rodrigue, Sylvain. 2016. *Évolution des politiques de logement social vietnamiennes vers un programme plus accessible*. Montreal: Université de Montréal.

Roy, Ananya, and Aihwa Ong. 2011. *Worlding Cities*. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons.

Sajor, Edsel E. 2003. "Globalization and the Urban Property Boom in Metro Cebu, Philippines." *Development and Change* 34 (4): 713–41.

Shatkin, Gavin. 2017. *Cities for Profit: The Real Estate Turn in Asia's Urban Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Sheng, Yap Kioe, and Sakchai Kirinpanu. 2000. "Once Only the Sky Was the Limit: Bangkok Housing Boom and the Financial Crisis in Thailand." *Housing Studies* 15 (1): 11–27.

Shepard, Wade. 2015. *Ghost Cities of China: The Story of Cities without People in the World's Most Populated Country*. London: Zed Books.

Sorace, Christian, and William Hurst. 2016. "China's Phantom Urbanisation and the Pathology of Ghost Cities." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 46 (2): 304–22.

Splendora. 2016. "Khu đô thị Splendora—Nơi ước đến, chốn mong về [PLEASE PROVIDE TRANSLATION]." Accessed November 19, 2016. http://khudothisplendora.vn/vi-tri-du-an/.

Tran Hoai Anh. 2015. "Urban Space Production in Transition: The Cases of the New Urban Areas of Hanoi." *Urban Policy and Research* 33 (1): 79–97.

Van Suu, Nguyen. 2009a. "Agricultural Land Conversion and Its Effects on Farmers in Contemporary Vietnam." *Focaal* 2009 (54): 106–13.

——. 2009b. "Industrialization and Urbanization in Vietnam: How Appropriation of Agricultural Land Use Rights Transformed Farmers' Livelihoods in a Peri-Urban Hanoi Village?" Final Report of an EADN Individual Research Grant Project, EADN Working Paper 38.

VIR. 2015. "Ha Noi Urged Action on Idle Land." *Vietnam Investment Review*, June 29, 2015. http://www.vir.com.vn/ha-noi-urged-action-on-idle-land.html.

Vu Thi Vinh. 2011. "Đất công cộng trong các khu đô thị mới: Thực trạng và giải pháp" [Public Land in the New Urban Areas: Current Situation and Solutions]. Association of Cities of Vietnam, Hanoi. On file with authors.

Waibel, Michael. 2006. "The Production of Urban Space in Vietnam's Metropolis in the Course of Transition: Internationalization, Polarization and Newly Emerging Lifestyles in Vietnamese Society." *Trialog* 89 (2): 37–42.

Woodside, Alexander. 1998. "Exalting the Latecomer State: Intellectuals and the State during the Chinese and Vietnamese Reforms." *The China Journal*, no. 40 (July): 9–36.

Woodworth, Max D. 2012. "Frontier Boomtown Urbanism in Ordos, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region." *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 1 (1): 74–101.

Yooil, Bae. 2012. *Governing Cities without State? Rethinking Urban Political Theories in Asia: Urban Theory beyond the West; A World of Cities*. Edited by Tom Edensor and Mark Jayne. New York: Routledge.

Yung, Chester. 2014. "China's Ghost Cities to Get Spookier." *The Wall Street Journal*, May 16, 2014. http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/05/16/chinas-ghost-cities-are-about-to-get-spookier/.

_____

Olivier Jacques is a PhD student at the School of Architecture, McGill University. Send correspondence to the author at olivier.jacques2@mail.mcgill.ca.

Danielle Labbé is associate professor of Urban Planning at the University of Montreal where she holds the Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Urbanization. Send correspondence to the author at danielle.labbe@umontreal.ca.

Clément Musil is a trained geographer and urban planner affiliated to the joint research unit Architecture, Urbanism, Society: Knowledge, Education, Research (AUSser) hosted by the Paris Belleville Architecture School, France. Send correspondence to the author at musil.clement@gmail.com.