

# VIETNAM'S HYBRID URBAN LANDSCAPES: The Dream of Western Architects / Urbanists

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## ABSTRACT

The non-designed built environment has long been a fascination in Western-based theoretical discourse of architecture and urban design. The powerful sensation of barely controlled chaos that pervades the atmosphere of urbanity in the South has proven globally inspirational and challenges Western world's model of urbanization and modernization. This paper draws upon the particular case of Vietnam. It is premised upon the belief that there exists the possibility to embrace informal and/or illegal settlements and activities into a Vietnamese urbanity for the 21st century. Vietnam has the opportunity to develop an ambivalent urbanity – one where 'place culture' meets globalization. A balance can be struck between the forces of stability and the forces of mobility in the country's hybrid urban landscapes. Two very different but complementary elements of landscapes need to continue to develop in parallel – one established, maintained and governed by law and political institutions, dedicated to permanence and planned evolution; the other, the vernacular landscape, identified with local custom, pragmatic adaptation to circumstances, and unpredictable mobility/change. The informal and/or illegal elements within Vietnamese urbanity can become the *strategic* points to create such a balance. Examples in three secondary cities (Vinh, Hue and Can Tho) of Vietnam are explored for their respective qualities which undeniably tie the informal urbanity to 'genus loci' and suggest manners in which these hybrid landscapes can become a formal and legitimate part of future urban development.



## EXCERPT FROM THE TEXT

However, the no-man's-land, so common in Western mid- and high-rise housing estates is colorfully and productively animated at its base, where ground units are invariably converted into shops, restaurants and informal markets; (Figure1) sporting activities, meeting places, small husbandry and agricultural areas colonize the open space. Although these activities are informal and illegal, they are recognized as providing legitimate reconsideration in the planning of open space. The LA21 Vinh City Project (with HABITAT and the Post Graduate Center for Human Settlements, University of Leuven) is developing a series of strategies for the rehabilitation of the site that includes the formalization of such activities in open spaces as well as rebuilding balcony extensions with structural integrity. The informal and illegal spaces and programs developed by the inhabitants has become the base from which to redevelop this important site within a secondary city in the North of Vietnam.

