

INFORMATION

Science Talk: Urbanization and Community Space in Vietnam against the Context of Globalization

On April 3, 2009, the Talk on "*Urbanization and Community Space in Vietnam against the Context of Globalization*" was held in Hanoi by Sociology Institute and Vietnam Institute for Social Sciences, with the participation of Prof. Terry Mc Gee (British University, Columbia) and Prof. Mike Douglass (Center for Globalization Research, Zonal and Urban Planning School, Hawaii University, USA), together with many interested architectural experts, urban planners, sociologists and researchers. The Talk was intended to assist researchers and policy makers in designing, constructing green, clean and environment-friendly cities and urban regions, to succeed and promote the national central tradition, in accordance with the interests of the Vietnamese people in the context of global and local union.

Addressing the Talk, Prof. Mc Gee analyzed *the effects of some market economic factors on creating urban spaces in Vietnam and China*. In comparison of the context of market economic development and the course of urbanization in each country, it should be noted that Vietnam and China have the similarities, which are represented by economic growth rate, the rapid resettlement of the population from rural to urban areas and the increase in the

number of mega-urban regions. According to Prof. Mc Gee, the current urbanization process in Vietnam is lower than that in China. The development of urban regions on the one hand is the manifestation of the tendency towards industrialization, modernization and globalization that are taking place on a whole world scale and on the other, it also demands that the Government of each country has to face the development scenarios, which are full of challenges.

Regarding the three urban development, urbanization scenarios, in his speech, Prof. Mike Douglass brought up practical examples from countries of the Asia-Pacific region. In Japan, South Korea and Taiwan today, there are no more scenes of many farmers working on their farms nor many children going to school. It is expected that in the future, this situation would happen the same way in Vietnam, with a serious decrease in the rural population. The *three urban development scenarios* that the author proposed follow three different directions. First, *priority is given to economic development*: material facilities, infrastructure are attached with importance, poverty reduction is one of the basic objectives, marketized culture, people and community are restricted to a secondary role, even not regarded as subject matter in strategies for development. Second, on the contrary, *counting human and their spiritual and cultural life as the focus*, giving

prominence to the people's participation in the making of every politico-socio-economical, cultural policy. Third, *privatization in every field*. In some new urban regions, isolated living spaces just for a small part of the population are created, thus resulting in some sort of a new resident culture which is totally indifferent to the responsibilities required by society and with limited contacts with the surrounding society which is seen by them as troublous, insecure and full of complexities, this does not at all stem from the cultural tradition of the nation and is destroying the living space of a modern urban city in the very sense of this word.

Apart from that, at the Talk, the participants also discussed the model "Livable Cities" under the following conditions: 1) There are walkways for pedestrians (streets, pavements, alleys) unoccupied by vehicle parking, business stores, advertisements or public works; 2) There are areas designed for many purposes: walkways, small stores to meet daily life needs, bus stops, schools and parks; 3) Streets, roads designed with rows of trees or lawns; 4) Community and public open to community institutions and non-governmental organizations; 5) Public squares and parks of high quality; 6) Historical relic architectures under protection and visited; 7) Popularity and development of local architecture; 8) Streets, pavements with a large variety of locally made products selling stores; and 9) With recreational spaces for every age.

QUÝ AN

Workshop on "Dispute over Sovereignty in Eastern Sea: History, Political Geography and International Laws"

On March 17, 2009, the Workshop on "*Dispute over Sovereignty in Eastern Sea: History, Political Geography and International Laws*" was held in Hanoi by Institute for Foreign Affairs. For the purposes of gathering the intelligence of researchers from scientific centres, universities, independent scholars, in the angle of individual academic exchanges, multi-disciplinary approach to the aspects of history, international laws and relations in connection with the Eastern Sea situation in order to have uniform awareness and strengthen the knowledge as well as arrive at conclusions for proposed policies. The Workshop was the initial step in the framework of the Institute's Eastern Sea Research Program. Over 70 scholars, researchers of Vietnam, both at home and abroad, State and independent researchers were present at the Workshop. Opinions and speeches by the scholars were concentrated on the three main points as follows: 1) History of dispute processes over Hoàng Sa and Trường Sa Islands, and other waters in the Eastern Sea; 2) International laws and sovereignty disputes in the Eastern Sea; 3) The Eastern Sea and international relations in the Asia-Pacific region.

It was agreed by the scholars that the Eastern Sea issue cover three aspects: The Hoàng Sa issue, the Trường Sa issue, and the U-shaped borderline, also known as "cow's tongue line" as stated by China. 1909 (up to now, it's been exactly 100 years) was the year that

marked the commencement of the sovereignty dispute over Hoàng Sa Islands between Vietnam and China with the event the government of Guangdong-China assigned a small fleet to make an illegal survey of Hoàng Sa (Tay Sa) Islands and declared that Tay Sa was ownerless.

At the Workshop, many documents, proofs in relation with the islands of Hoàng Sa and Trường Sa under the sovereignty of Vietnam newly found and collected by Vietnamese researchers was on display. The majority of scholars believed that proofs of Vietnam's sovereignty over these islands have been available since the Nguyễn Dynasty. The ancient maps drawn by the very Chinese prior to 1909 all proved that Tay Sa and Nam Sa did not belong to China. The Chinese archeological group also discovered on Phu Lam Island (Hoàng Sa) proof for establishing sovereignty of Vietnam. In all China's documents, the names of Tay Sa and Nam Sa did not appear until 1909. Some Western books and newspapers confirmed Vietnam's hold of its sovereignty over Hoàng Sa Islands.

The "cow's tongue line" as brought forward by China was judged by the scholars to be legally groundless which clearly represented this country's ambition to monopolize the Eastern Sea. To settle the Eastern Sea issue, according to the scholars, there would be two options: to handle through jurisdiction or by negotiation. It's time that Vietnam has to allow for different plans, scenarios and bring forwards roadmap for substantial negotiations with China and relevant parties (in the

case of Trường Sa) about these islands. DSc.Nguyễn Bá Diễn, Director of Centre for International Law of the Sea and Maritime Law, Hanoi National University, stressed: *Preparing legal grounds is the prime and must be the main requirement!* Historical evidence, geographic evidence are also important yet they are just for reference. In addition, it was also laid as grounds by researchers that Vietnam should consider having acts on baseline in order to create a clear legal framework against which for any infringement whatsoever can handle easily.

On the basis of exchanging their straightforward and open points of view, the scholars brought forth the following specific recommendations:

- Vietnam's policy on the Eastern Sea must be placed in the overall policy on the comprehensive external policy, which also covers security, development and improvement of Vietnam's role and status. The Eastern Sea must be within the international and Asia-Pacific relations. China's behaviours, the Sino-USA, Sino-ASEAN, Sino-Taiwan relationships must be kept under supervision.
- Sufficient legal documentation regarding this issue must be made available for political struggle, propaganda, negotiation, and as appropriate, for trial at International Court.
- The National Assembly should adopt law on the sovereignty over Hoàng Sa, Trường Sa. The Government should have a comprehensive maritime strategy that covers different areas.

- There should be four *-izations* in the dispute issue in the Eastern Sea, namely *Socialization, Openization, Internationalization, and Non-sensitization*.

- Struggling to safeguard Vietnam's sovereignty over Hoàng Sa, Trường Sa Islands, Eastern Sea on the foundation of the two strengths, namely nation (the great national united bloc both at home and abroad) and time (international laws, Vietnam's justice).

Additionally, the scholars noted that research work should be promoted, capacity of the staff of sciences of Eastern Sea improved, and scholarships granted to researchers to go to study abroad. Propagating and educating young generations about the Eastern Sea; fostering patriotic spirit and will to safeguard of the nation's sovereignty of the coming generations, regarding this as an essential strategy for safeguarding our sovereignty over the Eastern Sea.

By the end of the Workshop, it was expressed by many views that there should be more similar workshops to be held so that large circles of scholars may make more contributions to safeguarding the country's sovereignty in general and to researching and handling the maritime border issue in particular.

PHẠM VŨ

Vietnam's economy is holding better in the economic slowdown, challenges remain ahead

The one-day mid-year informal Consultative Group (CG) meeting for Vietnam was held on June, 8, 2009 in Buon Ma Thuôt, with donors expressing their satisfaction with the Government's

handling of the recent economic turbulence, and vowing their continued support to Vietnam so that the country can come out of the economic crisis in a stronger position.

At the meeting, the Government and donors jointly reviewed Vietnam's recent macroeconomic orientations and policies and the social impacts of the recent economic slowdown on the society. They also heard reports from the Vietnam Business Forum held prior to the mid-year CG. In the afternoon, the delegates reflected on the report from the Anti-Corruption Dialogue, discussing the importance of good governance and anti-corruption efforts. Future challenges to Vietnam with regard to climate change, as well as how to improve aid effectiveness, were also on the agenda of the meeting.

Deputy Prime Minister Phạm Gia Khiêm opened the meeting by taking stock of the implementation of the government's recent stimulus package, commenting on its impacts on the economy, and the challenges from the domestic and international environment. The Deputy Prime Minister briefed the donors on the current situation of poverty in Vietnam amidst the economic slowdown, and called on the donors to provide further support. *"I would like to ask donors to pay attention to the fact that due to the economic difficulties, many households, who have escaped poverty, now face the risk to poverty relapse, and that erodes the efforts that the donors, the Government and the Vietnamese people have exerted so far."*

Minister of Planning and Investment, Võ Hồng Phúc, provided an update on

socio-economic developments so far this year, and drew attention to the significance of the venue of the meeting. *"The fact that the Mid Year CG meeting is organized in Buôn Ma Thuột this year shows not only the Vietnamese Government's determination to accelerate a sustainable economic and social development throughout the country, it also shows our hope that the donors will make strong contributions to the development of the Central Highlands, where the economy remains underdeveloped, lives of ethnic minority communities stays hard, and the poverty rate is still high".*

In her opening speech, Ms. Victoria Kwakwa, the World Bank Country Director noted that *"times of difficulties and challenge are also the time of unique opportunity. We believe that the ongoing economic downturn does indeed provide such a unique opportunity for Vietnam. The crisis has highlighted where some of the weakest links in the country's socio-economic development lie. Vietnam has the opportunity to boldly address these weaknesses and turn them to strength, improve the resilience of the economy and position the country for even stronger and more inclusive growth in a global environment that is increasingly competitive and prone to instability".*

MACROECONOMIC MANAGEMENT

Delegates noted that Vietnam faces various challenges brought about by the sluggish global economic situation. Although there are signs that the situation is bottoming out, the

Government was encouraged to pay close attention to the developments in the national and global economy.

"The IMF notes that Vietnam is weathering the current global crisis relatively well" said Mr. Ben Bingham, the IMF Senior Resident Representative. However, some adjustments in policies were needed to preserve macroeconomic stability. In addition to tightening monetary policy to rein in credit growth and provide greater support to the Dong, the IMF stressed the need for the government to agree with the National Assembly on a revised fiscal plan for 2009 *"one that addresses concerns that the government financing requirements be contained to levels consistent with maintaining macroeconomic stability."*

Delegates also encouraged the Government to use the forthcoming Law on the State Bank, the Law on Credit Institutions, and the State Budget Law to advance reforms that will modernize monetary and fiscal management in Vietnam, as well as upgrade bank supervision.

"With some positive signs both globally and in Vietnam, we note that there is optimism that the worst period is over", said ADB Country Director to Vietnam, Mr. Ayumi Konishi. *"Macroeconomic stability and acceleration of reforms including that of SOEs will lead to greater confidence, which in turn will mitigate adverse impacts of the global economic downturn on Vietnam,"* he talked.

Delegates commended the Vietnamese Government to protect its efforts for macroeconomic stability, paying

particular attention to alleviating the economic burden on the poor and other vulnerable group. Mr. Sakaba Mitsuo, Japanese Ambassador remarked: *“In this connection, it was appreciated that the Government of Vietnam included in its economic stimulus package measures to strengthen social security, along with those for economic growth”*.

VIETNAM BUSINESS FORUM

Reporting on the outcomes of the Vietnam Business Forum (VBF), Mr. Nguyễn Văn Lan, from the International Finance Corporation, reminded participants that the business community remains committed to investing in Vietnam, but also expresses concern over the legal framework, which still lacks details and clarity. *“The business community,”* Mr. Lan added, *“requests to be better and more timely consulted in the drafting of legal framework governing the business climate in the future”*.

SOCIAL IMPACTS OF THE ECONOMIC SITUATION

Delegates positively noted the Government’s efforts to mitigate the social impacts of the economic slowdown, but also said that more was needed in the case of vulnerable groups. They also stressed the importance of reliable and timely data, for instance from regular labor force surveys, which would support better targeted policy responses.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator, Mr. John Hendra stressed the importance of data collection for policy making. *“One of the things that*

the economic crisis has already shown is the real need for enhanced data collection and information systems in Vietnam to better monitor the social impacts of the economic crisis, and how it is impacting specific groups, such as women, children, ethnic minority and migrant workers. This kind of data is essential to ensure that policy responses are evidence-based and appropriate.”

Meanwhile, the DFID Chief Representative to Vietnam, Ms Fiona Lappin, welcomed the government’s efforts towards a better targeted, more inclusive and more streamlined social protection system. However given the problems facing the poor, and migrant workers, she *“urged the Government to bring forward a long term social protection system backed up by regular, good quality data and analysis.”*

ANTI-CORRUPTION

The Ambassador of Sweden, Mr. Rolf Bergman, said that the most important and efficient way to fight corruption is to promote transparency and accountability throughout Government processes. *“Transparency and access to information are most needed for an efficient use of resources and good results.”*

The Ambassador also emphasized the need to translate a vision into practice. *“The question is how to bring the Anti-corruption Law and the Anti-corruption Strategy into the life of each government officials, civil servant and ordinary citizen still needs to be addressed,”* he said.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The government and development partners agreed that climate change will pose new threats to the well-being of the Vietnamese population, especially for people living in low-lying and coastal areas. *"We commend the government on the measures taken to ensure the implementation of the National Target Program to response to climate change,"* said Mr. Peter Lysholt Hansen, Ambassador of Denmark. He also urged the government to *"start 'climate proofing' of investments, to publicize the climate scenarios models and to develop a climate change mitigation plan"*, used by Government.

HARMONIZATION AND AID EFFECTIVENESS

Vietnam's development partners congratulated the Government on its continuing commitment to improving the effectiveness of aid.

The Australian Ambassador, Mr. Allastar Cox, the lead discussant on development aid effectiveness, said *"The global economic crisis brings into focus how important it is to effectively use available resources, including ODA."* Mr. Cox added that *"the development partners welcome the Government's*

preparedness to take the aid effectiveness agenda to a new level that is appropriate to Vietnam's imminent middle-income status and in the context of the next SEDP 2011-2015."

In the concluding speech, Minister of Planning and Investment, Mr. Võ Hồng Phúc expressed appreciation of the sincere, frank and open dialogue of the donor community towards issues practical to Vietnam's development, especially against the background of the negative impacts from the global financial slowdown and economic crisis, the challenges of climate change and Vietnam's transition toward middle income status, and how to improve the effectiveness of ODA projects. The Minister noted that *"the Government highly appreciates ODA resource, considering it a stimulus measure in the crisis. The government is committed to provide enough counter funding, as one Dong in counterpart funding attracts four Dong in ODA."*

The delegates to the Mid Year Consultative Group Meeting 2009 noted the efforts by the Dak Lak provincial authorities and people in contributing to the success of the meeting.