

Privatized vs. Community-Based Neighborhood Governance in the Context of Economic Renovation in Vietnam: Case Study of Ho Chi Minh City

Le Thi Thu Huong¹

Abstract

Rapid economic growth, as a result of economic reforms, has commonly brought unintended outcomes of increasing socio-spatial differentiation and unequal neighborhood development in post-socialist cities. Through two case studies in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam each corresponding to a residential area with adverse socio-economic conditions, this paper argues that since economic renovation began in the country in 1986, coupled with the housing segregation in urban development, neighborhood governance has become increasingly differentiated with the emergence of the private sector and more active communities as well as civil society organizations in dealing with neighborhood issues. Their level of involvement and effectiveness in governing the neighborhood depends on the background of the communities and the loosening role of local government. Although more privatized neighborhood governance brings better quality to urban neighborhoods in association with better socio-economic conditions for the residents, the level of the residents' participation in neighborhood governance and the sense of community in such cases is weaker than that in the case of a community-based approach, which results in poorer neighborhood conditions due to the lower socio-economic profile of the residents.

Keywords: economic renovation (*Doi Moi*), housing segregation, neighborhood governance, private developer, local government, community, civil society organization.

1. Introduction

Transition from centrally planned to market-oriented economy, in the context of globalization, has increasingly affected the scene of urban development in transitional countries (Wu, 2001; Blinnikov et al., 2006; Stoyanov and Frantz, 2006). Although the experience of so-called transition economies has been diverse, the tendency towards increasing spatial polarization has become more visible as sharpened urban fragmentation takes place in post-socialist cities (Kovacs, 1998; Ruoppila and Kahrik, 2003). In parallel with economic reforms, changes also took place in the housing sector with a move towards privatization and commercialization (Clapham, 1995; Daniell and Struyk, 1997; Wang and Murie, 1999), in governance and institutions towards decentralization of power and private property rights (Howell, 1994; Palda, 1997) in addition to enhancing grassroots participation in decision-making (Jones and Xu, 2002; Mattner, 2004).

¹Dr. Le Thi Thu Huong obtained a Ph.D. in Urban Environmental Management from Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand. Currently she is working as a Lecturer in the Department of Architecture, Montfort Del Rosario School of Architecture and Design, Assumption University, Thailand.