

URBAN PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN HCMC



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1. DETERIORATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY IN HCMC

HCMC is the most populous city in Vietnam and one of the most populous cities in Southeast Asia, its population of over 4.3 million people in 1993 increased to nearly 5 million people in 1995. On its area of 2,090.3 km², the average population density is 2,300 people/km². In inner city particularly, this figure increases to 20,000 people/km². In certain districts such as 4, 5, 8 and 11, this figure reaches 40,000 or 50,000 people/km². In short, the pressure of population on the environment is high.

HCMC is one of the most important economic center of the nation producing around 30% of national industrial output. It is also a trade, transportation and communication center of the South and has diplomatic and trade relations with surrounding countries, so its traffic is very heavy while its infrastructure hasn't been developed compatibly. Fast urbanization and lively economic activity pose a threat to the people's life and health. It's the alarming pollution of the environment of HCMC. This situation could be outlined as follows:

1. Urban wastes

Urban wastes include waste water from households, factories...flowing into canals and rivers; hazardous wastes from the city life; and smoke from both households and factories. The ambient and indoor air is polluted seriously. Particularly, in present living conditions, most families use wood, coal and oil as fuels so

the level of indoor pollution is high and affects the health of women and children. This problem however hasn't become the focus of attention yet.

2. City traffic

In HCMC, the public transport means are poor. They are mainly old buses, motortrikes, tricycles, etc. that couldn't meet the demand of the people. Most city residents have to choose motorbike or bicycle as their principal means of transportation.

The network of roads in HCMC weren't developed in accordance with the growth of population and vehicles. In HCMC at present there are some 900,000 vehicles, around 800,000 of which are motorbikes. These vehicles consume some hundred thousand tonnes of petrol every year.

The above - mentioned facts along with poor traffic control lead to an increasing number of road accidents and traffic congestion which caused noise and air pollution. Generally, the "city-life illness" tends to increase while city beauty and the people's way of living tend to be downgraded.

3. Quality of life

At present, HCMC economic growth is of the highest rate in the country, the per capita income of HCMC residents is around US\$500 a year. However, there are some 30,000 slummy houses and flats along the banks of canals and rivers. These are low - income areas lacking of basic infrastructure (water supply, drainage, garbage - collecting system, etc.)

People living here are both victims of pollution and polluters who made the canal system of the city blocked and dirty.

In upper - income areas, in spite of better infrastructure and hygienic conditions, pollution takes another form. These areas are medleys of construction models, shop windows, billboards which form a chaotic space and cause uncomfortable feeling for residents and tourists. This problem however hasn't attracted enough attention yet.

II. URBAN PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Urban environmental management has become a must for all cities in the world. As for HCMC, because of its deteriorated environmental quality, so the task of studying and implementing the environmental management is what we should give a lot of attention to.

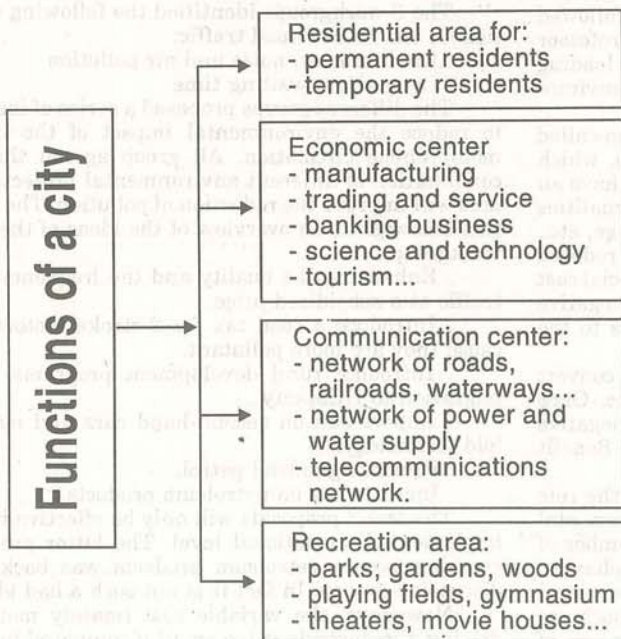
A town isn't only an economic system, but also an ecosystem. As an economic system, it is crowded with producing, distributing and trading activities. In its operation, the economic system releases a lot of wastes into the environment to such an extent that it is beyond the self-regeneration ability of the environment, that is all natural conditions of the environment are polluted at different degrees and we should study and repair the damage.

As an ecosystem, a town includes both organic and inorganic substances, both natural and artificial things. In its course of development, the ecosystem is affected by both

natural and social laws. A healthily-developed city can't be without natural things such as rivers, canals, green plants, birds and other animals, etc. If the economic system with its wastes causes damage to the environment in which the people live, the illness and death rate will increase. So in town planning we should respect the biological viewpoint and grasp the basic concept of interrelations between natural and artificial things.

The above-mentioned analyses show that we can't control the growth of a city by reducing it to a mere administrative unit and paying no attention to the environment. If we want to develop HCMC sustainably, we have to maintain interrelations between the economic system and the ecosystem. Moreover, the development of HCMC should be in harmony with the rest of the country which is considered as a complete whole.

Town planning is currently considered as one of meaningful measures to control the urban environment effectively. Town planning aims at fulfilling basic functions of a city: a residential area, economic center, communication center and recreation area.



Zoning is the main task of town planning, that is dividing a city into zones of different functions. Generally, a city is divided into the following areas: residential area, industrial area, transportation area, recreation

area, shopping area, waste treatment area. Thus each area has its own function and they are usually separated by clumps of trees.

In HCMC at present, functional areas aren't divided up. Any area could have many functions. This situation makes town planning very difficult. On the other hand, there are fewer parks, gardens, woods or lakes in HCMC than other 5 - million cities in the world (international standard is from 15 to 20m² of green plant for a resident). And there is no waste treatment factory in HCMC while the environmental quality has gone from bad to worse. Reparation for environmental damage will cost us lots of money and time.

III. CONCLUSION

In order to protect the environment in HCMC more effectively, we have to understand and take the following measures:

1. To study and make plan to build waste water treating areas which are near to industrial estates (such as Thủ Đức, Nhà Bè, Hóc Môn) or in a suburb. Building such an area is very costly but it is a must for a modern city. Furthermore, all slums along rivers and canals should be moved, and all rivers and canals should be dredged regularly.

2. To move all factories, especially ones causing pollution, away from residential areas and separate them with appropriate clumps of trees.

3. To improve the road network:

building freeways and beltways, banning trucks from crossing the city center. Moreover, all vehicles used in the city should meet some required standards (no exhaust fumes and noise, usage of unleaded petrol, etc).

4. To expand the area of green tree in the city: protecting seaside forests in Cần Giỏi district, planting trees along canals, expanding existing gardens into parks or woods, protecting lakes in suburb and developing lakeside resorts.

5. The city center needs a face-lift: the architecture of all buildings in there should be modern and have national characteristics. The city center should be an area for shopping, walking or supplying services with a lot of greenery.

6. Because a city is both an economic system and an ecosystem, its development should harmonize well with the environment, that is, the city should have interrelations with the rest of the country. So, in order to carry out urban environmental management in HCMC, we should also pay attention to the environmental conditions of surrounding provinces. Only protecting the environment in coordination with other provinces ensures us success because the environment can't be limited to administrative boundaries■

