



## 2.1

The ongoing expansion of Hanoi puts a strain on the current road structure. Here, a secondary street in the Ba Dinh district is being widened and upgraded to become an important link in the main street structure. Entrance to Duong Lieu Giai street, Hanoi

“We live in a moment of history where change is so speeded up that we begin to see the present only when it is already disappearing.”

*R. D. Laing*

## Chapter 2

### Hanoi - a city in transition

#### Short history

Hanoi is the capital of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). In the year 2010 Hanoi will celebrate 1000 year anniversary as city. The oldest part, called the 36 Old Streets Quarter (today actually consisting of 50 streets) in the centre of Hanoi, is dominated by the Chinese influenced store-front houses. According to feudal law, houses were not allowed to be higher than the Royal Palace and were thereby limited to two storeys. Also to avoid taxes based on the width of the street frontage most of these plots are narrow, but instead very deep.<sup>12</sup> The widths of the street frontages are still quite small but today most of these houses are 3-6 storeys high.

12 Florence, M. & Jealous, V., 2003, *Vietnam* (7th ed.), Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, Victoria, Australia



#### 2.2

The streets of Hanoi was once populated only by rickshaws and pedestrians. This scene has changed radically the past few decades, when motorbikes have become affordable to a majority of households.

Hang Dieu street, Hanoi - 1940's

The refurbishment of old, run down areas and the development of new housing areas in Hanoi, are mainly carried out by a few state owned companies. Among the largest ones are Vinaconex, Song Da and HUD.

**These developers have four tasks:<sup>18</sup>**

- Handle and manage the planning of large-scale housing projects.
- Handle the relocation and compensation for households already residing in areas where the new projects are being developed.
- Handle the implementation of projects including infrastructure, housing and service buildings.
- Handle the selling of residential lots and apartments.

The city served as capital of French Indo-China between 1902 and 1953. As reminiscence from this era, Hanoi still has its French boulevards and houses initially built for the French officials. Parts of Hanoi are also built up using the grid system of streets introduced for the New Quarter (also called the French Quarter). During this colonial era shops, offices, official buildings but most of all villas, placed in the midst of a plot, were built in this quarter.<sup>13</sup>

In 1955 North Vietnam met an Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement with the Soviet Union. Official buildings, parks and housing areas were then constructed with the aid of Soviet engineers, architects and planners. The design on many of the official buildings and monuments are what can be referred as Modern Constructivism. Pre-fabricated apartment blocks came into use when large housing areas were built. The Soviets reinforced the influence the French introduced for Hanoi's spatial planning, with emphasis on formal design, and Hanoi came to be a symbol of the 'indestructible Soviet-Vietnamese friendship'.<sup>14</sup> Beginning in late 1980's liberal reforms started to open up the country to the west and foreign investments poured in. In 1994 USA finally lifted the economic embargo that had been in place since the 1960's. Among other things, this gave Vietnam access to loans from the International Monetary Fund.<sup>15</sup> The Vietnamese economy has consequently improved greatly the past few decades. The economic growth has been among the highest in the world, estimated at 7.2% of the year 2003. This has also affected people's private economy. The incidence of poverty (according to United Nations definition, less than one USD a day to live on) has decreased from 58% in 1990 to 29% in 2002.<sup>16</sup>

The population of Hanoi is estimated to increase from 2.7 to 3.9 million inhabitants in a ten year period. This population growth together with people's wish for improved housing standards, increase the demand for new housing in Hanoi.<sup>17</sup> To meet these demands many new housing projects are planned in Hanoi and more than 50 larger projects are under development.

In Hanoi, four main categories of housing development can be seen:

- Restoration of the central quarters
- Redevelopment of the 1960-1980's quarters
- Development of New Urban Areas
- The Hanoi New Town project

<sup>13</sup> Duy Luan, T. & Schenk, H., 2000, *Shelter and living in Hanoi*, Cultural Publishing House, Hanoi, Vietnam

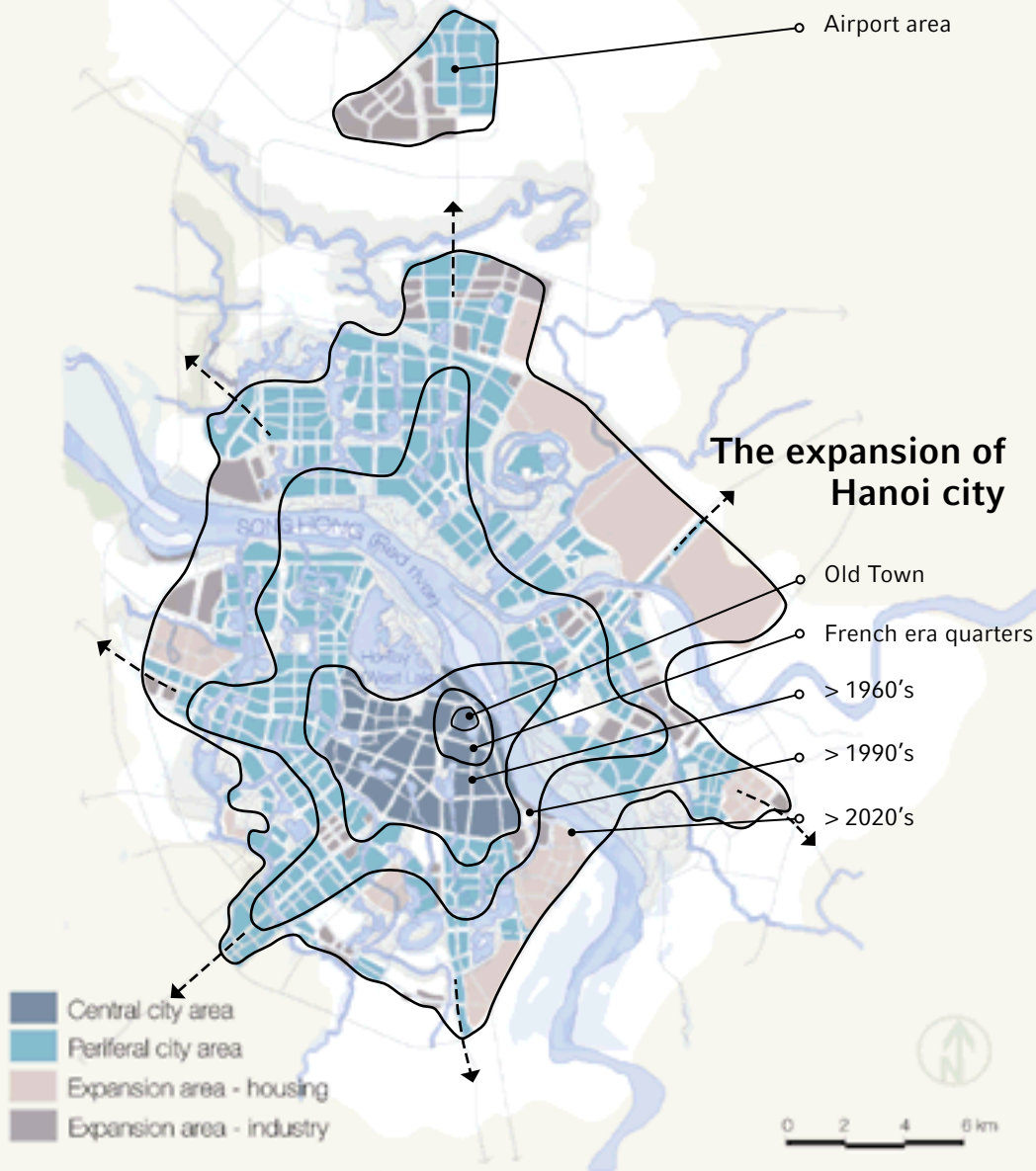
<sup>14</sup> Logan, W. S., 2000, *Hanoi - Biography of a City*, University of New South Wales Press Ltd, Sydney, Australia

<sup>15</sup> Florence, M. & Jealous, V., 2003, *Vietnam* (7th ed.), Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd, Victoria, Australia

<sup>16</sup> SIDA Country Report 2003, <http://www.swedenabroad.com/SelectImage/9154/CountryReport2003.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Duc Thang, D., 2001, *New Urban Area Projects – A Major Solution for Housing Development in Hanoi*, HUD, Hanoi, Vietnam

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



### 2.3 (above)

A group of Vinaconex workers on their way to the construction site of the 34-storey building which temporarily will hold the record for being the capital's tallest building. Trung Hoa, Hanoi.

A 65-storey skyscraper has recently been approved by the Hanoi government. It will be built by a foreign consortium comprising France's Coralys SA and Germany's LOHR Industries. The building's location will be in the Lieu Giai-Dao Tan Intersection adjacent to the five-star Hanoi Daewoo Hotel.

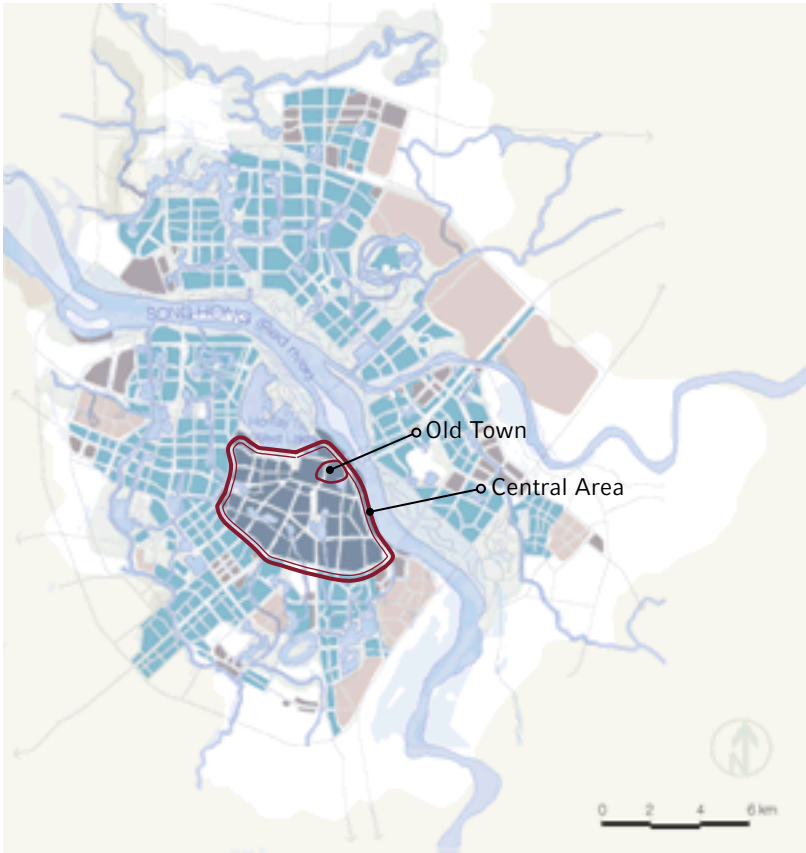
### 2.4 (left)

Map over greater Hanoi showing current and planned land use, as stated in the comprehensive plan for Hanoi 2020. The map also shows an approximated display of how Hanoi city has sprawled during the past century.

# Restoration of Old Town and the Central Area

Limited housing development is planned to take place inside the city core. According to the Master Plan of Hanoi, development within the central area is restricted because of high cultural values, and preservation must be taken into consideration.<sup>19</sup> In the central area of Hanoi, many of the houses are privately owned and therefore the restoration is taking place on a small scale, building by building, when sufficient means are available.

2.5  
Map over Hanoi, showing the location of the Old Town and the Central Area



2.6 (below)  
The central area of Hanoi is full of historical remnants from both pre-colonial and colonial eras. The recently restored Hanoi Opera House was built 1911 during a period of French governance.



19 The Architectural Research Institute in Hanoi, 1999, *Preserving Hanoi's Architectural And Landscape Heritage*, Construction Publishing House, Hanoi, Vietnam



### 2.7 - 2.9 (left & below)

Febrile construction activities can be seen taking place all over the central area of Hanoi. The lavish 'neo-colonial' style seems to be preferred by many house owners. The ground floors of the buildings are either used for parking vehicles or for business purposes; or both.



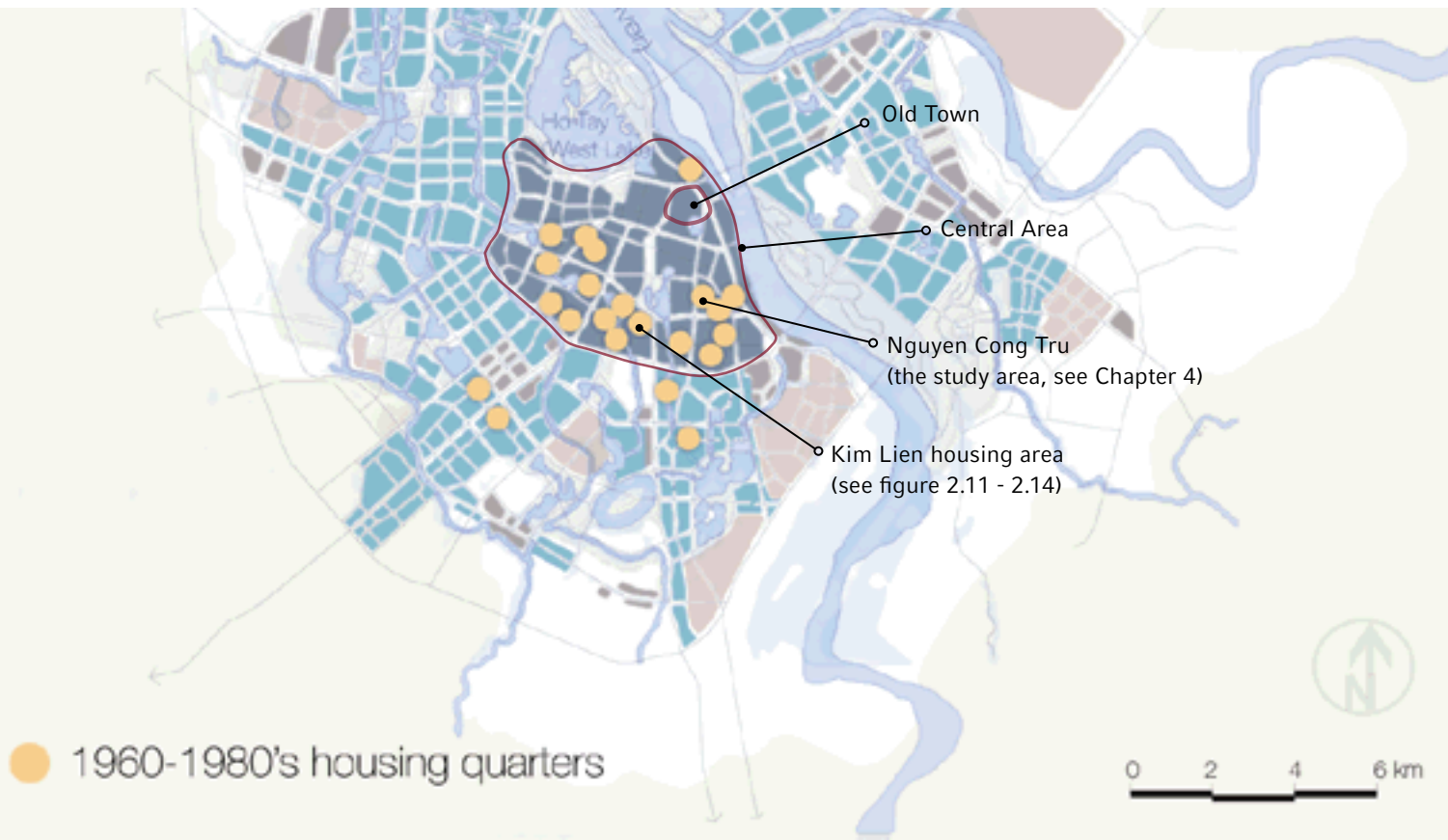
## Redevelopment of the Soviet model apartment areas

Many of the housing complexes built during the 1960's – 1980's are in a poor state of repair due to deficient maintenance but also due to inadequate building standards. These projects focused more on the construction of housing and not on infrastructure requirements. The infrastructure in these areas is often strained causing problem regarding water supply, electricity, drainage, roads and sanitation. One other issue is that the rent is extremely low and was sometimes set as low as one percent of an employee's salary. This has left very little over for maintenance and the buildings have deteriorated very quickly since the date of construction.<sup>20</sup>

Extensive refurbishment of these housing areas is therefore required in a near future. They face either large and costly upgrading or a total replacement with more modern types of housing. This is needed both to provide

20 P. Boothroyd & P. X. Nam (Editors), 2000, *Socioeconomic Renovation in Viet Nam - The Origin, Evolution, and Impact of Doi Moi*, International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada

2.10  
Most of the Soviet model apartment areas are located within the central area of Hanoi



good housing for an increasing population but also due to increased payment ability and the demand people have for higher housing standards. These large refurbishment projects are complex since the areas in question are densely populated and a temporary relocation of people is often necessary during reconstruction. An interesting example of this is the housing area Kim Lien. This area is at the moment undergoing extensive redevelopment where the old 4-5 storey structure is being replaced by 11-12 storeys high buildings.



(below & right) 2.11 - 2.14

The housing area, KTT Kim Lien, with the Soviet model apartment buildings's so typical yellow ochre nuance, is here being refurbished. At ground floor level the new buildings get shop openings that front the Pham Ngoc Tach Street.

KTT Kim Lien, Hanoi



## Development of New Urban Areas

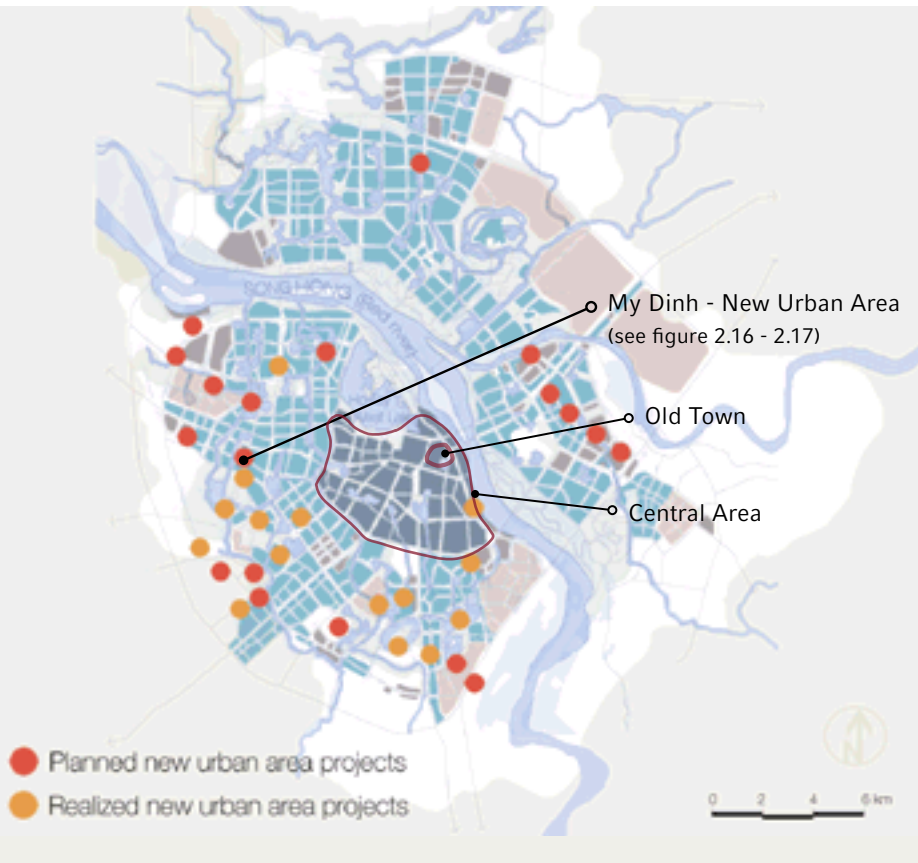
### 2.15

Map showing the location of the many new housing areas that are being planned and implemented all over Hanoi.

In the outskirts of Hanoi new housing areas are being developed, mainly on green-land. The limited amount of land allocated for new housing areas in Hanoi increases the need of high density development. That combined with official Hanoi's wish to create a modern, locally anchored townscape for the capital, has resulted in large numbers of high-rise buildings within these project areas. The authorities expect these areas to provide housing for at least 370.000 residents in high-rise buildings and 160.000 residents in low-rise buildings.

These projects contain not only high-rise buildings, row-houses and villas, but also public facilities such as schools, health centres, banks, markets, hotels, and office buildings. The project areas are quite large and are each designed to provide housing for 10-20000 inhabitants and vary in sizes from 10 to 400 ha of land.<sup>21</sup>

21 Duc Thang, D., 2001, *New Urban Area Projects – A Major Solution for Housing Development in Hanoi*, HUD, Hanoi, Vietnam



(right) 2.16  
Plan over the My Dinh area,  
provided by HUD, Hanoi



2.17 (below)

My Dinh is just one of all New Urban Areas that are being built in the outskirts of Hanoi at the moment.



## The Hanoi New Town project

The Hanoi New town project is an extreme development project, playing a central role in reducing development pressure in the capital's old areas. If it should be possible to provide housing to the expected population growth in Hanoi it is unavoidable that this means an immense venture. The project is still in its early stage and is estimated to be developed during a twenty years period of time.



2.18 (left)

Map showing the outline of the Hanoi New Town areas.

2.19 (below)

Goals and objectives of the Hanoi New Town Project, according to Hanoi People's Committee, 2003



(right) 2.20  
Proposal for part of the Tu Liem  
residential area, Hanoi.  
Perspective view.



#### SHORT FACTS ABOUT THE HANOI NEW TOWN PROJECT<sup>22</sup>

**Project timetable:** 20 years, 2001 - 2020

**Population:** Planned to house 750.000 – 1.000.000 residents when completed

**Total project area:** 8.830 hectares

**Location:** Dong Anh district, north of the Red River in Hanoi, and the three districts Tu Liem, Cau Giay and Tay Ho, west of West Lake

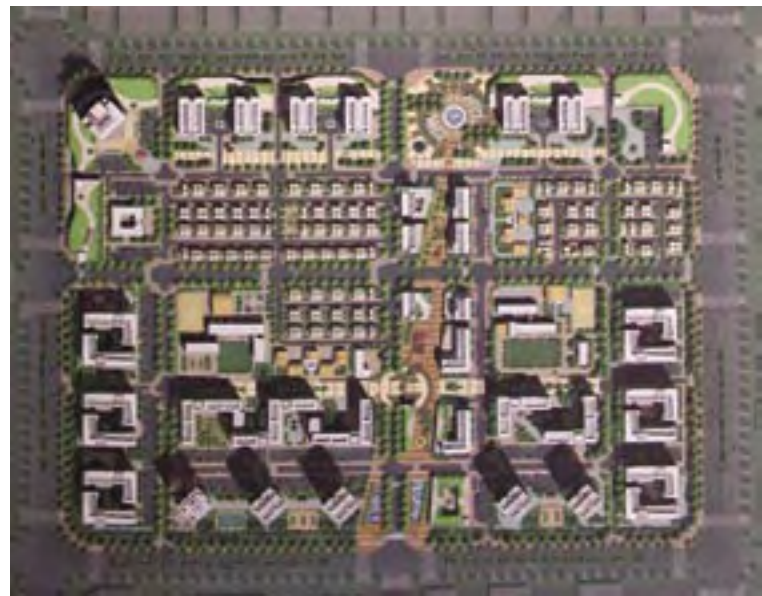
**Estimated cost:** more than \$130 million has already been spent on preliminary work for the project and the estimated total cost for the project is \$30 billions

<sup>22</sup> Hanoi People's Committee, 2003, Feasibility Study on the Housing Development Project in Hanoi New Town - Alternatives, Hanoi, Vietnam

2.21  
A model presented in HUD's office  
lobby, showing part of the gigantic  
Hanoi New Town Project.



2.22  
Proposal for a part of the Tu Liem residen-  
tial area, Hanoi. (See also fig. 2.20)  
Plan view.



## Contemporary life in Hanoi

### 2.23 (below)

Side by side, minute shops line the streets of the old quarters in Hanoi. They make the streetscape colourful and one can easily make an assessment of the range of goods put up for sale.

Hang Ngang, Old Town, Hanoi

## Modernisation of Hanoi

Living in Hanoi means to live densely. The city core of Hanoi is crowded, but we felt that the large amount of people in the streets, squares and market places also made the neighbourhoods lively and interesting.

Alongside most of the streets in Hanoi, people have opened up shops in the building's first floor. The shops are often quite small and sometimes the shop space is also part of an apartment. The owners of the building in which the shop is located either runs a business in it themselves or rent it out to others. The availability of these small shops seems to be very important both for individual families' economies but also for the neighbourhood in which they reside. The shops not only make it possible to earn a living, they also open up a 'social window' to the world outside. These traditional shops open up the whole store-front to the street. Since the shops are only a few metres in width they create a dense commercial structure and an interesting facade with a large variety of activities along the streets. Opening hours are usually from early morning to late evening and this helps generate a lively street throughout the day.



#### 2.24 & 2.25 (left below & below)

When shops grow bigger, so does the distance between them - and between people. The urban environment becomes an obstacle for sociability and we have to take detours around walls of glass to find someone to talk to. While doing that, a wall mounted surveillance camera is there to keep an eye on us...  
New Urban Area, Trung Hoa, Hanoi



#### 2.26 (right)

Shops are at a steady phase closing up their store-fronts with glass. The street-scape is deprived of much two-way communication and we are left to suffice with the communication advertisements provide. Hanoi

During our stay in Hanoi we could observe an ongoing transformation of the commerce in Hanoi. More and more shops have begun to close the store-front with modern glass walls. A few plausible reasons we found for closing the store fronts were to keep air pollution and traffic noise out and to keep costly air-conditioned air inside. We could especially notice this on streets where electronics and fashionable silk wares were sold.

When the store fronts become closed like this we could observe that these window walls not only kept the noise and pollution out, they also became a barrier between shop keepers and people passing by. Also in the new urban areas that are being built in Hanoi, the glassed-in shops and restaurants prevail. (See fig. 2.24 & 2.26) When the possibilities for communication between people are missing, the street's sociable qualities are negatively affected. This type of modernisation is understandable and perhaps unavoidable because it provides shops and enterprises with improved working conditions and a comfortable climate. The negative effect it has on the public street-scapes needs however to be considered if there is a desire for making the urban environment sociable.





## Commerce in transition

On ongoing change is the emergence of large department stores and shopping malls. A few already exist in Hanoi today and judging from what we saw in Ho Chi Minh City we think many more will be built in Hanoi, in the future. With appropriate design, shopping malls can provide the city with large, sociable, indoor environments. The shops in a shopping mall do not have to build up protective walls against noise and pollution making the shopping area very visually open. These malls also offer a comfortable shopping situation where you under one roof can get a wide range of merchandise. We noticed however, that these large shopping malls threat the street's sociable environment since they often lack outward directed store-fronts. This almost always results in a rather dull and uninteresting building street frontage which does not exactly invite people to linger and more or less kills a street's sociable qualities.



2.27 - 2.28 (both left)

A variety of goods, electronics, clothes and shoes are available in this modern shopping centre. The building further house a supermarket and a restaurant on the top floor, overlooking the Hoan Kiem lake. Trang Tien Plaza, Hanoi



As a contrast, the more traditional commerce in Hanoi takes place directly on the streets. This way the street becomes a social meeting place and the urban environment comes to life. Hanoi is still full of walking and cycling vendors who cruise the streets and make a large variety of merchandise available at people's door steps. We could also see people on their way home from work doing their grocery shopping without even getting off their motorbikes. We saw this happen frequently at street corners, when waiting at traffic lights or simply by driving the motorbike directly into narrow street markets.

2.29 - 2.30 (above & below)

The outreaching commerce bring in large quantities of groceries and handicrafts from the rural areas into the city. The goods is transported on bicycles or on bamboo yokes.

Old Town, Hanoi



2.31 (below)

The informal commerce plays an important role in people's everyday life - both socially and economically.

Prices can be kept low and the courtyards and street-scapes becomes lively and friendly.

Kim Lien housing quarters, Hanoi





2.32 Blocked pavement, Cau Go Street, Hanoi



2.33 SUV on Luong Van Can Street, Hanoi

## Traffic in Hanoi

Today a large portion of the sidewalks along the streets of Hanoi are occupied by parked motorbikes. The city of Hanoi is not adapted to the high numbers of motorbikes present today and parking is a problem. Shop entrances become almost inaccessible and the sidewalks completely crammed up. Pedestrians are forced out into the streets where the heavy traffic imposes a threat on both health and life. Privately owned cars are not that common in Hanoi yet, but when people's economy improves, one can assume that the number of cars will increase. This will probably worsen the traffic and parking situation in Hanoi. We could notice that many of the new cars already present in Hanoi are not of the smallest available city cars. Instead large SUV's (Sports Utility Vehicles) seemed to be preferred by those who can afford. These large 'terrain' cars are perhaps better suited for rough countryside roads than for already overloaded narrow city streets.

Motorbikes are the most popular means of transportation in Hanoi. The motorbikes and motorcycles are very 'efficient'. They are often used for transportation of more than one person at a time. Also the amount of goods people are able to load on a motorbike is astonishing. Another benefit is that the motorbikes can be parked right next to the entrance of a supposed attraction point and they can easily be stowed away once at home. They do however crowd the streets, pollute the city air with noise and fumes and riding them is an extreme health hazard. The number of deaths and injuries in the Hanoi traffic continues to rise in parity with the intensity of the traffic.



2.34

Restrained walkability on the pavement at Hang Buom Street, Hanoi



2.35

A whole family riding the same motor-  
bike is not an unfamiliar sight in Hanoi.  
Hang Bong Street, Hanoi



## Public life in the central area of Hanoi

Throughout Hanoi, we could see how the pavements had many uses to provide space for. Since there is not that much available common space in Hanoi, children use the streets and sidewalks as a playground. The streets and sidewalks also function as an extension to people's often small apartments. Activities that otherwise would have been refrained to the privacy of people's homes can therefore often be seen on sidewalks and backyards. Small coal-fired stoves are set up on the sidewalks in Hanoi and these both function as private kitchens and tiny public restaurants. Bathing children, washing clothes or doing the dishes are common activities taking place on the pavements, in Hanoi's old quarters.

2.36 (above)

Sometimes parents running a business are forced to look after their children while working. Usually the shop is located in the outer part of their ground floor apartment, which often lacks both kitchen and bathroom. Hang Buom Street, Hanoi



(right) 2.37

Sidewalks are used for all kinds of activities. Two kiosks provides the neighbourhood with small meeting places.

Dinh Liet Street, Hanoi

(right) 2.38

A minute restaurant has been set up on the sidewalk, serving lunch to people living in the neighbourhood or passers-by.

Le Duan Street, Hanoi



2.39 & 2.40 (below & right)

The divide between private and public is not particularly sharp. It is common that people prepare and cook food on portable coal-fired stoves on the sidewalks, since many apartments lack proper kitchen facilities. Equally common it is to do the washing up there. Hoa Ma Street, Hanoi





## Public life in the New Urban Areas in Hanoi

When we visited the Linh Dam Lake area a Saturday in September 2003 we could notice that the area differed quite much from what we had seen in the rest of Hanoi. The area had more the character of a dormitory suburb than being a part of an otherwise lively and crowded city, which Hanoi undoubtedly is. We assumed this was partly caused by its location in the outskirts of Hanoi and that Saturdays are workdays for most Vietnamese, but we could not let go of the thought that the design and general layout of the area played an important role in making the area feel so 'un-sociable'.

So where were people? We found some young kids playing football on one of the empty streets and another bunch playing around in the pool area. Very few adults were visible in the area until the evening came. Then the local restaurants and cafés began to fill up with customers, but apart from that, most of the area stayed quiet.

Linh Dam Lake was one of the first New Urban Areas to be built in Hanoi. It is not yet fully completed and part of the open space (see figure 2.44) will later be filled in with high-rise buildings, judging from the plans we saw. The area has had some problems regarding water quality and has therefore not become as an attractive housing area as was hoped.

A similar housing area in Hanoi, Dinh Cong, followed the same pattern. Due to the lack of visible outdoor activities going on, both of them felt more like dormitory housing areas than vibrant and sociable urban environments. These experiences encouraged us to continue our pursuit for an answer for the question; for whom and for what uses do we plan. We became interested in what it was in the structure that made these neighbourhoods so different from what we previously had experienced in Vietnam. And perhaps even more interesting, since Vietnamese cities in general gives a rather noisy and crowded impression, it made us ponder if the calm and spacious atmosphere these two areas offered, actually was desirable.

By studying all kinds of living quarters in Hanoi we became aware of great differences in both the physical structure and in the amount of visible social life. We realized there was an intricate interplay between the physical and social structure. It is notable that much of the social life we today see take place on the streets and sidewalks actually originates from low standard of housing and cramped living space. At present many of Hanoi's streets are full of life but when the standard of housing is improved, much of the street activities will move inside to people's private homes. We feel that if there is an aspiration for keeping the urban environment sociable and people-friendly, it is important to find a substitute for this natural but perhaps forced-upon outdoor meeting ground.

2.41

The area next to the houses are paved and sparsely adorned. It is admittedly convenient when the monsoon season arrives and it provides lots of space for kids to play on. The question is however if this space encourages people to participate in any outdoor activities?  
Linh Dam Lake, Hanoi



2.42 - 2.45 (above & right)

The Linh Dam Lake area has a sparse building structure. A supermarket and a few shop premises of traditional open-front style are available. The commerce did however not seem particularly flourishing. Linh Dam Lake has a nice outdoor pool area, which seems to be the major attraction point in the area. Apart from this there are a few restaurants and cafés, which function as local meeting places.  
Linh Dam Lake, Hanoi

