



Saigon's Ready-made Neighbourhoods

The Changing Face of Community

The bulldozers and cranes have retired for the evening but their hulking forms remain stationed in front of residential developments all over Saigon. They've become a permanent part of the city landscape, as the projects they cater to climb ever upwards into the skyline.

The urban population in Vietnam has multiplied and so has the need for housing, prompting a wave of condo developments to be erected all over the city. But as older buildings are demolished, the communities surrounding them are often dispersed as well. How are ideas about neighbourhoods being restructured to conform to this progress?

Shifting Times, Tastes

In the past, communities were made up of social networks centred around resources, such as land for agriculture or water for the fishing industry. As Tom Vanderbilt explained in an article for *Wilson Quarterly*, "In late medieval Marseille [...] quarters—in essence, neighborhoods—were important sites of social identity, oriented largely

toward one's profession". Traditionally, HCMC has organised itself in a similar way. There are streets filled with one type of product or artisan—spice streets, woodworking streets and even *hems* populated with merchants selling only light bulbs.

In other parts of the city, the modern day neighbourhoods have become more fluid. They are often composed of services, like markets or street eateries, combined with the social characteristics of the residents and merchants themselves. The community identity is created almost by accident by the haphazard elements that populate the defined area.

In recent neighbourhood developments in Ho Chi Minh City little is left to such chance.

Contemporary complexes have become self-contained communities—not only places to live, but spaces with schools, hospitals, shops, gardens, and community areas where residents can congregate, celebrate and connect. Ready-made neighbourhoods, so to speak.

Each aspect of the community is a thought out part of the development. The new residences are a love song to steel and glass—modern skyscrapers

that are built higher and higher in hopes of selling better views to their potential occupants who are spoiled for choice in today's market.

According to Duong Lanh's case study "Housing Development in Ho Chi Minh City", there are currently 1,007,021 new housing units in the city, and real estate trend tracker Mansion Global writes that "We'll have 5,000 more luxury units coming online by 2020."

An abundance of competition makes it necessary for real estate developers to rethink what potential residents want in order to remain relevant. A current trend for luxury developments is to create a more centralised community setting.

Rethinking Branding

Vinhomes Central Park, a residential complex finished in 2016, boasts on its website that it is "modeled after a small city". Within the walls of the compound, there is a VinSchool, a Vinmec hospital branch with "over 600 examination rooms", a massive park and a Vincom commercial and activity centre.