

Impacts of Rapid Urbanization to Traditional Living Environment and Community Linkage in Historic Old Quarters of Vietnam: A Case Study on Gia Hoi Area in Hue City, Central Vietnam

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Abstract: Though with slight ups and downs, Vietnamese economies have been flourishing for recent decades. Just like other remaining historical districts in Asia, those of Vietnam have been going through rapid urbanization and transformation. The rapid urbanization impacts on traditional living environment. This paper examines the impacts of rapid urbanization to traditional living environment and community linkage, illustrating a case study of the Gia Hoi area of the historic old district in the city of Hue in Central Vietnam. To identify the impacts, a comparative analysis is conducted between neighbors along a main street which were more impacted by urbanization and those along a small alley which were less impacted. Through the analysis of field and questionnaire surveys, it found out that socioeconomic conditions, in particular, community linkage of households along main street and small ally varied significantly. It argues that in historical district, social capital is not well-spread, but rather concentrated along small allies, and small allies play an important role for sustainable community.

Key words: Community linkage, impact of urbanization, traditional living environment, historical city.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Vietnam's economic growth has been dramatic since Doi Moi was introduced in 1987. The average annual GDP (gross domestic product) growth rate from 1994 to 2003 was about 7.4%. In 2003, it was estimated that the urban population accounted for about 25% of the total population of Vietnam, and it has been forecasted that Vietnam's urban population will increase rapidly over the next 15 to 30 years—more than doubling by 2020 [1]. The rapid urbanization has impacted on Vietnamese traditional living environment.

1.2 Research Objectives

This paper aims to examine impacts of rapid urbanization to traditional living environment in Vietnam and has conducted a case study survey in the Gia Hoi area which is an old historical district of Hue City in Central Vietnam. Through the survey, it found out that, in particular, rapid urbanization has impacted community linkage and traditional community activities have disappeared. Therefore, this paper also explores sustainability of traditional community activities, illustrating a community facing on a small alley in the Gia Hoi area.

1.3 Research Methods

The case-study site is city blocks around Chi Lang street, Nguyen Du street, Hien Thanh street and Huong River in historic old quarters of Hue city,

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located in the east of the Hue citadel (Fig. 1). Chi Lang street, a main street, runs through the area. In the research site, interviews regarding basic information of living environment and measurement were conducted to 69 households from April to July 2009, and a workshop was held on 19th July 2009, in order to get more detailed residents' opinions about living environment.

Communities there can be divided basically into the areas along the main street and small alleys. The communities along the main street, Chi Lang street, have been more impacted by urbanization. On the other hand, the communities along small alleys have been less urbanized. Therefore, the paper tries to identify impacts of urbanization on their living environment through comparative analysis between the communities.

2. Urbanization in Vietnam

2.1 Urbanization in Vietnam

Vietnamese government started the Doi Moi policies in 1986 to introduce liberal market mechanisms, encouraging private-sector initiatives. On account of Doi Moi policies, Vietnam's urbanization also started accelerating. In parallel, economic growth, measured by GDP per capita, was strong over the same period. This coincides with rapid structural transformation from an agriculture-based economy to greater emphasis on industry and export oriented activity [1].

Urbanization in Vietnam has been accelerating recently. Urban population in Vietnam has been increasing, and percentage of urban population of total is 31% in 2011, which was 15% in 1960 and 20% in 1990 (World Data Bank). The UN (United Nations) projects that the urban population will exceed the rural population by 2040 [1].

2.2 Urban Development Policies

After Vietnam has incepted the Doi Moi policies, its government has implemented a variety of policies

to foster a distribution of economic growth and urban development. For example, Government Decision No. 10 (1998) on the urban system and development strategy to 2020 called for the development of medium and small sized cities while containing the growth of the largest cities. Subsequently, the government accepted the possibility of the rise of mega-cities with populations over 10 million (Government Decision No. 445 in 2009). The 2011-2020 Socio Economic Development Strategy denotes that urbanization will be necessary to promote the country's goals of industrialization and modernization [1].

2.3 Urban Housing Conditions

According to the Institute for Construction Economics, Ministry of Construction, November 1997, the unit size of majority of houses is less than 50 m². It is typical for Vietnamese households that two or three (even four) generations share the same place of living [2]. Houses is renovated and built extra rooms, a few families share the houses. In one case, people from other areas rural areas immigrate to cities, and they built their houses in unoccupied lands without permissions from governments. In urban areas, housing is not only for living purpose, but may serve as income generation space. First floors of roadside houses are often used as shops which is called "Shophouses". Shophouses are mostly two or three stories high, with a shop on the ground floor for mercantile activity and a residence above the shop.

According to living standard report by Ministry of Construction in 1997, major types of dwellings in Vietnam are semi-permanent house (41.56%) and temporary house (19%). Before the introduction of the Doi Moi policies, only a minority of households had to borrow capital to finance 1/3-1/4 of the cost of construction, and almost all classes of people could not afford to build or repair their houses. However, half of these households now own or have built their own houses with their own capital [2].

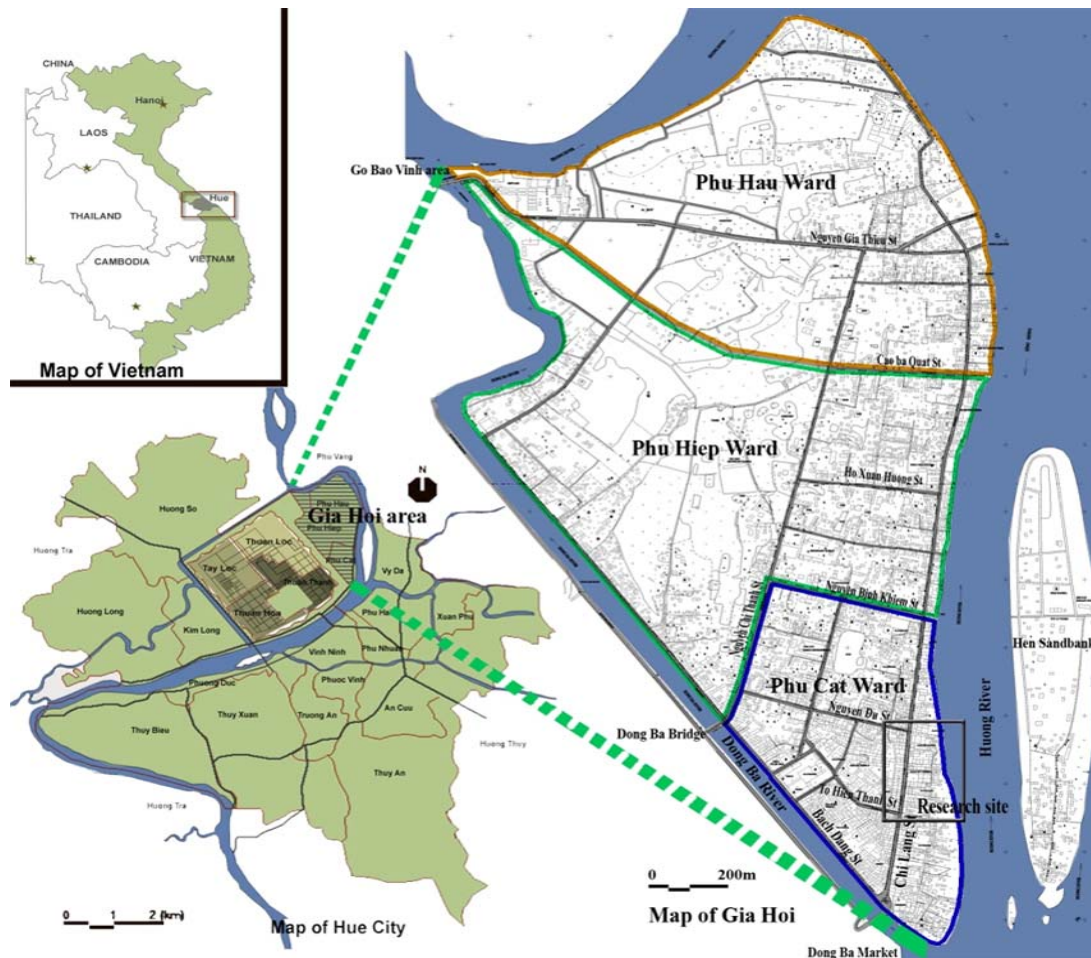


Fig. 1 Map of Vietnam, Hue city and Gia Hoi area.

3. Overview of Living Environment in the Case-Study Area

3.1 Development Process of the Gia Hoi Area

Emigrated Chinese people arrived at Thanh Ha port and started to live in the Gia Hoi area of Hue in around 1794. After that, they developed business activities [3]. Fig. 2 shows transformation of Gia Hoi area.

In 1836, eight kiosks named “Duyen Giang Bat Trang” were built. In between of these eight kiosks, new roads and commercial activities were developed rapidly. In 1838, the Ming Mang King ordered to build a new market namely Gia Hoi including 89 kiosks and 2-storey communal building of that market. In the street running perpendicularly to Cho Dinh street from Gia Hoi Bridge to Tran Binh Dai, 399

chambers of dwelling houses were built while resident volunteered to build 149 chambers. All columns were constructed by brick and each three chambers were separated by one brick wall. Row of handrail in the riverbank was also built of Dinh market moved from crossroads between Nguyen Du street and Chi Lang street, crossroads between Cao Ba Quat street and Chi Lang street to present place near by crossroads between Nguyen Gia Thieu street and Chi Lang street. In 1899, when Dong Gia market (Dong Ba at present) was moved to the present place from place within the citadel near Dong Ba Bridge, and Truong Tien Bridge and Truong Tien Street (Tran Hung Dao at present) were established, the commercial center of Hue has been moved gradually from Gia Hoi street to Tran Hung Dao street as present seeing. Then, Gia Hoi is as the name of ancient quarter that is available within the

new urban city. Even though the present name of the street is Chi Lang, every local people has still called the old name “Gia Hoi” because it makes people remember prosperous period of ancient commercial street in the past. Since the main markets were moved from Gia Hoi area to different areas, Gia Hoi area has been urbanized as not only a business area, but also a residential area.

The total population in Hue from 1998 to 2007 has gradually increased from 289,428 to 335,747, while the average density has increased from 4,077 persons per km² in 1998 to 4,729 persons per km² in 2007 [4]. In particular, urban population has increased and in 2007, population in urban areas is about six times higher than population in rural. The change of population structure implies rapid urbanization in Hue. Phu Cat ward, a part of Gia Hoi area and including the case-study area, is the most densely populated area in Hue, reaching 25,849 persons per km².

3.2 Basic Structure of the Case-Study Area

Fig. 3 is a map of the case-study area in the Gia Hoi area. For administrative management, each ward is divided into several basic local administrative zones called as “To dan pho” in Vietnamese [6]. In the research site, Zones 1, 2 and 11 are involved (Fig. 3). On the other hand, traditionally, each resident belongs to a local community, which is called “Xom”. Each “Xom” organizes community activities, such as luna ceremony, worship called “Cung Xom”, visiting sick people, and providing learning opportunities for poor

children.

The historical main street, Chi Lang street runs through the area, and small alleys run in places. The area is divided by the main street, and characteristics of communities are different by street-layout. Communities along the main street have long history and have been impacted by urban development. Along the main street, 72% of all buildings are shop-houses. Regarding to architectural style, Vietnamese traditional wooden houses and European-style buildings were built. At this moment, according to the field survey, 56% of the all surveyed buildings are concrete modern housing, the wooden housings are 31% and the European-style housings are 13%. In short, architectural style along the main street is mixed. On the other hand, 86% of all buildings along small alleys are concrete modern housing, as the houses along small alleys were built newer, compared to housing along the main street (71% of housing along small alleys were built after 1945).

After the Vietnam War, especially after the Doi Moi policy started, many people moved in this site. In addition, after floods occurred in the 1980s, some people illegally settled down behind housings along the main street. As one of the reasons, 81% of houses along the small alleys do not have a land certificate, which is called as “Red Book” in Vietnam. Regarding income, average income between households along Chi Lang street and small alleys varied much. Average income of households along Chi Lang street is about 210 USD per month, average income of

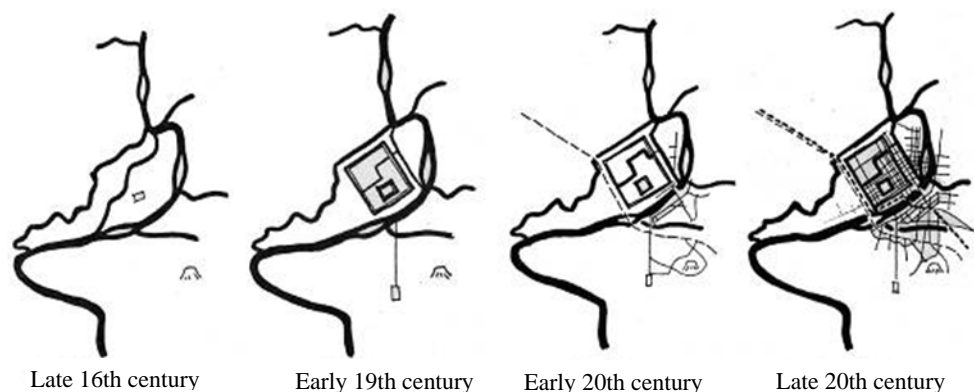


Fig. 2 Transformation of Gia Hoi area [5].

households along small alleys is about 110 USD per month whereby the gap is almost double.

In the last 10 years, more new residents, who came from outside Hue, moved in Chi Lang street. Moreover, new internet-cafes and shops for young people had opened along Chi Lang street. As Chi Lang street is more economically attractive, the area along Chi Lang street is more urbanized.

Besides, the local government tries to redevelop the area along Huong River into parks or hotels, and to relocate residents living in the area to other places (“Emigration area” in Fig. 3).

4. Urbanization Impacts on Living Environment

This section discusses the differences of living situations in Chi Lang street and small alleys, and

analyzes urbanization impacts in traditional living environment.

4.1 Living Environment in a Main Street and Small Alleys

Fig. 4 shows level of satisfaction with local living environment of between households along Chi Lang and small alleys. Residents along Chi Lang street are satisfied with their houses and convenience for shopping, work and education. However, they are not satisfied with open spaces for community relationship and playground for children.

On the other hand, residents along small alleys are satisfied with overall living environment, compared to residents along the main street. In particular, residents along small alleys are satisfied with communities and communication with neighbors.

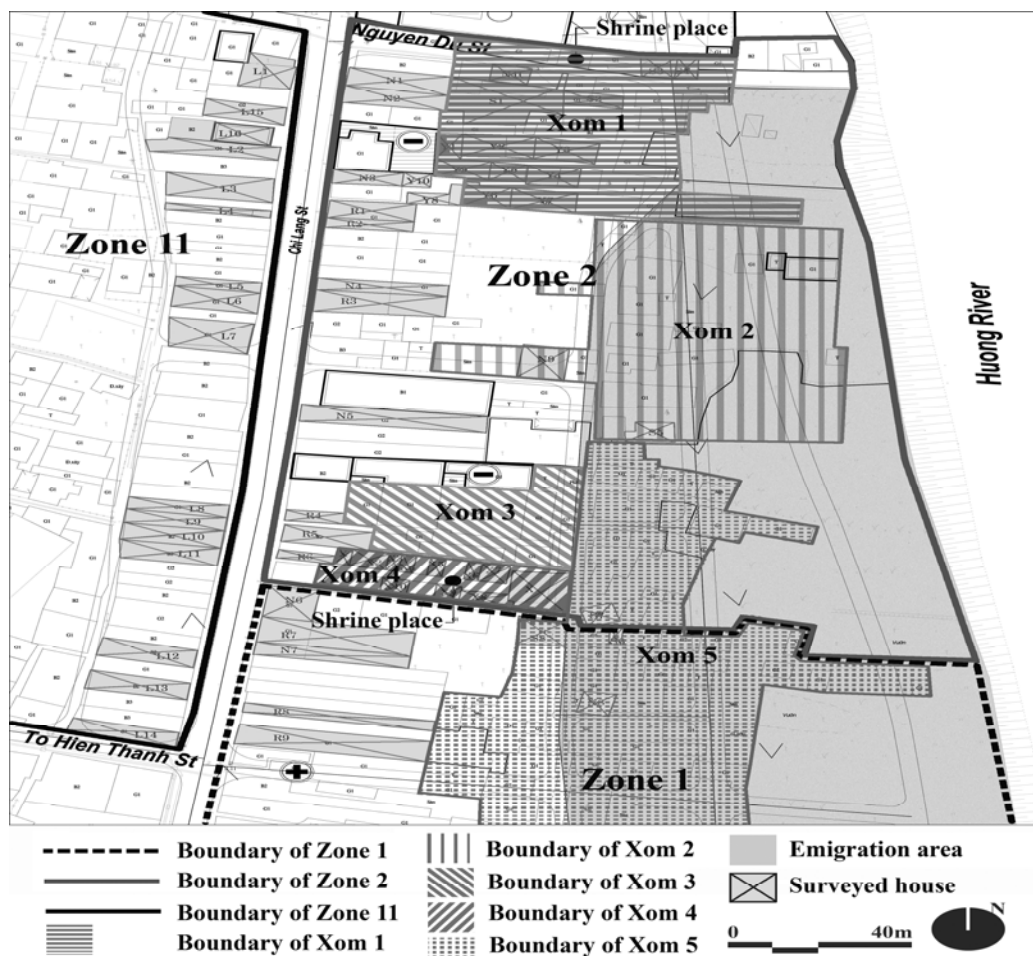


Fig. 3 Map of the case-study area in Gia Hoi area, and boundaries of local community “Xom” and present administrative.

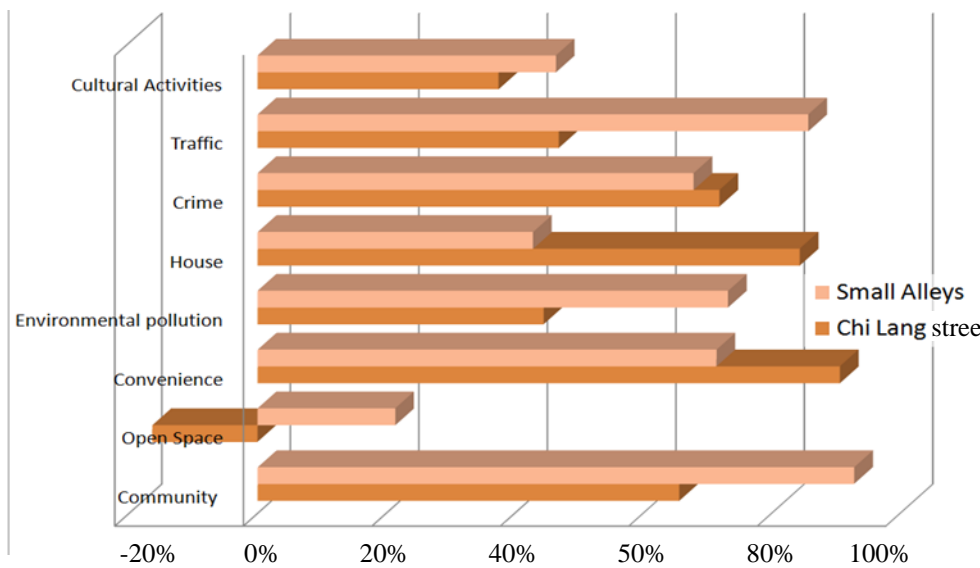


Fig. 4 Satisfaction with living environment.

4.2 Impacting Factors on Living Environment

Fig. 5 shows responses to a question asking what impacts serious issues on living environment. According to the survey, the residents think increasing traffic volume, rapid urbanization and poor policies affect their living environment.

Remarkably, more residents along small alleys than those along the main street think that rapid urbanization causes serious issues on living environment. The area along small alleys is less urbanized than the area along the main street, and residents along small alleys have learnt negative impacts of urbanization from the area along the main street.

4.3 Traditional Community Linkage

The area along the main street is more urbanized and the traditional community linkage along the main street is disappearing. Table 1 shows frequency of communication with neighbors of the residents. While most of residents in small alleys communicate with neighbors every day, at least once a month, some residents in Chi Lang street do not communicate with neighbors at all. One of the reasons that communication with neighbors in Chi Lang street is lack of community spaces. As Fig. 4 implies, there are

not enough spaces for communication with neighbors in the main street. In addition, heavy traffic affects residents’ communication.

As mentioned above, there are traditional cultural community activities in Hue, and each “Xom” organizes community activities, such as Luna ceremony and worshipping, called as “Cung Xom”. Cung Xom was originally introduced by Chinese people and Cung Xom has become one of the most important community activities for community linkage.

However, according to the survey, 88% of residents in the main street no longer participate in Cung Xom. This is because that people who had come from outside for their business are not interested in traditional community activities, there is no community space for Cung Xom, and it is difficult to organize it in the architectural style along the main street of tube house. Therefore, they only organize worshipping activity in their home by themselves. Accordingly, traditional community activities in Chi Lang street seem to be disappearing.

5. Case-Study of Sustainable Community Linkage in Xom 4

This section focuses on Xom 4, one of five Xom in

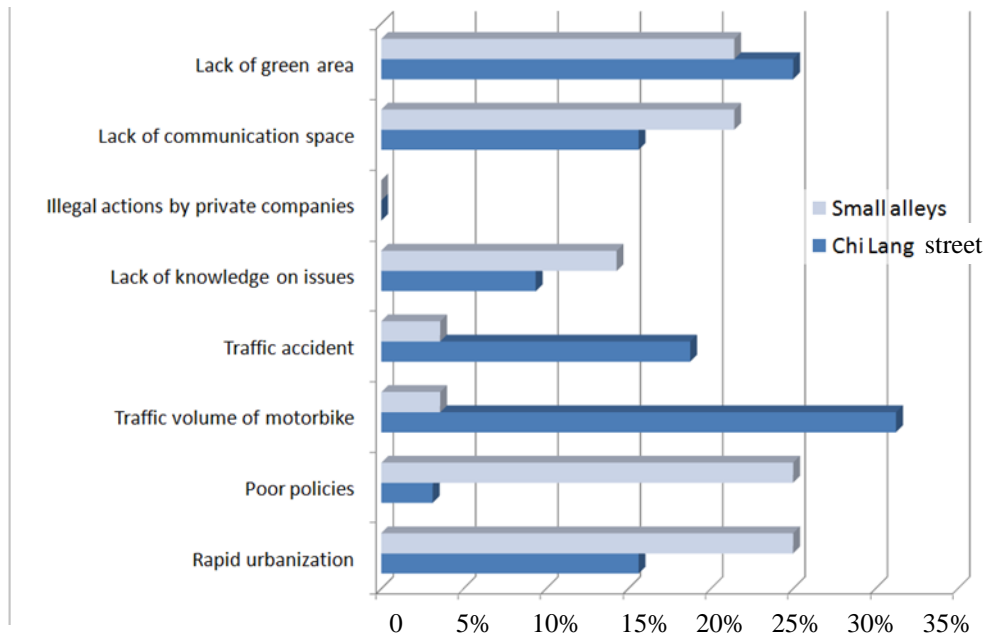


Fig. 5 Impacts to serious issues on living environment.

Table 1 Frequency of communication with neighbors of the respondents on Chi Lang street and small alleys.

	Chi Lang street	Small alleys
More than three times a day	20%	42%
A few times a day	33%	27%
A few times a week	27%	19%
A few times a month	0%	12%
A few times a year	10%	0%
Zero	10%	0%

the area and tries to explore sustainability of community linkage, illustrating transformation of Xom and ways of using spaces for community activities of Xom.

5.1 Historical Background and Transformation of Xom 4

The original owner of this land of Xom 4 is father of Mr. Ton That Buu Lieu. His family is descendent of royal family (Nguyen Dynasty). In 1934, the original owner built a private antenatal clinic. The building facing main street was 5-chambers building with function of each chamber. The middle chambers have remained as the gate of Xom 4 (Fig. 6). In 1939, the original owner built a 2-storey house on the right side of the land and a kitchen next the house (Fig. 7 shows transformation of Xom 4).

In 1975, the Vietnam War ended and Vietnam was unified. As most of the members of the original owner’s family belonged to the old government, it was hard for them to live there. In 1978, the present owner, Mr. Lieu, divided the land into two parts with a border line crossing on Plantae tree. He donated the left part except one of garages facing Chi Lang street to the



Fig. 6 Gate of Xom 4.

government, while the right part and the garage was under his ownership. Even though the left part has belonged to the government since 1978, if someone wants to live in this land, it is necessary to ask for permission of Mr. Lieu.

At that time, the front 5-chambers building was destroyed, and the other buildings of the clinic became dwelling houses. In 1980s, several floods occurred and some people came to live there for preventing from the floods. All of the new residents used common kitchen and toilet near the *Plantae* tree. At that time, Mr. Lieu renovated the old kitchen next his house and built a house for his first-born son.

In the period of 1990s, the six daughter of Mr. Lieu got married and she built a house in a place of the garage for her new family. And then, she extended the house to the rear the piece 7 (piece number 7 as illustrated in Fig. 7). Mr. Su Duy Be bought the land of the piece number 6 and built his house. Besides, the owner of dwelling house 1, Mrs. Dang Thi Phuoc occupied the land of the piece number 5 and rebuilt her house. Other persons bought the lands of the pieces numbers 8 and 9 for building their houses as well. In the late 1990s, the third daughter of Mr. Lieu, Mrs. Ton Nu Phuong Trang, went to live in the house of the piece number 1, and the first son's family went to live in another place.

In years of early 2000s, family of Mrs. Ton Nu Phuong Trang built and lived in a new house on the piece 2, and her younger brother (the eighth son of Mr. Lieu named Ton That Vinh Sang) went to lived in her old house on the piece 1. At that time, Mr. Lieu also sold pieces 3 and 4 to other persons with cheap price.

In 2005, Mr. Le Tinh, who came from Nam Dong District, bought the piece of the old common toilet and also gave some money to Mr. Lieu for his permission. Mr. Le Tinh built his new 3-storey house, and Mr. Lieu used that money for constructing new private toilets for all residents in the land. At that time, Mrs. Ho Thi Luong came to buy and build new house for her family.

5.2 Function of Small Alleys for Community Activities

There are 15 households that live in Xom 4 community (Figs. 7 and 8). In "Xom 4", the width of the alley is small enough (less than 2 m) to create a convenient space for community activities among residents. They share information, communicate with neighbors, and cooperate with each other, when someone needs helps in Xom 4. The small alley among those households serves as multi-functions. The alley can be the place for children's playground, recreation and exercise of residents, chatting, having meal and small markets (Fig. 9). The residents often sit in the small alleys, and it is almost like a big living room of the community.

In "Xom 4", the width of the alley is small enough (less than 2 m) to create a convenient space for chatting and sharing information among residents. Moreover, if a community member is sick, the information of the sick person is quickly known among the community. Then every people can gather and visit the sick person. Finally, this event can improve the level of communication relationship among inhabitants there.

As one of the most important community activities, the alley among Xom 4 is used a space for organizing "cung xom" activity two times per year. The alley among Xom 4 is space for organizing "cung xom" activity two times per year (worshipping the Heaven and the Earth on May 23 and welcoming Tet holidays). Firstly, all households contribute money to the wife of Mr. Lieu every three months. Before the ceremony, the wife of Mr. Lieu and other wives together go to market and buy something for preparation. The place for happening ceremony is in the middle of the alley near by the *Plantae* tree. Mr. Lieu is the first person, who comes to pray for healthy, prosperous and so on. Then, other husbands gradually come to pray. After the offering, food will be divided and offered to each household and representative of each household come to the house of Mr. Lieu for gathering, chatting, drinking, discussing

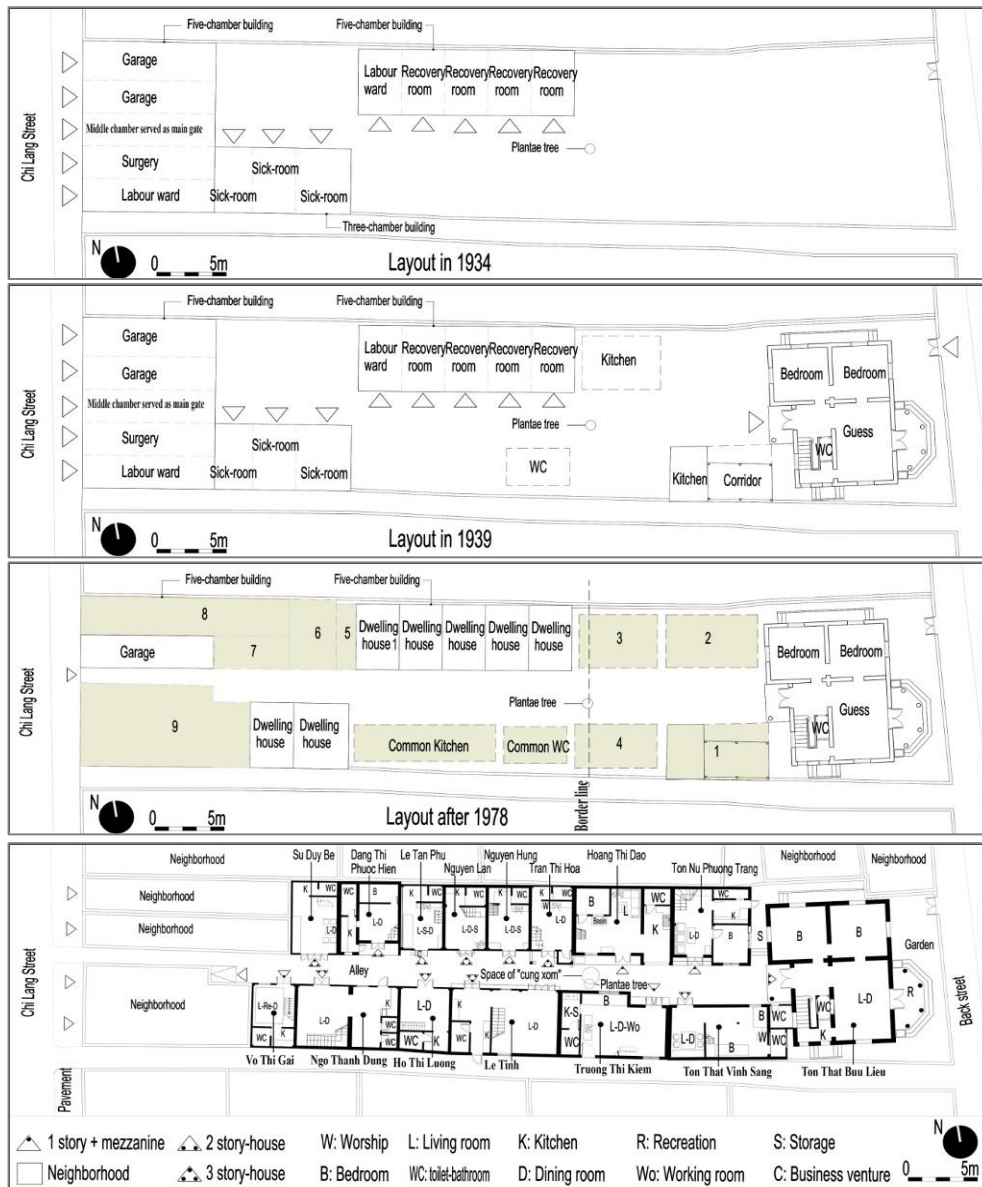


Fig. 7 Transformation of floor plan of Xom 4 from 1934 to 1978, and the floor plan in 2010.



Fig. 8 Facade of Xom 4 in 2010 (in relation to the floor plan in 2010).



Fig. 9 Xom 4 community's use of the small alley for their community activities.

and sharing their information related to the life, living condition, job and so on.

6. Conclusions and Notes

The Gia Hoi area, historic old quarters of Hue has been urbanized as economic commercial district. Independence of Vietnam and end of the war impacted the area. After the Doi Moi policy was introduced, Vietnam has been seeking to expand their economic activities more and more, which has impacted their traditional living environment even more.

Urbanization impacts traditional living environment, such as architectural style from wooden to concrete and community space, and causes economic gap and the socially vulnerable such as households without the red book and people who has to move for the government's relocation policy. In particular, traditional community linkage has been impacted. Historically, there is a community group "Xom" and each Xom organizes community activities. However, as rapid urbanization has impacted and some people are only interested in economic activities, the traditional community activities and community linkage are disappearing.

One of the reasons is lack of community space. Transport volume has increased and occupied streets, and people try to build as many shops and houses as possible. As a result, open spaces for communication and community activities are decreasing. Earlier,

people used to organize worships with neighbors, but they now tend to organize them in their house by themselves.

On the other hand, communities with small alleys still organize the community activities where the community linkage is sustained. This is because small alleys play an important role of community space.

Learnt from the case of Xom 4, Xom consists of not only families and relatives, but also outsiders, and a leader of Xom manages his/her Xom's activities. The small alley plays a very important role of the space for community activities, children's playground and chatting with neighbors.

Community linkage is leading to cooperate with each other, help the socially vulnerable, reduce damages of flooding and crime through community cooperation, and very important for sustainable development. However, through the survey, it is found that increased transport volume has occupied spaces for community activities, rapid urbanization and pursue of economic development has impacted decline of traditional community linkage in Vietnam. In order to sustain community linkage, it is necessary to secure community spaces including small alleys.

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Some people lost the red book during the war and flooding, other than people settled down illegally without red book.

Figs. 4 and 5 and Table 1 are the survey results from 69 households of which 32 households come from the main street community, 28 from the small alley, and the remaining nine households did not answer the survey.

The survey about Cung Xom in Chi Lang street was conducted to 24 households additionally in August 2010.

“Cung Xom” is worshipping the Heaven and the Earth and organized on May 23 and in welcoming Tet holidays.

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