

SURE Facilitation and Synthesis Research Team – Project Visits in Vietnam and Cambodia in September and October 2022

Ten Days of chaos, resilience, and zeal. Or a journey in three acts.

by Anika Slawski & Katharina Borgmann

Đà Nẵng, Vietnam

It is slowly getting dark as the landing flight to Đà Nẵng starts. The rural fields, suburban settlements, even the emerging urban areas are widely flooded. Twenty-four hours earlier, the city was busy preparing for Typhoon *Noru*, which made landfall over Vietnam – over Đà Nẵng – on September 27, 2022. One day on and hours of delay (due to suspended air traffic) later, one fact in particular can be observed: *the calm after the storm*. And then – another night later – the streets are largely tidied up, damage has (for now) been repaired, bits and pieces that have flown around have been swept up. Resignation? Routine? Resilience?



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At the Đà Nẵng University of Architecture, the students of the summer school, organized as part of the SURE project implement!, are working again on their *community-based sustainable tourism concepts for the Cu De River Valley* – for the final presentation the following day. Natural disasters such as a typhoon, which are increasing as climate change progresses, highlight the urgency to act sustainably, and this is also – or especially – true for the sector that the city of Đà Nẵng has identified for itself as an important growth potential: tourism.

At the same time, it is mainly the valleys of the surrounding provinces that have realized their tourism potential as a recreational destination during the Corona pandemic and this is what the Summer School is all about: authentic and sustainable tourism, based on the understanding that communities can use their own capabilities to achieve sustainability. One of the five topics, the summer school addresses, is therefore the issue of *sustainable forestry and agriculture*. Practiced deforestation and monoculture in the provinces threaten the loss of biodiversity and in this context, sustainable tourism can be used as a tool: if natural qualities – such as the forest – are recognized by the communities as tourism and financial potential and are carefully used for tourism purposes, there could be a chance to achieve sustainable behavior in regard of forestry and agriculture (1).



Summer School of the element! project © Anika Slawski

Huế, Vietnam

She's like the wind through my tree, Patrick Swayze's voice pours from the car's speakers as the green, the imperial, the city of Huế arises on the horizon. Two SURE projects are located here: GreenCityLabHuế and FloodAdaptVN.



Visit to the GreenCityLabHuế exhibition © SURE Facilitation and Synthesis Team

The GreenCityLabHuế consortium aims to increase knowledge on the integration of nature-based solutions (nbs) and blue-green infrastructure into existing urban structures. On the one hand, the governance side is considered by adapting legal regulations and integrating nbs into existing urban planning and thus into strategic planning. On the other hand, the goal is to involve local people in processes of co-design through participation. Here, the organized workshops and especially the exhibition of the GreenCityLabHuế support to make issues of climate change, nbs and green-blue infrastructure accessible and to sensitize for these very topics. The fact that people have a strong sense of community has been shown by *Noru* – Vietnamese people have a tradition of caring and supporting each other during natural disasters (2).

But it's not just typhoons that are increasing in Central Vietnam due to climate change, it's also heavy rainfall events that the FloodAdaptVN project is addressing and developing measures to reduce flood risk. Here, as well, a people-oriented approach represents a smart strategy that can be easily linked to, because, as we learned, Huế residents are proud of their tradition, of their culture, of their city, have a great understanding of local values and aim for protecting them. For the purpose of developing Huế sustainably through people's strong awareness, the *Green Sunday* was launched a few years ago, on which people collect garbage and plant flowers. So, Huế today is quite walkable, green and the river is sometimes even swum in, if it is not polluted by a typhoon and floods (3).



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Phnom Penh, Cambodia

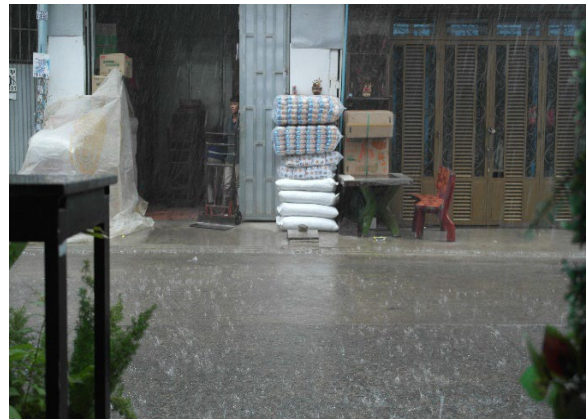
Three hours, an old propeller machine and a few sweats later, writer Wojciech Czaja's words about Phnom Penh seem tangible reality: *The Khmer city has declared chaos to be the principle of order. Thus, one is no longer surprised when the Tuk Tuk driver proudly says: „Oh, Royal Palace, I know where that is.”* (Czaja 2018: 201).

Although not in the Royal Palace, but in the Phnom Penh City Hall, the consortium of the SURE project Build4People discusses in the context of a roundtable workshop with representatives of urban planning *design strategies and early stages criteria for sustainable neighbourhood development*.

A sustainable development in Phnom Penh requires in the first step mainly structural interventions in the area of open space, roads and water supply. The reason is that three main problems dominate in the city: Waste management, traffic jams and floods. In addition to the mass of waste, which could not be managed, traffic jams in the city occurs on a daily basis and on an immense scale. Reducing the number of cars seems illusory from today's perspective, because there are no alternatives like a well working public transport system. City buses are stuck in traffic jams, do not arrive on time, making connections poor. But the biggest challenge is the water: Phnom Penh is bordered by the Mekong River to the east and water from the mountains flows into the city from the west. During the rainy season, the city must constantly pump and protect itself, so there is an urgent need for a resilient drainage system (4).



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And here the circle closes, and here the journey ends: Faithful companions have been issues such as the typhoon, floods, and heavy rainfall – plus the threat of biodiversity loss through monoculture. But the good news is, there are approaches like community-based tourism, sustainable neighborhood concepts, nature-based solutions, flood mitigation measures, and there are the makers, the initiators, the researchers, and – most importantly – the residents who care about their cities.

References

- (1) Information from meetings with local partners of implementation, especially: Dr. Chu Manh Trinh, Nguyễn Trần Lan Chi and Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy
- (2) Information from an interview with Binh Minh Hoang and Long Nguyen Duc Hoang, MienTrung Institute for Scientific Research, partner of GreenCityLabHuế
- (3) Information from an interview with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Hoang Khanh Linh, Head of International School, Hue University, partner of FloodAdaptVN
- (4) Information from an interview with Mr. Phanin Cheam, Vice-Head Urban Management Division of Phnom Penh Capital Hall, partner of Build4People

Czaja, Wojciech (2018): Hektopolis: Ein Reiseführer in hundert Städte. Paperback.