

# Mobility, porosity and the peri-urban city in Vietnam

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## Introduction

Driving from Đà Nẵng to Tam Kỳ along Highway 1A, one passes endless rice fields, crosses small rivers and sees water buffalos. However, one can also observe continuous construction efforts as every town and village along the highway is keen to modernize. Arriving in Tam Kỳ, provincial capital of Quảng Nam province, these efforts continue as the city slowly grows into its hinterland. Urban transformations dominate these spaces in small Vietnamese cities. These transformations include changes to their spatial structures, the livelihood strategies of local people and the urban identity of the cities. Many of these transformations follow patterns similar to big urban centres: a changing demographic due to migration from rural areas, the construction of new infrastructure and the development of new urban areas. Urban planners and city administrations cause this homogenization in the urban periphery based on a singular path of development. They produce visions of a modern urban future for small cities based on “travelling urban forms” (Söderström, 2013) with large national or international cities as point of reference. On the surface, urbanization in these small towns is hence only a repetition of developments already described and analyzed elsewhere. This is supported by research focused on large, national cities, like Hà Nội or Hồ Chí Minh City (Ton Nu Quynh Tran et al., 2012; Fanchette, 2016; Harms, 2011; Harms, 2016). In this paper, I extend this research on urbanization in Vietnam by looking beyond the national urban centres towards secondary cities.

I argue that processes of self-organized urbanization and social creativity (Evers and Korff, 2003) in small urban centres can counter this homogenous process of urban planning. They create a space of interaction in which urban aspirations are able to realize a liveable urban future for its citizens. To make this possible two related dimensions are relevant: (1) mobility and (2) porosity. Whereas mobility is a main feature of modern societies, it is especially important for smaller cities, which are located at the periphery. Practices of mobility allow engaging with the world (Talco, 2004). Local planners import mobile urban forms from outside sources, which they use as a blueprint to transform the physical, functional and symbolic landscape of the city. However

mobility also becomes a resource for local people in navigating these changing landscapes and thereby a tool to access new opportunities.

Wolfrum (2018) defines porosity as the existence of open, mobile spaces without any clear function, easy to enter and re-imagine continuously. It is a precondition for the use of mobility as resource. A multifunctional use of open space, a lack of boundaries as well as overlapping practices and symbols characterize urban porosity. The spatial proximity between rural and urban areas and the existence of empty wasteland, newly developed areas, construction sites and in-migration produce porosity. It can be found everywhere in small towns in Vietnam from the city centre to the peri-urban areas and enables mobility for local people. It produces a multilevel landscape of urban planning, self-organization and negotiation between state and non-state actors.

Mobility and porosity create the peri-urban city, which I define as a fluid space of transformation, which contains a high level of porosity with an urban level of density. This provides numerous open, undefined spaces to explore and appropriate. In the setting of small and medium sized towns, not only does the urban space cut into the rural hinterland, but the rural hinterland also reaches into the heart of the urban centre.

This paper is a by-product of my field research in Tam Kỳ in 2014 and 2015 and explores the practices of mobility and porosity used by local actors and local state administrators, which create the “peri-urban city”. To this end, I use qualitative data from 35 semi-structured interviews of local inhabitants conducted from November 2014 until March 2015 in four wards of Tam Kỳ (Tam Thánh, An Phú, Hòa Thuận and Trường Xuân). Visual data on urban development, mostly photos, document the use and transformation of space. Furthermore, the study analyses local newspaper articles as well as official documents of the local administration.

## Defining the Peri-urban City

### Small town urbanisation as multi-dimensional interface

Looking at urbanization of large national cities in Vietnam, the existing literature describes a dual process of metropolisation and peri-urbanisation, which combines the integration of rural space into urban space with the integration of this urban space into a global network (Ton et al., 2012; Fanchette, 2016; Harms, 2011). The socio-spatial integration of space and people takes mostly place at the peri-urban edge. Harms (2011) anthropological study “Saigon’s Edge” describes the emerging new urban areas on the outskirts of Hồ Chí Minh City, Bousquet (2016) analyses peri-urban space in Hanoi and the book “Hà Nội: a Metropolis in the Making” edited by Fanchette (2016) focuses on the integration of villages into the urban fabric of Hà Nội. Here, peri-urban development is characterized “by low to medium density dispersed urban development with low connectivity and sometimes large areas of vacant or low-level production agricultural land between settlements” (Roberts, 2016:11 based on Almeida, 2005). This also includes poor urban services and infrastructure, the prevalence of farming activities on small plots and family-owned commercial and business activities. With growing urban development, the industrial manufacturing increases. (Roberts, 2016)

However, in the case of small and medium-sized cities like Tam Kỳ, the distinction between rural and urban and the localization of peri-urban space become more difficult. The integration of rural areas into urban space takes place at the same time as the consolidation of the urban core into a homogenous urban space occurs. In the meantime, rural and peri-urban processes, activities and spatial characteristics reach into the urban centre, because the urban centre and the rural hinterland are geographically close. Markers of rural activities, especially agriculture, are still prevalent in the urban core, close to modern housing facilities or supermarkets. Contrarily to the idea that the urban is spreading out into the periphery and transforming rural into urban space, in small and medium-sized cities, the characteristics of the rural survive and push into urban space. The whole city is simultaneously rural and urban. Instead of a peri-urban frontier at the edge of the city like in Hà Nội, the whole city becomes a frontier space, on the edge between the urban and the rural as well as the local and the global.

I argue that small and medium-sized cities in Vietnam can be perceived as peri-urban spaces of transformation and hence 'peri-urban cities'. A mixed spatial use of rural and urban activities in the surrounding hinterland as well as in the city centre characterizes these cities. Peri-urbanisation as frame of analysis cannot only help to understand the transformation processes in the surrounding periphery of these cities, but also to analyse the distinct functions, characteristics and processes of these cities.

The ambivalence of peri-urban space defies the clear categories of urban or rural used in the local discourse and by the Vietnamese state during the urban planning process (Harms, 2011). Peri-urban space is often defined as a continuum between rural and urban. This creates a space of transformation changing rural into urban structures (Brook et al., 2003; Narain, 2010; Simon et al., 2006). Peri-urban space becomes an interface for people, goods and information, which move through space (Brook et al., 2003; Narain, 2010; Simon et al., 2006). This in-betweenness also characterizes the urban in smaller cities in Vietnam that are rapidly transforming due to urbanisation. Being located in the urban periphery, they provide an interface, which transforms rural into urban citizens and relocates goods and services between rural and urban space. (Talcoli, 2004)

Furthermore, Harms (2011) defines peri-urban space by its social edginess. This means the mutual existence of opportunities and marginalisation created by the position of local actors at the blurred boundaries of urban and rural space (Harms, 2011). Social edginess emerges from the ambivalence of peri-urban space that exists as a grey zone of administrative, social and economic status. This ambivalence and the emerging insecurities create a mobile contested space (Narain, 2010) and the need for risk spreading and the diversification of livelihood strategies. The peri-urban grey zone enables some actors to take control and adapt their own strategies (Harms, 2011). Others are faced with marginalisation due to a lack of access to resources in this contested space. Thus, peri-urban space creates a pattern of inclusion and exclusion based on the access to resources and social creativity, defined by Korff and Evers (2003:14-15) as "the knowledge, usage and coordination of resources available", especially concerning social interactions and networks.

This social edginess, I argue, also characterizes small towns in Vietnam. The influx of new residents, the re-orientation from the local to the national and global, the mate-

rial and functional transformation due to urban development plans force local actors in small towns to constantly renegotiate their position in the urban space. As new resources and livelihood strategies become available, others are lost. Hybrid social forms and rural livelihood strategies persist in the urban core of small towns, for example in the form of the agricultural use of land. Secondary cities become 'peri-urban' as a whole. They are a frontier between the local rural and global urban. They produce spaces of transformation and globalization. Being neither urban nor rural, they provide an interface for rural and urban goods, people and ideas to interact. They offer opportunities for new migrants and old inhabitants but will also marginalize them. They are in a constant process of transformation, produce new identities, offer open space for new developments and modern aspirations, and engage in a constant process of negotiation. The two main dimensions of these peri-urban cities are porosity and mobility.

### Porosity as spatial dimension

The urban environment differs from rural space by a higher density of people, buildings and activities (Wirth, 1938). However, this urban density is interrupted by borders, thresholds, and forgotten empty spaces. These spatial interruptions of the physical space create porosity in the built environment. Porosity combines the density of urban space with the existence of voids as empty and open spaces throughout the physical urban environment. These voids provide openness, accessibility and mobility, as well as space for innovation, flexibility and negotiation. Whereas porosity exists in every urban space, it is especially prevalent in peri-urban spaces where transformation processes continuously open and close access to space. (Wolfrum, 2018; BypassLab, 2016: 10-14)

Porosity links density to spatial openness and voids. In rural space, density is low. There exists a high degree of homogeneity combined with a high amount of vacant, open space. In urban space, high density and high heterogeneity of actors and activities dominate while spatial voids are smaller and more scatter. Between these two extremes of rural and urban, in peri-urban space, we can find a high level of porosity, but irregular growing density and increasing social, functional and spatial heterogeneity due to processes of transformation.

Finally, porosity encourages the mobility of peri-urban people within and between the urban and peri-urban. Porosity and the subsequent mobility of peri-urban people enable them to simultaneously access and use different roles, fulfil different functions and evoke different symbols, similar to the description of social edginess by Harms (2011). Porosity is leading to fluidity concerning symbols, activities and people (Wolfrum, 2018).

However, whereas existing thresholds and borders in the physical space encourage accessibility and mobility that connects spaces, fixed boundaries limit or end movements. They create dead-ends, which interrupt mobility and openness. The result is a fragmentation of space, which is also a main spatial feature of peri-urban areas. Contrary to porosity, which supports the multifunctional use of space, spatial fragmentation restricts the use of space. Furthermore, it creates a landscape of fragmented patterns in which urban and rural spatial patterns exist simultaneously side by side (Harms, 2011).

## Mobility as social dimension

Mobility of people and goods as well as of ideas and discourses has always a spatial and a social component. The physical movement in space expresses the spatial dimension. The social construction of its meaning defines the social dimension. Together, they enable the interaction with the surrounding world (Cresswell, 2007; Söderström, 2013: 2). According to Cresswell (2013: 21), underlying power relations determine the access to mobility, the meanings attached to it, its experience and practice and its regulations. The existing physical structures are the materialization of these power relations and they reproduce them at the same time.

Mobility plays a central role in producing 'peri-urban cities'. It can reduce marginalization and enable the adaptation of livelihood strategies in a transforming spatial and functional landscape. Mobility provides access to resources, networks and interactions. It enables the diversification of income at the household level. It allows incorporating global and national ideas into the local discourse. Finally, it also facilitates the establishment of secondary cities as interface between centre and periphery.

In the urban fabric, the built environment and the regulative framework enhance or limit mobility. In cities of the Global South, these spatial forms are often mobile urban forms imported from industrialized countries. They include sets of architecture, infrastructure, symbols and regulations, which together summarize the expectation of how a modern urban landscape must look like. They are part of projects of modernization implemented by urban actors as promise of a modern, civilized life (Söderström, 2013: 2). Söderström (2013) describes these urban forms as urban pedagogies, which incorporate an educative and disciplinary function. In this function, they educate their users about modern urban behaviour and help create the modern, urban subject. They also provide means of control for state agents as they encourage 'civilized' behaviour. However, urban forms also manifest an emancipatory function by opening new urban spaces for urban citizen and their mobility projects (Söderström, 2013). These mobility projects can include resistance and subversion as well innovative, interactive and integrative activities in urban space. This enables local urban citizen to participate in shaping urban identities, meanings and communities (Söderström, 2013: 2).

Mobile urban forms function as means of control and discipline and as means of empowerment and contestation. They are mobile imaginations, which attempt to create a material, functional and symbolic pattern, which influences the everyday mobility in real locations.

## Mobile urban forms: Mobility and urban planning in Tam Kỳ

Urbanization in Vietnam follows a predefined path towards a homogeneous urban image linked to global discourses of modernity and sustainability (Söderström, 2013). Urban planning reproduces this global imagination without including a local meaning. Based on a comprehensive framework of formal urban planning, state actors are the main developers of urban space. The Vietnamese state aims to regulate the urbanization process and facilitate the legibility of urban space. The state defines a vision of the urban as civilized, clean and modern that every urban area under state control should

implement as prescribed in the Law on Urban Planning. By using a master plan for each city, the state controls the urbanization process (Harms, 2011). The implementation of this orderly urban vision aims to prevent the emergence of an ugly urban image and maintain urban civility (Harms, 2011; Harms, 2014). Kurfürst (2012) and Labbé (2013) describe this process, which links modernization, urban planning with civility for Hà Nội, Kaiser (2014) and Schwenkel (2014) for Vinh. Kaiser (2014) and Schwenkel (2014) also take the mobility of urban forms (from Eastern Germany to Vietnam) to reproduce modernity into account.

The Vietnamese state further enforces its control by establishing a representation of space (Schmid, 2008) in each city, which embodies the state, its symbolisms and its power relations. This state vision of urban space as modern, clean and orderly is partly borrowed from a global discourse - and hence already highly mobile. It travels from the centre to the periphery - a process, which leads to the introduction into local discourses and the reinterpretation of this vision based on local needs. Furthermore, peripheral cities nowadays also participate in global networks and discourses. As a result, urban forms travel from the global directly to the local setting as in the case of Tam Kỳ (Harms, 2011; Söderström, 2013).

Urban civility (văn minh đô thị) (Harms, 2014), as used by state officials as well as local residents, expresses this “will to impose order on human beings living in social groups” (Harms, 2014: .226). This concept works as top-down instrument of government control as well as a bottom-up critique of a chaotic social order. Many Vietnamese perceive the cities as out of control (Harms, 2014). The urban realities of urban everyday life do not always align with the image of a modern, civil city. Instead, self-organization is a strong component of the urban everyday life in Vietnam as local residents adjust regulations to their daily needs and use spatial porosity as a resource. This becomes possible due to the mediation space located at the interface between state institutions and local community, which enables negotiation and adaptation of the implementation of state regulations in local space (Koh, 2006). Consequently, the emerging representational space as described by Lefebvre, which is rooted in the local environment and counter-balances state control (Schmid, 2008; Prigge, 2008) is a lived space, a space for local residents, representing symbols and meanings outside of state control and ideology.

Thus, there coexists a state-led urbanisation process and a process of a self-organized urbanisation, as well as a state space of representation and a representational space. The difference between the urban image and the urban practice is prevalent in urban areas. With regard to mobility, this differentiation happens between the introduction and implementation of mobile ideas of a civilized, sustainable modern city on the one hand and on the other hand, the practice of mobility in the everyday life as a coping strategy to adapt to the ever-changing urban realities.

## **Urban planning in Tam Kỳ: Modernisation, internationalisation and privatisation**

Tam Kỳ has been the provincial capital of the Central Vietnamese province of Quảng Nam since 1997. It is located 70 km south of Đà Nẵng along the National Highway 1A

and 30 km north of the Chu Lai Industrial Zone, at the Central Vietnamese coast. It has an area of 92.82 km<sup>2</sup> and over 120,000 inhabitants in nine urban and four rural wards. Based on the Vietnamese categorization of cities, Tam Kỳ is a Grade 2 City since 2016 (VGN News, 2016), based on the population, the provision of specific infrastructure and economic performance (Decree No. 42/2009/ND-CP OF MAY 7, 2009). Agriculture, aquaculture, handicraft, small services and a small industrial sector dominate the economy (AVC, 2013).

The Nguyễn Dynasty founded Tam Kỳ in 1906 as tax post (AVC, 2013). In the 1960s and 1970s, an American air base was located in the proximity of the city. The urban area of Tam Kỳ was concentrated along the highway, which crossed the city (today Phan Châu Trinh Street), the market and the river. The Communist forces controlled the surrounding rural areas. With the exception of a major battle in 1969 ("Battle of Yui Non Hill"), Tam Kỳ did not play any important role during the war or after the Communist conquest on March 24, 1975 until it became the provincial capital in 1997.

As a recent foundation without any historical symbolism and meanings, Tam Kỳ provides urban planners with the opportunity to realize their urban aspirations. Surrounded by rice fields and empty wasteland, this spatial and symbolic porosity provides the ideal landscape to build a modern city from scratch.

Embedded into the national urban framework and the Vietnamese concepts of the city, this vision defines the city as a space of modernity. It is not rooted in a local tradition but in a global imagery of urban modernity, having travelled to Vietnam as mobile urban form (Söderström, 2013). In Tam Kỳ, this means that city officials meet with other global actors in a global forum to develop and discuss new urban plans. These forums, meetings and workshops constitute nodes of mobility. In 2014 and 2015, the Tam Kỳ People's Committee held two international workshops together with UN-Habitat, and in one case the Japanese city of Fukuoka and in the second case the Cities Alliance and International Urban Training Centre on green urban development and eco-tourism (UN-Habitat 2015). Tam Kỳ is also a member of the regional network for local authorities for the management of human settlement (City-Net). Furthermore, Tam Kỳ is one of two Vietnamese cities, which will use the urban planning tool "City Development Strategy" crafted by the Cities Alliance to coordinate their urban development in the future (Cities Alliances, 2016). Overall, Tam Kỳ is an active participant in the global discourse on urban development, using tools provided by the international community and eager to be perceived as a role model for a green urban future.

Beyond the global discourse, Tam Kỳ also implements the national urban strategy. Urban Green Growth is the central developmental aim of urban planning in Vietnam. It is based on the urban green growth development plan to 2030 and follows the shift of the international discourse on urban growth towards sustainability and climate change adaption. Tam Kỳ constitutes one of the 23 pilot sites for this plan (Bizhub, 2018).

The state also defines measurable criteria to classify urban centres as cities, towns and townships (Decree No. 42/2009/ND-CP OF MAY 7, 2009: The state demands that the local administration formulates plans and mobilizes resources for investment based on the criteria defined by the decree. Urban centres should aim to move up the grading scale successively. While the decree states that an "urban development program must aim to improve the quality of people's life and make urban architecture and landscape



civilized, modern and sustainable while preserving the cultural quintessence and traits of each urban centre.” (Decree No. 42/2009/ND-CP OF MAY 7, 2009), the emphasis is on quantifiable development goals like infrastructure and population growth. Hence, in Tam Kỳ, urban development focuses on the construction of infrastructure, like the planned extension of Điện Biên Phủ Street, a new wastewater treatment plant and the new market. Many of these efforts are part of a cooperation with the ADB Secondary City Development program and require the resettlement of parts of the population (ADB, 2013). Since 2016, a new development project financed and supported by Finland aims at installing a smart power grid in Tam Kỳ (VIR, 2014). These construction projects reduce the spatial porosity found in the city and its hinterland by defining spatial functions and erecting new material boundaries in space.

The urban master plan for 2030 with an outlook for 2050 draws the image of Tam Kỳ as ‘Green Capital’ with a strong focus on green economy, green space and green infrastructure, including a comprehensive water supply network for all citizens (VAA, 2014; Doan, 2014). This master plan draws heavily on images of a modern, but placeless architecture. The urban future is not rooted in the local heritage but can be located anywhere (VAA, 2014). Local urban planners might not implement this plan literally; it nevertheless represents the urban aspirations of these local state actors. The plan is a tangible manifestation of the formal image of urban space aspired by state agents in Tam Kỳ.

Based on the aim of a growing modern city, the development of new urban areas in the peri-urban region of Tam Kỳ is incorporated into the masterplan, mainly in Tân Thành and An Phú ward and the rural ward of Tam Phú. These constructions of new urban areas are located along the main roads with easy access to the city centre. They consist of a grid of streets with street signs and lights, crosswalks, newly planted trees and lots of open space. Planned as construction sites for future private houses, they create open, unused space, which can be appropriated by private citizens for their everyday activities, and thereby increase porosity. This appropriation can be temporarily, for example when local farmer use these empty lots for their cattle, or permanent, for example when local residents fence off parts of this space for their gardens or build small shacks on it. These more permanent structures then reduce porosity, as they erect new boundaries, limiting access and use for other people (for similar dynamics in Hà Nội compare: Jacques, Labbé and Musil, 2017).

Economically, urban planning focuses on the development of new economic zones to attract international companies. In 2015, two Korean-invested garment companies (Panko Tam Thăng and Duck San Vina) started the construction of their production plants in the Tam Thăng Industrial Zone (VietnamNews, 2015). The plans also involve the development of tourism infrastructure along the seashore in Tam Thành, including the construction of a seaside resort, the Tam Thành Beach Resort and Spa, the Tam Thành Mural Village as well as better road accessibility. At the same time, in 2015, a new city hotel complex, the *Mường Thanh Grand Quảng Nam*, was built in the city centre at Hùng Vương Street which includes a bar and restaurant area open for locals to visit. These economic plans advance globalization and mobility as they attract people – as workers and tourists –, goods and companies from the outside. However, they also



privatize space that was previously open to local people for recreation and economic activities like fishing, thence limiting mobility and porosity.

## Spaces of everyday mobility

As shown above, urban planning by different state agencies defines a strict development path for each city and imagines the urban future as civilized, clean and modern. Furthermore, urban planning aims to regulate the urbanisation process, and to bring order to the perceived urban chaos (Harms, 2014) caused by urban actors moving through the city. All of them move through urban space without being legible, which makes it more difficult to control them and install a sense of order. The urban, thus, becomes a space of everyday mobility. This is especially true for smaller towns and peri-urban spaces where different spheres of economic and domestic activities intermingle.

Mobility is hence a livelihood decision, which creates new opportunities. As mentioned above, small towns function as interfaces for their rural surroundings as well as the whole region. Spatial proximity and porosity of space characterize these towns. Due to this spatial proximity and porosity, people living in the rural district of Tam Thành can earn an income in the city in white-collar jobs in the growing administration, the university or in hospitals as Tam Kỳ provides many of these services as provincial capital. However, it also enables informal activities like street vending. Families combine rural and urban income strategies and look for employment in all three sectors. Households also stay at the fringe of the small urban centre and make their living from those passing by and crossing the space they live in. Owners of small coffee shop or mechanical workshops and street vendors benefit from the increasing accessibility of peri-urban space. Most of the late-night entertainment facilities are also located in peri-urban space. Other activities include smaller waste recycling activities and small-scale handicraft production, which often uses road space for activities like sorting and drying (for a similar case of waste traders in Hà Nội, see also Nguyen, 2018). There are thus constant movements of goods and people between urban and rural space passing peri-urban areas. Urban, rural and peri-urban space in Tam Kỳ benefits from its proximity to the urban, administrative centre and market, and the rural, where natural resources and more empty space are available.

Apart from the mobility immanent to Tam Kỳ, urban planning introduces other forms of mobility. Due to economic growth and the role as provincial administrative centre, Tam Kỳ attracts migrants from the more rural districts of Quảng Nam. At the same time, employment in the administration and at the university brings in new citizens with higher education from larger urban centres, who seek employment in these facilities. However, due to the geographical proximity to Đà Nẵng, many of those white-collar workers stay only during the week in Tam Kỳ, so their kids can go to school in Đà Nẵng (Interviews in Tam Kỳ 2014/2015). Tam Kỳ, thus, forms an interface between the local and the global, the rural and the urban, engaging in a constant dialogue with outsiders and the outside world.

This influx of migrants and office workers necessitates the construction of new urban areas in order to meet the projected population growth. As described above, these

new urban areas provide basic infrastructure and empty building land for future landowners. These newly developed urban areas also provide open space for alternative activities as the land lies idle. House owners construct small wooden structures for their private gardens next to their houses, along streets and in open areas to plant vegetables and herbs for consumption and to claim empty space. Farmers are using the same space to look after their cattle. These activities then move into the more urbanized areas where small construction sites, sidewalks, streets and empty slots provide space. Porosity allows sidewalks to become part of a wide array of economic and domestic activities. Some of these domestic activities are temporary like washing vegetables, drying clothes or having a family party; others are more lasting like smaller workshops and small gardens in Styrofoam boxes. Porosity also opens space for cattle and chicken in the urban streets of Tam Kỳ.

The existing porosity and mobility also influence the rhythm and dynamic of everyday life in Tam Kỳ. Cars, trucks and motorbikes speed along, sometimes stopping to buy something from the sidewalk. Farmers with their cattle, street vendors with their pushcarts, and schoolkids on bicycles slowly move along the street. Finally, people sit on the sidewalk to drink coffee, eat noodle soup or to engage in small talk. Other activities, like the recycling of waste and the drying of goods, like cinnamon and incense sticks, spill over into the streets, where they interfere with the flow of traffic, limiting speed and mobility. This leads to a more ambivalent urban setting and creates a fluid interface, which people can enter, engage in, and leave.

Self-organization is particularly common in the arena of private water supply in many households in Tam Kỳ. Instead of engaging with state agencies, residents use private wells or local surface water and cooperate with neighbours in times of need. They combine different water sources and use their resources to avoid engaging with the state.

Porosity and mobility thus create the functional and material pattern of Tam Kỳ, which make these opportunities available in everyday life. Mobility becomes a valuable resource for people living at the fringe. Due to mobility and porosity, a space of interaction emerges in which people with different social and spatial backgrounds can meet. Mobility helps to create reproductive functionality by moving resources, people as well as goods and services from rural to peri-urban, and to urban space and vice versa. Mobility is hence central to the everyday livelihood strategies of the people of Tam Kỳ.

## Urban mobilities as Pedagogies

As we saw, urban planning in Vietnam and in Tam Kỳ is predominantly occupied with the creation of a modern future. Söderström (2015) talks about the pedagogic component of urban planning as the need to transform everyday behaviour. In Vietnam, the omnipresent slogan of “green, modern, and civilized” represents such idea as a broad social discourse on adequate social behaviour (Harms, 2014). Being civilized might include shopping in supermarkets, driving a car, following traffic rules, and recycling. Hence, at the celebration of Tam Kỳ’s 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Vietnamese Prime Minister

Nguyễn Xuân Phúc not only upgraded Tam Kỳ to a grade 2 city, but also urged the city officials to develop Tam Kỳ into a modern and civilized city. Besides the focus on infrastructure and economic development, he especially called for the creation of an urban civilized lifestyle (VGP News, 2016).

Therefore, urban planning needs to engage with the everyday life of local residents and establish a sense of urban order against the perceived chaos of everyday activities. Therefore, local state actors need to limit and control the mobilities of everyday life activities. They engage in politics of mobility and decide which mobility projects can be explored in urban space (Cresswell, 2010). This control of urban mobility focuses on the regulated usage of public space. At prominent places, like the sidewalk along the university or the main square 24-3, official signs remind people passing by of undesired behaviour. This includes advertising, selling of goods, lottery tickets and littering. Some of the signs also forbid driving on sidewalks and public squares. The stated aim “Xây dựng tuyến phố văn minh đô thị” (translation: “Building civilized urban streets”) references the pedagogic aim of urban development. Whereas these signs declare clear rules of conduct in public behaviour, they are often ignored in everyday interactions, and thus require enforcement. During the winter of 2014, the administration installed low metal barriers around the square 24-3 to stop people from driving their motorbikes on the square. However, the installed barriers did not stop motorbike drivers from entering the square. Thus, over the period of two months, the barriers were regularly broken down and replaced. While the local administration tried to regulate behaviour and limit mobility, local residents were less willing to change their behaviour and found ways to circumvent those barriers.

Also in 2014, the administration implemented a plan with the aim “to turn the city into a beggar and homeless person free zone” (Vietnam News, 2014). This included sending people back to their hometowns or into social services. It defined which kind of mobility was acceptable in public and by whom. To clean up the city, an effective waste management was also established. Finally, traffic police controls the public behaviour of street vendors. They not only check permits, but they are also concerned with the obstruction of traffic by sellers sitting or standing along the street (Observations and interviews October 2014). The fast flow of traffic takes precedent over the everyday mobility of local residents and their shopping habits.

The conflict concerning the new market in Tam Kỳ in 2014 demonstrates these difficulties in establishing urban order, regulating mobilities and changing people's behaviour. As part of the urban development plan, a new market was built along Bàn Thạch River in the city centre, surrounded by small shops in narrow streets. It is also close to the bridge crossing the Bàn Thạch River, which is one of the big arterial roads in Tam Kỳ. However, tensions arose, as the old market area was located along Hùng Vương Street with better accessibility especially for people living east of highway 1 and the railways. People east of the highway felt already outside of the city and were complaining about a lack of market access (Interviews December 2014). Already during the construction of the new market, local sellers complained about the management of the new market building. After the opening, these local market sellers in the new market also complained about a lack of customers. The municipality took matters into its own hands. Market operations at the old market in An Sơn were radically reduced, the built

ding partly demolished with only some market stalls left selling fruit and clothes. This forced residents to use the new market creating new mobility through the city (Observations; PetroTimes, 2014; Thanh Niên, 2014).

Another way of regulating mobility includes the construction of new streets. The construction of new arterial roads, including Điện Biên Phủ, will create new flows of traffic and improve access to some of the more secluded areas of Tam Kỳ, like An Xuân ward and An Mỹ ward and the rural district of Tam Thành. However, better access makes the area also more interesting for land development. Furthermore, this construction affects residential and agricultural land and necessitates the resettlement of 345 households (ADB, 2016).

Finally, this urban pedagogy also references socialist ideology and revolutionary history in Tam Kỳ. There are propaganda posters announcing the achievements of the local and national government. Slogans proclaim future goals of development. Loudspeakers in public areas play music and announce local party news and the local state holds ceremonies, celebrations of anniversaries and parades in public space. This space of representation is a part of everyday mobility as people drive past posters, state parades and loudspeakers. As these activities are common occurrences in public space, local residents outside of state institutions ignore them. Participation is limited to those required by the state. Ignoring those state activities is made easier because they are limited to the administrative area of Tam Kỳ. Everyday mobilities and the state space of representation in the city centre exist as two different spheres with minimal impact on each other (Interviews and observation).

Peri-urban and rural space on the other hand provide enough empty space to create a new public space dedicated to the socialist state ideology, like the Vietnamese Heroic Mother statue (Mẹ Việt Nam Anh Hùng) in the peri-urban ward of An Phú, whose construction cost US\$19.27 million. This space of representation integrates the city into the national discourse on Vietnamese history and the legitimization of the ruling Communist party (Nhân Dân, 2015).

The inauguration on March 24, 2015 was part of the 40-year celebration of the seizure of Tam Kỳ attracting a huge local crowd. The celebration organized by mass organizations like the Hồ Chí Minh youth, included dance and music performances and a firework to celebrate the Vietnamese state. However, there were also street vendors, photographers and other kind of small business activities involved. Afterwards the park surrounding the statue became a recreational space for local people as well as a tourist attraction. Cafés are located around the park and statue. Originally envisioned as space of representation for the state ideology and as educational space for the younger generation, everyday mobilities transform the space into a recreational space. Local residents drive there to take pictures for Facebook, walk around the park, drink coffee and meet friends. The political space overlaps with a space of local practice shifting the meaning towards the mundane (Observations, March 2015). Kurfürst (2012) describes this same process for public spaces in Hà Nội.

## Conclusion: 'Peri-urban city' and everyday mobility

Global urban forms introduced from the outside attempt to create a uniform urban landscape taking inspiration from global skylines without roots in the locality. Especially smaller urban centres like Tam Kỳ have an incentive to look at successful Asian cities like Singapore to recreate a modern image and attract private investment. This process might limit local mobility in the long term and exclude local residents from the use of urban spaces for recreation, economic activities and their everyday life. Politics of mobility create new tensions. Struggles about street vendors, the new market and the flow of traffic demonstrate these tensions in the case of Tam Kỳ.

However, the realities of everyday mobilities also challenge the implementation of urban development by city planners. Local residents often look for self-organized strategies instead of engaging with the local state. They self-organize their water supply; engage in urban gardening and agricultural use of urban land in Tam Kỳ. These challenges are possible due to the high porosity of urban and peri-urban space. It allows for the mobility necessary to create a liveable city for the future.

Urban planning might also lead to new opportunities for mobility, as the use of space in Tam Kỳ is often open to negotiation. An example of the appropriation of newly developed space for everyday mobilities is the park surrounding the Vietnamese Mother Statue, which provides a recreational space while ignoring the underlying ideological meaning. Combined with spatial porosity, this creates alternative identities of the urban integrated into new urban structures.

As argued in the beginning, urbanization in small cities has many similarities with peri-urbanization in large national centres like Hà Nội and Hồ Chí Minh City due to the central function of mobility and porosity. In Tam Kỳ, the rural reaches in to the city centre, while the peri-urban and rural hinterland become urbanized. This intertwined relation between urban core and rural hinterland creates a landscape in which the implementation of urban development plans and the everyday mobilities of local residents mutually transform each other and create patterns of opportunities and marginalization. As secondary city in the periphery, Tam Kỳ provides an interface between the local and the global, for residents as well as for ideas and goods. Whereas this might change in the future, for now, the prevalence of porosity in the urban core and the existing practices of mobility provide means of participation for the people faced with the transforming landscape.

These processes of porosity and mobility create a 'peri-urban city'. Finally, I would like to suggest the following three dimensions of analysis for future research: the porosity of space in small towns, their existence as interface due to spatial proximity, and the emergence of social edginess based on the ambivalence of space.

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