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**Faculty of Landscape Architecture, Horticulture
and Crop Production Science**

URBAN GREEN IN VIENTIANE, LAO PDR

– A minor field study.

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Urban green in Vientiane, LAO PDR

A minor field study

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Preface

During the summer of 1999 I visited Laos for the first time. We spent about 2 weeks in Vientiane the capital of Laos and my strongest memory from that visit was that there was absolutely nothing to do. I was 19 at the time and was surprised how a capital could become as silent as the smallest village at night. During daytime we strolled around barely noticing any traffic at all.

In 2005 I went back to Vientiane and to my surprise the city had changed quite drastically. The small dormant village that I remembered had awakened with cars, sounds, bars and everything else you might find in a bigger city. During this trip I decided to come back soon again but not only as a tourist but also as a Landscape architect.

This is a final thesis in Landscape planning at SLU, Alnarp. The minor field study was conducted in Vientiane, Laos during the spring of 2006.

Acknowledgements

This minor field study is a result of many components working together. Thanks to the on going umbrella project between HKR and Laos which made it possible for a SLU student to join and be a part of it.

Thanks to my supervisor Gunilla Lindholm who's valuable input has helped my report stay on the right track and not straying to far from the subject.

Co supervisor Jean Lacoursiere who introduced the concept of MFS and its possibilities.

And thanks to Mrs. Saykahn and Mr Bounchan urban planners in Vientiane.

B n P guest house where I stayed during the field study who took me in as a family member.

Summary

This is a Minor field study addressing the current situation in Vientiane, Laos where focus lies on the green structures past, present and future.

The city of Vientiane is growing rapidly and as a result of this there is a increasing development. The once peaceful capital known for it's lush and green environment is standing in a crossroad where important decision must be made to preserve valuable areas. During 8 weeks inventories and observations where made resulting into a proposal for future development. The proposal is divided into three parts.

The urban fringe and surrounding landscape are still quite undeveloped and have a great potential of green wedges etc.

The city of Vientiane and the green network linking important recreational, commercial and cultural places.

Detailed proposal over certain green objects such as parks and squares.





Sammanfattning

Detta är ett examensarbete där den nuvarande situationen i Vientiane med fokus på grönstrukturens förflutna, nutid och framtid bearbetas.

Vientianes invånare ökar dagligen i antal och som resultat av detta ökar bebyggelse trycket på stan. Den en gång lugna och lummiga staden står inför ett vägskäl där viktiga beslut måste fattas för att bevara den speciella karaktären.

Under 8 veckor inventerades och observerades Vientianes grönstruktur för att kunna ge förslag på framtida utveckling.

Förslagen är uppdelade i tre delar. Det omgivande landskapet, staden Vientiane och groan object såsom parker och torg

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Background

A city consists of several different interlocked structures. The dominant one, the infrastructure, is something that we today are very familiar with and greatly dependent of. Everyone use sanitation and some kind of transport system in everyday life, and it has probably never been easier to send and receiving information. Another other one is the "blue and green" structures. The green structure consists of a network of forests, parks, gardens, allées, trees, bushes and perhaps even single plants. It can vary a lot in character and function which, although we take them for granted, can make it hard to fully comprehend. The blue structure is the water in and around the city. It consists of oceans, lakes, rivers, ponds, streams wetlands and dikes. Most often in the planning process, blue structures are organized as a part of green ones (e.g. Region Skåne 2002). In the following text the blue structure will be included in the green structure.

When trying to apply an original European model on a city like Vientiane it is important to understand how these ideas have developed.

During the urbanization that took place in Europe in the 18th and 19th century public parks were developed to increase the public wellbeing. (COST)

The idea of public parks spread to America where the concept was developed not only to include parks but also connecting parkways. Today the greenstructure is becoming more and more integrated into urban plan-

ning and should be something regarded with high value and importance.

Green structures have always been a part of a city and, in some cases, are even the main reason for its present location. Their role in transport, resources, food supply and amenity has made that today most large cities are located near rivers and oceans. The importance of well developed green urban structures in the wellbeing of the inhabitants is well documented (Grahn 1986). This has been known for a long time in Europe, something that unfortunately has too often been learned the hard way. Many important parts of these systems have disappeared, and today a lot of money is put in to restore them or even simply reconstruct them from scratch. After the Second World War and up until the 1970s, a lot of green areas were created to help improve the degraded city air and general environment. Not only humans gain from them, urban wildlife benefit too, further reinforcing the sentiment of amenity.

Today parks, green corridors, gardens, lakes and streams are becoming an essential part of cities in countries of developed economy and, in most cases, even promoted and protected by law. This however did not happen spontaneously! Long-term perspective and approaches integrating such structures in a functional urban environment had to progressively overcome the sporadic and often specific-interest pressures of development, which almost invariably led to their slow but steady disappearance. Lessons learned only emphasize the neces-

sity for integrated long term planning perspectives and the willingness to implement them with respect to their “green” aspirations. Is this willingness however dependant of self-learned lessons? Is a city having lost such structures more inclined to keep what is left and promote their return? Can lesson learned be transferred and willingly accepted, or one must first give-in to sporadic and specific-interest pressures of development before proactively incorporating green and blue structures? Consequently, do levels of “development-industrialization” or regional perceptions of green structures (*i.e.*, cultural differences) further influence their incorporation in urban planning?

In many fast growing cities countries of developing economies, although knowledge often exists and plans have often been made to secure them, green structures still steadily give way to new buildings and infrastructure. Urban sprawling seems to be working faster and more effectively than the official planning process.

Vientiane, Lao PDR

One such city is Vientiane, capital of Lao PDR, where local and national practitioners try to deal with discrepancies between planned and actual development not only of their capital, but also of many of their fast growing cities. Lao PDR is a small county in South-East Asia situated between Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China and Burma. (Se Fig.1) Dominantly Buddhist, the 6 million large population of Laos consists of a large ethnic diversity with over 90 different ethnic groups identified.



During the first half of the 20th century Laos was a part of the French Indochina, influencing both architecture and infrastructure development of its main cities. Following its independence from France in 1949, Laos development remained slow and remained more or less closed to tourism until the early 1990's.

Vientiane is divided into 112 villages covering an area of ca. 30 km² and its population is now growing at a rate of 5.9% per year (compared to ca. 1% in 2000). Until recently, the ca. 300,000 inhabitant of Vientiane had been living in close contact with an intricate network of centennial allées and a dense network of vegetated earth-channels connecting larges wetlands and small ponds. By the end of 1996, the *Vientiane Urban Infrastructure and Services* project, implemented by the Vientiane Urban Development and Administration Authority (VUDAA), was being implemented with financial and technical support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Road, sanitation and drainage works rapidly changed Vientiane's urban features. Many small allés and a large portion of the tall teak trees lining the downtown waterfront on the Mekong River were removed to allow for road enlargement and infrastructure layout. Similarly, most of the drainage network – which included the construction of a channel through the city's central wetland - was canalized and cement-lined to ensure quick and

efficient water evacuation from the city in order to reduce local flooding (Fig. 2 Lacoursière *et al.* 2003).



Fig. 2 The Hong Ke, part of the natural drainage network of Vientiane, in 1990 and in 2003 after rectification.

The basis for recent developments in infrastructure and services was the Vientiane Urban Master Plan, which was prepared in 1989 with assistance from the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and approved in 1991 by the Laotian Authorities (GHK International & SMED Consultant, 2001). It however seems to be a very active parallel development in housing, hotel and business buildings by local authorities and rich citizens, through illegal filling of wetlands subsequent to these channel and road works. Furthermore, some officially planned and ad hoc developments seems to be at odds with plans for official green structures established by the Institute of Urban Planning of the Ministry of Communication, Transport and Construction (Lacoursière and Vought, personal communication). Also part of Vientiane's changing face are development assistance projects such as the 2 year *Improvement of Urban Environment in Vientiane Lao PDR* from the Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) initiated 2001, which had the objective to "identify, formulate, plan, manage and implement improvement of the green and brown environment in Vientiane" (DANIDA 2001).

Project Objective

The purpose of this study is to investigate the current situation of Vientiane with focus on the green areas and structures.

Inventories and analyses will be made to identify and chart important green areas.

The goal will be to create a proposal for the future development of the urban green structure. The proposal should be based on various inventories and analyses presenting the present state.

This paper could be used in city planning as guidance when deciding on future development.

Presently Vientiane is lacking such a document and I hope that this paper can be helpful in future planning and development.

Methodology

This minor field study was based on an intense and deep litterature study as a preparation before the trip to Laos.

A lot of the base information needed (*i.e.*, maps and reports) was already available in Sweden through an ongoing research project conducted by scientists from Kristianstad University.

The fieldwork in Vientiane consisted of three distinct parts:

- 1) gathering more written information concerning the green areas in Vientiane such as master plans and detailed plans.
- 2) conduct relevant inventories and analysis of the actual green areas
- 3) interview local planners to better understand the present situation.

Operating under a collaboration agreement with the Lao National Mekong Committee (LNMC; a high level governmental organization), the research project facilitated on site gathering of information as well as field support (local transport, meeting facilitation, translation) and security (assistance from a Lao Government official).

Analysis of the green structures will address different aspect such as historical and cultural factors, ecological considerations, sustainability and the social template. This will give a better understanding of the complexity surrounding the present condition and form the basis for the interview with the planners.

Interviews will be conducted in a semi-structured manner, an approach often used when the interview gains from being more flexible (Devereux, Hoddinott, 1992). This way one can get a fuller picture of the situation. The initial target groups were:

- 1) the Vientiane Urban Development and Administration Authority
- 2) the national planners such as the Institute of Urban Panning – office of the local supervisor

Area of interest

The area chosen for this study is the central part of Vientiane. This is the most developed area where the effects and problems are the greatest. This area is shown with a pink color on the map. The countryside and urban fringe (yellow and green) will also be addressed but on a less detailed level. (Fig. 3)

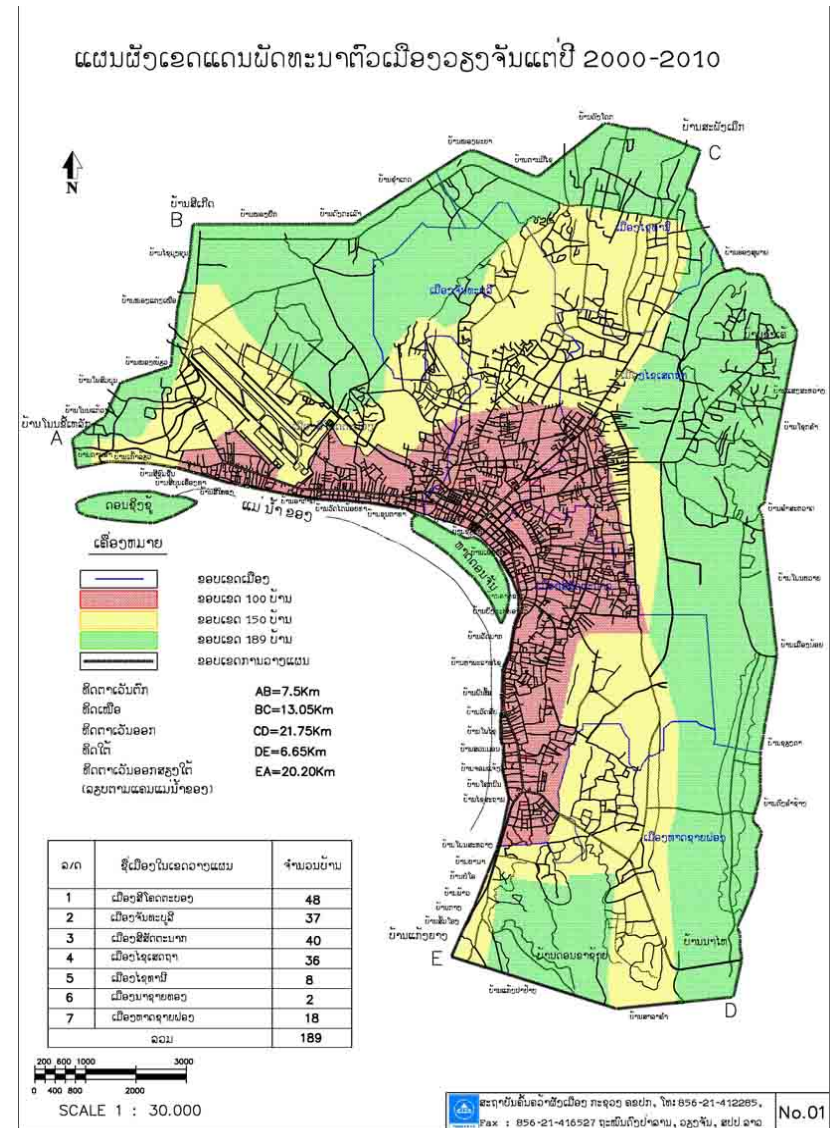


Fig. 3 Map showing the different divisions of Vientiane, from Masterplan 2000-2010

Green and blue values and aspects

Ecology

The vegetation in a city has several different values one is the direct function. The trees shade the soil lowering the temperature and creating a more pleasant climate. (COST) The leafs on trees and bushes also work as an air filter reducing the airpolution. Wetlands purify water and reduce the amount of nutrience.

In Vientiane the nature has earlier been the matrix in which the different villages rest like small islands. However the increasing population has changed this state rather rapidly. The lush capital is slowly loosing its green charm. As in many cities the wildlife has been pushed aside to make room for new roads and buildings. This had also led to an increase in poaching and 10 years ago it was so bad that the urban wildlife was close to being extinct. Today it is clearly better during my field study I was amazed by the amount of visible animals.

During a walk around town you can hear birds, and se beautiful butterflies, toads and other reptiles al over town. Still the situation isn't stable. Everyday wetlands, the natural homes to many of these animals, are being land filled to give room for new development. Large green areas that are linked with smaller surrounding areas making it possible for animals and plants to survive in a city. Green corridors such as avenues and edges are important for the movement of wildlife.

Culture

The urban green is an important part of a cities identity. And it has been so for a long time becoming integrated with the local tradition. It reflects the ideals of the time often not just local but also foreign. The urban green often tells a tale of how a village became a city.

The urban green in Vientiane has for along time been its strongest character. In contrast to many capitals in other developing countries in Asia, Vientiane hasn't grown so fast and until recent years been able to keep a lush appearance.



Fig. 4 One of the last dubbelsided mahogney allees in Vientiane.

One of the main features has been the green avenue of mahogany planted during the French colonial time.

(Fig. 4)

The old avenues are a remembrance from the old times and are worth saving just as much as the colonial architecture.

Another feature are the many wat areas creating green areas with a very special appearance. A wat is a Buddhist temple, which often is surrounded with a small piece of land that is taken care of by the monks that live there.

Since most Lao men during a certain point of their lives live as monks the wats are still very active and a strong part of the local culture.

A park as a concept isn't a very old concept in Vientiane. The oldest parks would be considered still new with European standards.

Social

Green areas such as parks have a great potential for relaxation, sports, children playing, exercise, spontaneous meeting places and events. Often one area can hold several of these functions. (Höör grönstrukturplan)

To have access to a green area close to the home is an important part of the daily life and wellbeing.

The use of a park or green area varies a lot in a tropic country and a temperate. In Vientiane the parks are

used early mornings and late afternoons when the temperature is tolerable.

During midday only parks with sufficient shade are visited.

The Mekong river is used mostly during the dry season when the water level is low and safe for swimming.

(Fig. 5)

When asking locals about nature and recreation the closest answer I got was a small waterfall not too far from



Fig. 5 The Mekong river during the celebration of the Lao new year

the town. Otherwise people don't use the nature in the same way that we do in Europe.

Many people living in Vientiane have family and friends

living in the countryside that they can visit.

Different kinds of sports are a very popular recreational activity. Depending on your interests and financial situation there are several different recreational activities that one can do.

Football is a popular sport and it played all over the city. The level of organization varies from an open spot in a meadow to an organized field with high standard. There are a few tennis courts with organized games.

Other sports are basketball, volleyball, court hockey, and Frisbee on the sandbank of Mekong River.

There are gyms and health clubs both in different price ranges.

Public swimming pools and more expensive luxury pools attract both locals and tourists.

In weekends a trip to the waterfall north of Vientiane is popular as long as it isn't the dry season.

In early morning and evening it is popular to go jogging around Patuxay Park. During weekend evening several hundred people gather there.

Just by the Mekong River in an open sided building every afternoon an aerobic class is held.

In the outer fringe of Vientiane golf courts are a popular.





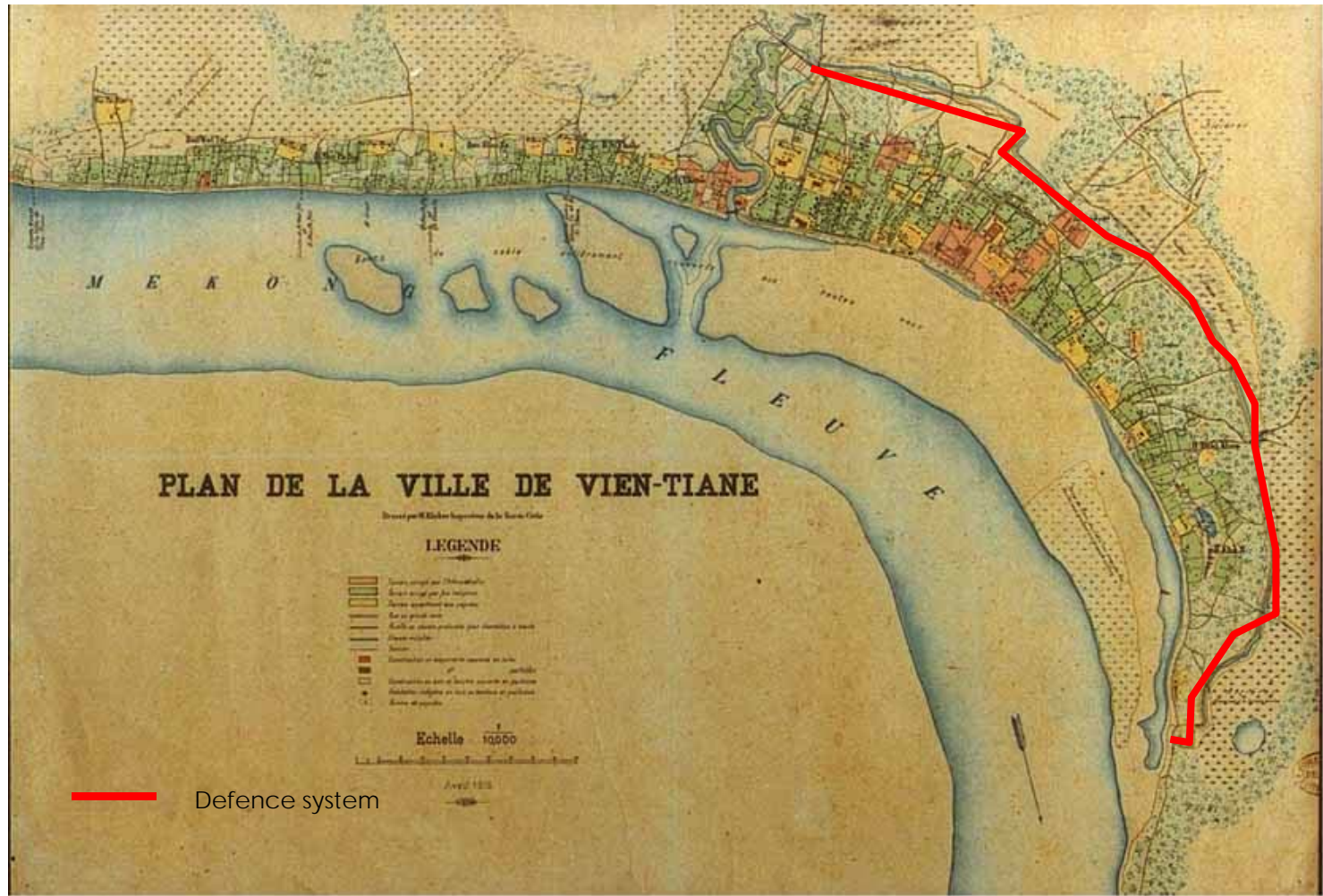
PAST, PRESENT AND ANALYSIS

City expansion

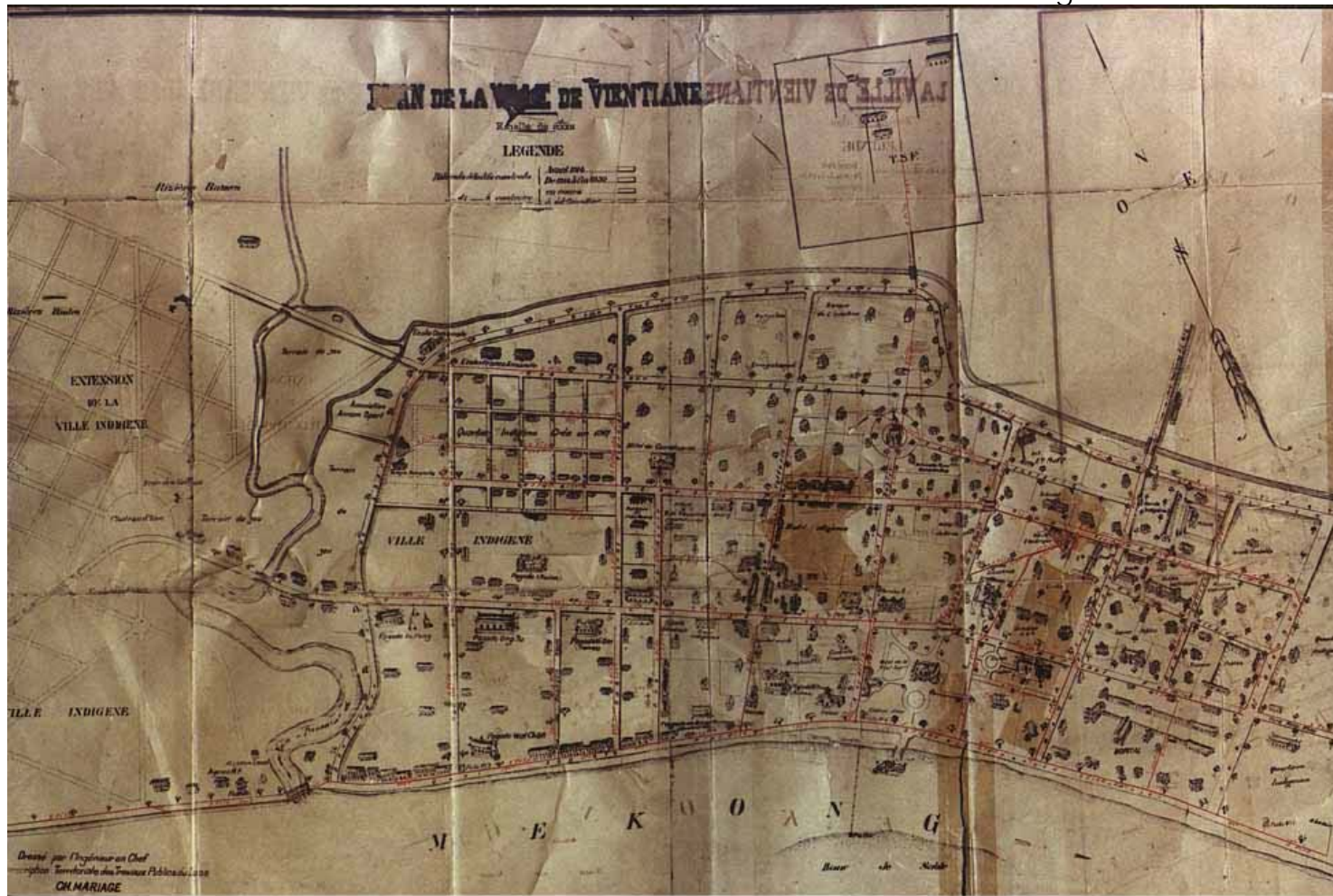
The city expansion is well documented from the beginning of 1900 up until today. Based on maps from the colonial period the rapid changes are easy to follow.

On this map from 1905 Vientiane is small village. The wat areas which are marked with a red color and official buildings which are yellow dominate a large part of the city.

The defense system consists of a high wall and a mote surrounding the city. Outside of the city rice fields and forest dominate the land use. It was around this time that France moved the administration to Vientiane making it possible for new city structures to appear. (Sayatath, 2003)



On this map from 1931 the city has grown out to the outer wall. The streets are straight a clear sign of the French colonization. In the restructuring plan administered by the French the existing roads were supposed to be straightened out and either parallel or perpendicular to the Mekong river.



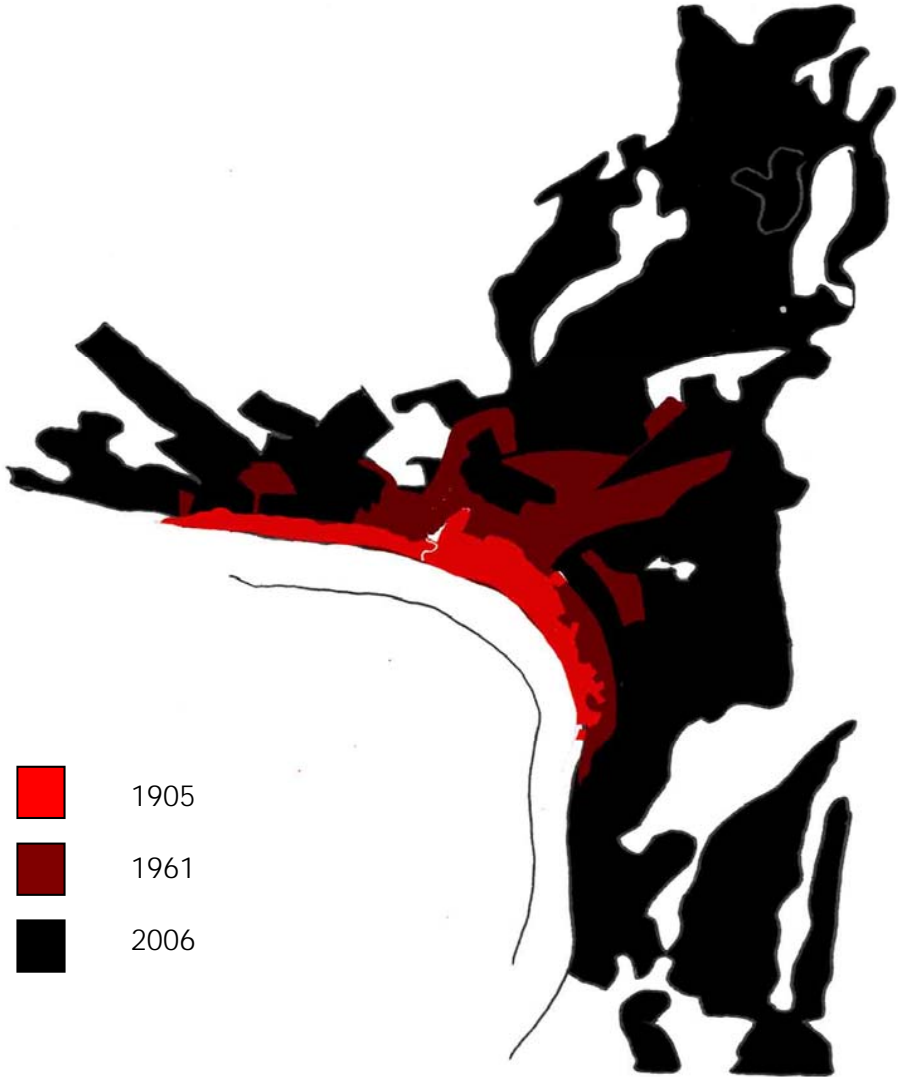
It is also possible to see avenues and important buildings on the map. This central part of Vientiane has remained quite the same up until today with many colonial buildings left intact.

The planned extension of the city is shown on the left side this is however something that never came through. During 1928 the urban city of Vientiane had only 9000 inhabitants and the Laotians were a minority. Not until 1950 did the majority consist of Laotians.

This map is from 1961 and Lao has been independent for 8 years. The city has grown a lot and large urban and infrastructural plans are made. The Lan Xang avenue connecting the palace with the surroundings as one of the main roads.



Urban Expansion



Present situation

In this part I will present areas, avenues, parks, gardens, schoolyards, temple areas, wetlands, channels and others green links and objects that I have found to be important for the future development of the urban green in Vientiane.

In the master plan of Vientiane 2000-2010 there are five green areas marked out as important for further development. (Fig. 6)

1. Mekong area,
2. Novotelpark,
3. Patuxay,
4. That luang area
5. The national museum.

The areas are in some cases in need of a renovation and in some it is new development. Unfortunately there is nothing about linking the different areas or smaller development plans.

During the spring of 2006 and 2007 some of these areas already had been developed and some were still due for a change.

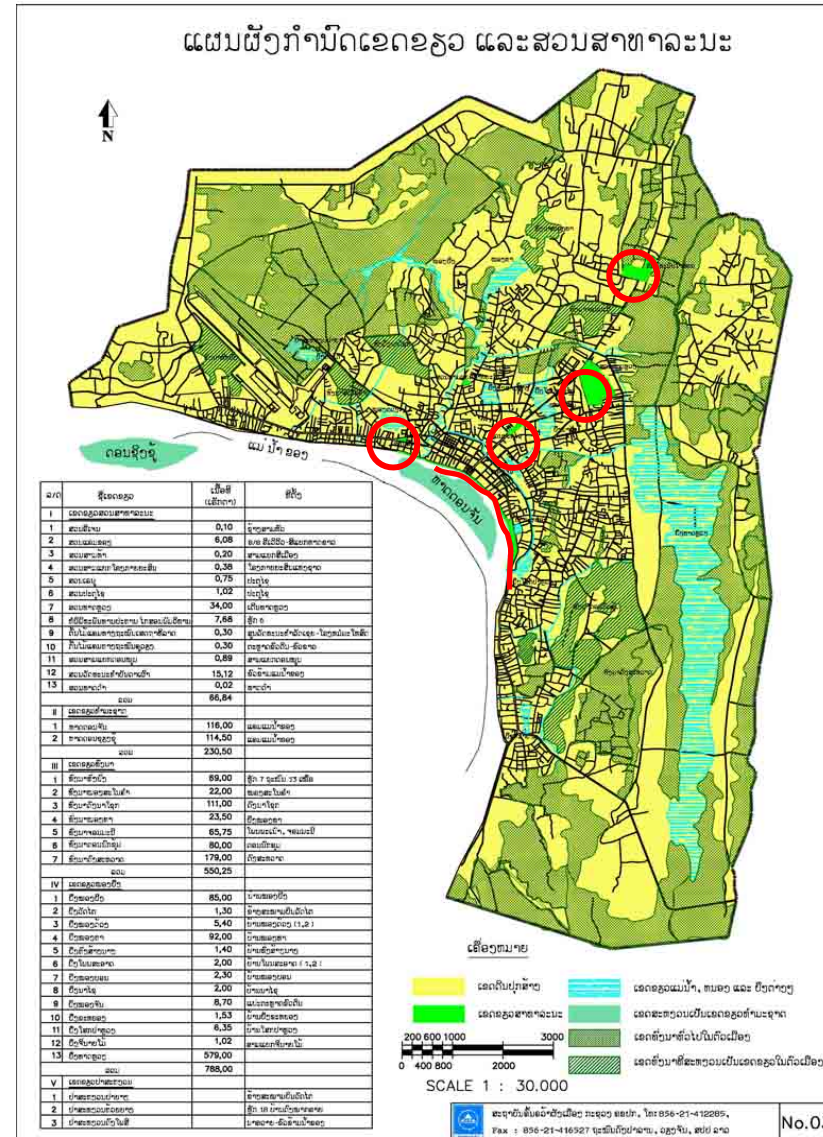


Fig. 6

City structure

When trying to understand the blue and green structure it is also important to look at the city structure. Kevin Lynch, an American Urban planner, published in 1960 "The imagine of the city" where he describes city navigation and perception.

A city consists of several different physical elements; these elements are organized in a way that makes it more or less easy to navigate through the city. By creating a mental map over the city based on the actual city and a network of paths, nodes, landmarks, barriers, and districts people orientate through the city. The clearer theses different parts of the network is the easier it is to navigate. One of the most defining elements is the path, which should be clear and perhaps even contain a certain consistent character. For example similar vegetation or streetlights. (Lynch 1960)

Paths, the streets, sidewalks, trails, and other channels in which people travel;

- Along the Mekong
- Avenue between the palace and Patuxai
- Shaded roads

Nodes, focal points, intersections or locations

- Talat sao (and other markets)
- Buss station
- Nam puh (mostly a tourist node)

Landmarks, readily identifiable objects, which serve as, reference points

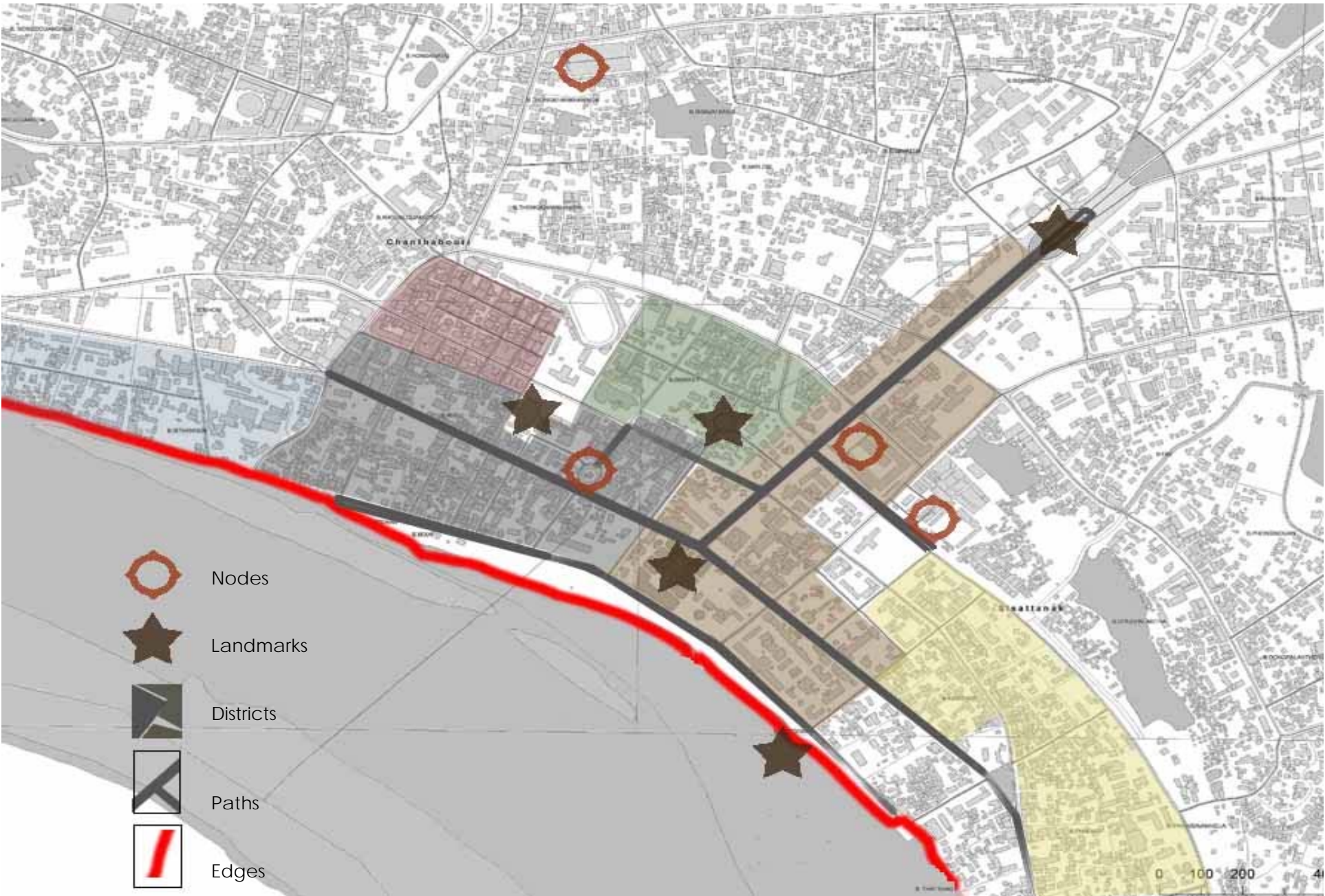
- Don chan
- Patuxai
- The Palace
- Nam puh
- That dam

Edges, linear elements such as shores, roads and walls

- Mekongriver
- Channels
- Larger roads

Districts, larger areas with similar character and/or scale

- Areas from the colonial period
- New built areas
- Area along the Fa ngn road



Surrounding landscape and city expansion

Around Vientiane there are several larger green areas that still haven't been developed. (Fig. 8) The green areas vary a lot in content some are bewooded and some have a more agricultural character.

These areas can be important in the future expansion of the city. Today there are no links connecting these areas with the central part or with each other.

In the master plan of Vientiane 2000-2010 the major residential expansion is located to three places. (Fig. 9) These new development areas only affect the green areas to some extent. (Fig.10) It is important that these green areas are considered and evaluated before new development takes place.

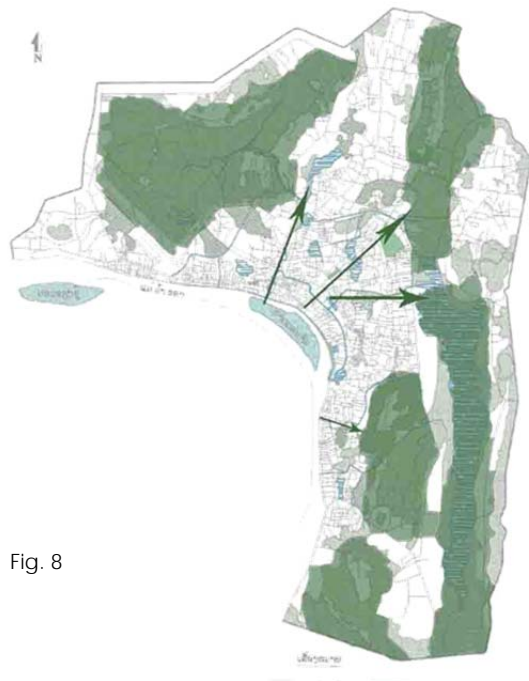


Fig. 8

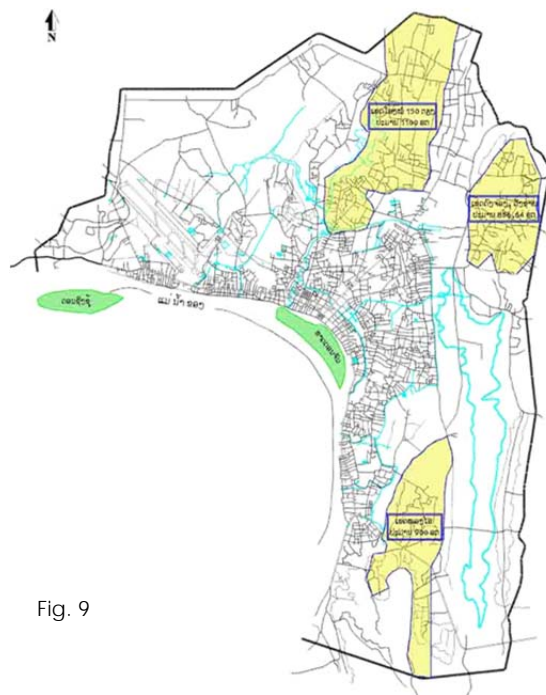


Fig. 9

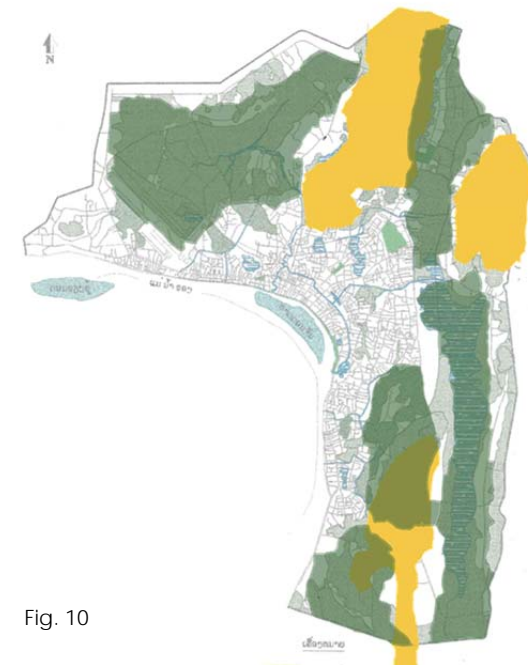


Fig. 10

Vientiane city

The green structure can be divided into green objects and green links. The green objects consist of parks, gardens, squares, natural vegetation, lakes, ponds and wetlands. And the green links are avenues, rivers, channels, paths and even sidewalks.

A well-developed green structure promotes movement and activities in a city by providing safe paths and areas.

The green structure should link the surrounding countryside with the city as well as connecting different parts within the city. The shape and size of a green link can vary a lot, from just a narrow path to several hundred meters large park or nature area.

Vientiane is a lush and green capital with a lot of vegetation. However as the city grows the green network is becoming less and less intact. By identifying the weak and undeveloped green links and strengthen them



Fig.11 The different dominant green elements



Fig. 12 Green links which need to be strengthened.

Traffic and Public transportation.

The amount of traffic varies a lot during the day. From rush-hour when the main roads are filled with cars, tuctucs and motorbikes to period when there's almost no traffic at all.

It is quite safe to visit the city by bike but sadly the majority of bikers are tourists. Many hotels rent bikes and motorbikes and this is a good way to get around the town. For more convenient travelers tuctucs can take you an-



...ywhere you want for about 1 US dollar. Tuctucs are also used as public transportation with stops and set destinations. But since there are no signs the system is hard to understand as a visitor. So you often end up haggling the price with one of the many tuctuc drivers. From the bus station busses primarily go to other parts of the country.

As the city continues to grow the need for a well-developed public transport will increase.



Fig. 13 As a result of the lacking parkinglots cars are parked on the side of the streets,

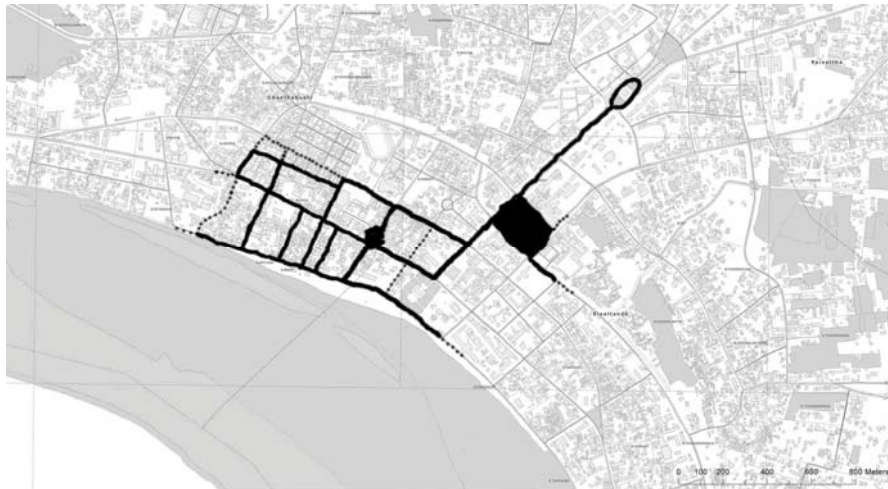


Fig. 14 One of the few parkinglots

Movement observations

By analyzing the pedestrian pattern in a city one can come closer to understanding the potential of different places. Where do people walk, stop, sit and rest? These were questions that were hard to answer without conducting field observations. During my field study in Vientiane I spent a large part of the days outside in the parks, streets and squares. What do people do outside, which parks and places do they visit.

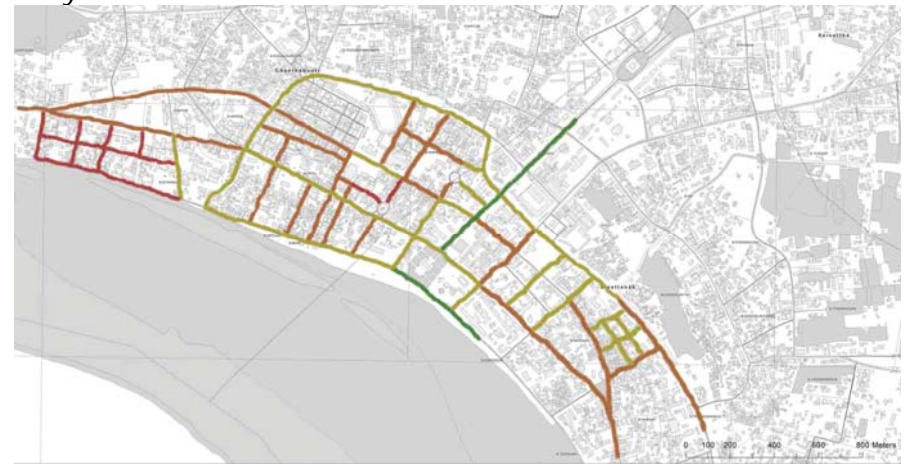
I visited the same places on different times of the day and on different days of the week. The result of this study shows the most frequently used streets by pedestrians.



Accessibility

A city should be available for all people whether they are old, young, with or without any handicaps. Separating the pedestrian and bicyclist from highly trafficked roads creates a safer situation. Sidewalks and bike paths are also a good start. A well-lit street during the dark hours, safe crossings, and designated parking areas makes the city more accessible. Today there are no special paths for bicyclists so they are forced to share the road with cars and trucks something that doesn't always end well. As the traffic continues to increase these problems will become more evident. To keep this city bicyclist friendly as it still is today something will have to change.

Several of the main roads in the central parts of Vientiane have sidewalks but the quality is very poor. Open manholes, large mahogany roots and parked cars are very common.



Shade analysis

One important aspect when developing the pedestrian network in Vientiane is the sun and the high temperature. Streets with a lot of vegetation such as large trees have a more pleasant walking climate. By developing the street vegetation the pedestrian paths can be promoted.



Fig.17 Streets with very good and good shade levels. Where the shade levels were very good the main shade giver was the mahogenytree.

Park characters

In a growing city like Vientiane it is important to see to the need of the new and old inhabitants. People moving from the countryside into the city move away from nature but the need still remains. The diversity of the cities green areas should be high to see to the many needs of both new and old residents. And as the city changes influences from other countries will affect the way the people see and interpret their surroundings.

When creating a new or restoring an old park it is important to understand what people seek when going to a park.

In a rapport written by Berggren-Bärring and Grahn (1995) 8 different park characteristics are described. These different park characteristics can be used as a guide when analysis the green area diversity from a health and environment psychological aspect.

1. Rich in species
2. The open
3. Festive ornamental character
4. Space
5. The pleasure garden
6. Social history
7. Wild
8. Peaceful

To better understand the parks in Vientiane I tried to apply these definitions to the present parks and green are-

as. What kind of characters exists and which areas are missing. Why are they missing, are there any other characters that isn't mentioned in the Berggren-Barring, Grahn rapport? The result could serve as a guide when planning for new park and or changing old parks.

The result of this study showed that parks and planned green areas with a wild and natural appearance was totally missing.

The character peaceful and space were also missing since the parks in Vientiane are quite small and it is hard to find a spot without visual or auditoria disturbance. The other characters could be found on one or several places.

One conclusion is that since the very concept of a park still is very new, and that Vientiane still has plenty of unorganized green areas close to the residential areas, areas like this aren't needed.

Another aspect is safety. During the night the city of Vientiane becomes very dark and only some public areas are light up. A park with wild character could become something dangerous and unwanted. And of course the wild nature in Laos cannot be compared with the Swedish. In Sweden nature is something romantic and extremely safe. In Laos a park with a wild character could become the home to dangerous insects, snakes and other animals that one does best in avoiding.

If parks with a wild/natural character ever will become something for Vientiane is hard to know but with the continuing development, decreasing urbangreen areas and continuing influences from abroad this might become something developed in the future.

More likely is perhaps the introduction of parks with peaceful and quiet spaces. This is something that was mentioned by locals when we were discussing why the visit parks. With the stress in the everyday life and the increasing noise level due to traffic people seek out quiet places to relax during their lunch brakes and weekends.

Garden culture in Laos

When talking about Asian gardens and parks it is hard not to first think about the Japanese or Chinese gardens with their simplicity and balance. Water, stone, pavilions and plants in a perfect setting. In Vientiane the areas that most resemble theses ideals are the temple areas. Within the temple walls a simplicity and neatness is found. Theses areas have probably been looking the same for along time and not been so influenced by external forces such as the French during the colonization or the modern ideals of today.

For the average Laotian the garden is a place for production. Fruits, vegetables and herbs are grown for cooking and some flowers with a religious and cultural purpose.

It's often close to the house but some gardens are also found on vacant lots close to channels and paths.

Many of the parks in Vientiane are sponsored by one or several foreign parties. In doing so the park directly becomes influenced by this countries ideals.

For example there are a couple parks sponsored by Korea and China. Here neon lights, fountains and strict plantations dominate.

In other parts of the city influences from Thailand are seen mostly in the selection of plant material but even the design of some of the smaller parks.

Not far from down town Vientiane several nurseries can be found. They show a wide selection of plants and trees. During and short interview with one of the owners I found out that the interest in plants from private persons has been increasing a lot the last couple of years. Much of the plant material was imported from Thailand since it still was hard to find producers within the country. This gives an indication that Thailand has a lot of influence over the future garden trends.

Tourism and Vientiane's image abroad.

To better understand the image and attraction of Vientiane I did a light inventory on Internet. I primarily searched through tourist guides and similar sights.

The result was conclusive besides the many attractions it is the pace and scale that attract people. Something important to have in mind when planning for the future.

Vientiane, capital of Laos is Asia's biggest village.

<http://www.visit-laos.com/where/vientiane/>

Vientiane's major attractions are its serene Buddhist monasteries and significant monuments that dominate the scene on the streets of central Vientiane.

<http://www.laoembassy.com/discover/sites/vientianecity.htm>

the laid back waterside capital city, Vientiane.

<http://www.travelindochina.com/Country.asp?CountryID=5&qclid=CL26peCJpooCFQJPOgodWE6nuw>

When it's time to take a break, there's Vientiane.

<http://travel.nytimes.com/2007/01/14/travel/14next.html?ref=travel>

Smaller and far less congested than many other South East Asian cities, Vientiane has been described as how Saigon once was. The city has wide boulevards that make it easy going for visitors. Rental cars are however almost unheard of in Laos, but much of the city center can be easily explored on foot. And while some of the attractions can be a couple of miles apart the walking in Vientiane is typically easy going.

<http://www.tripadvisor.com/Travel-g293950-s302/Vientiane:Laos:Getting.Around.html>



SWOT-ANALYS

Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat.

SWOT is originally an analysis method used by organizations and companies developed by T R Dealtry. The method is used to identify organizations opportunities for future success.

Once analyzed the idea is to develop the strengths, eliminate the weaknesses, use the opportunities and reduce the threats. In this rapport I have used the SWOT analysis to sum up the conclusions of the analysis.

Strength

- Strong green and lush character
- Unique capital with a reputation of being a nice and relaxing place
- Strong identity.
- A couple of public parks with a mature vegetation spaced out in the central part of the city.

Weakness

- A majority of the avenues are getting old and need to be replaced.
- The city is rapidly growing and the development takes a lot of green areas for housing.
- Lacking sufficient funding for maintenance for the parks.
- Natural parks with a wilder character are missing

Opportunity

- Attract tourist as a green and culture rich Asian capital.
- The city is still not too dense and a lot of the urban green could be saved creating a green capital for the future generations.
- Pedestrian and bicyclist friendly city
- Densification of the city with a well developed and integrated green structure.
- A good frame to continue the development of the parks.

Threats

- The city grows to fast and loses its identity by building away the special character.
- The housing development continues without considering the present urban green structure.
- The lush green corridors are replaced with insufficient vegetation creating a hot and dry pedestrian climate.
- New larger roads become barriers for the inhabitants.

Urban green

In this part of the report I will present the different parks and green areas in Vientiane. The definition of a park is a public area with organized maintenance.

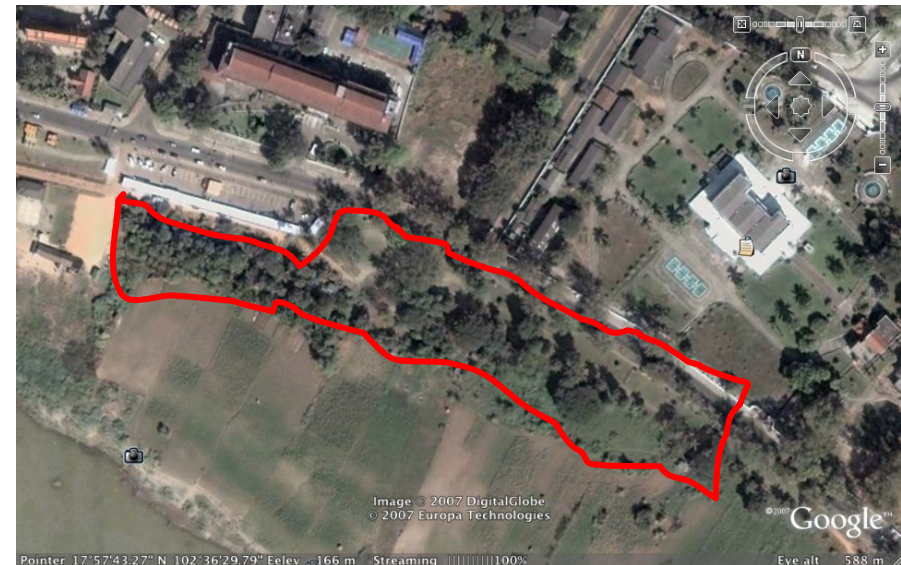
Mekong River Park.

This is the oldest park in Vientiane. (Bounchan)



It is located between the palace and the Mekong river and consists of three parts. One open ornamental part with few shade giving trees, cut ornamental hedges and a small monument. The plants are in bright colours and

distinct shapes. This is not a place to relax in and people do not stay here during the hotter hours of the day. It is nice to look at when you pass the area by car or tuctuc. The middle part is a parking lot with a newly planted boarder consisting of yellow flowering trees and cut low hedges. It is one of two well-needed parking lots in this area.



The last and biggest part consists of large trees giving a well-sought shade during the warmest hours of the day. There are more than 15 kinds of trees, which give the place a diverse and interesting character. The age and size of the trees add a certain quality that is hard to manufacture in a short time. Under the trees a playground with swings and slides is found. Before this place

held a restaurant today it's visited by fruit wagons with fresh pineapple, mango, guava and melon ready to eat.

The park is used during most parts of the day and it is the largest public green area by the Mekong. The people that visit this park vary in age but most common is family with children and groups of teenagers. Occasionally tourists find their way to this green haven by the Mekong but only for a short stop and a quick picture of the old trees. People sit on the grass in the shade talking the benches are not a limiting factor the shade is. The park



is close to a parking lot and is easily accessed from the city.

The old trees that make the special character consist of several different species but the new trees planted in the

gaps mostly consist of one or two. (Yellow flowering and palm trees)

The old trees (acacia, tamarind, popel, eucalyptus, teak, reach a full tree height of 20-30 m and the new ones will only reach half this height. In the future this will change the expression of the park from a lush green oasis to a dry hot spot. There are today gaps where larger growing trees can be planted and in a future replace the old trees.



Ficus religiosa, important tree in the Buddhism religion, common around wa-tareas.

Patuxay The Victory gate.

The name Patuxay has several translations Patu: Arch or Gate and xay: triumph or victory.



It is located in the northern part of central Vientiane connected to the palace with Lan xang aveny. The avenue splits up and passes around the Victory gate making it into an island. The easiest way to come here is by tuctuc or vespa. By foot it is about a 10-15 minutes walk from the town center.

There are two safe crossing with lights but even here one must be careful.

The park consists of two parts the monumental ornamental park with the victory gate and the northern part with a more lush character.

The monument was created in the 1960 with cement that was supposed to be used for an airport (Lonely



planet). The monument bears a strong resemblance of the arc de triumph in Paris however the details are traditional Laotian.



Today it is a popular place for joggers since it offers a good jogging path in central Vientiane. During the hot hours of the day the visitors consist of tourists who come by the buss loads to se this monument. The shady parts of the park offer a midday rest for local inhabitants.

Early mornings and evenings the place is full of activity. Every Saturday and Sunday between 6 and 7 PM the two fountains have a water show with music. The fountains were sponsored by china. At nighttime the parks neon lights are lit up and the park is filled with groups of teenagers, mothers with children and couples holding hands. Very few western tourists come by at this time.



Simuang

A monument park in the east part of Vientiane.



The park is well kept with flowers, palm trees, shaped bushes, paths to walk on and benches to sit on. The park is located between two roads but since there is a lot of vegetation blocking the view it isn't a great problem. Couples often sit here during the evenings. There are a couple of big trees that give shade during the hot hours. Tuctuc drivers are often found taking a nap here.



Novotel park

Located in the western part of central Vientiane.



It is the first green area that you see on your way into the city from the west. It is a monument park with a large monument, fountains, palm trees and well-cut green lawns. Unfortunately the park has been vandalized, small trees have been damaged and there is a lot of rubbish on the ground. The fountains are empty of water and the park gives a deserted expression. The fact that it is located between two roads is obvious wherever you

are since it is so small and the vegetation is low. The park isn't used during day except by tuctuc drivers, who seek the shade under a big tree. During the evenings and early mornings the park is a small haven for local families and their children. The grass lawns are used for sports such as football.



Nam puh square

A former market that during the 60th was turned into a small park/square.



The place is surrounded with restaurants and cafes and is one of the most tourist dense areas in Vientiane. It's where most guided tourist tours start and end. The vegetation consists of palm trees, flowering bushes and cut hedges. It doesn't have large shade giving trees and therefore it is almost deserted during daytime.

At night the neon lights are turned on and visited by teenagers and couples.



Sengdala

A small park in the east part that is located in a road junction and you need to cross a road to get there. The park lies close to Sengdala, which is a fitness/spa center mostly for tourists and wealthy locals.



The vegetation is generally low and well-kept the main characters are colorful plants in distinct shapes. Weeping trees and pyramidal and globular bushes form the base of the park structure. There are no shade giving trees and the park isn't used during the hottest hours of the day.



Avenue

Most of the avenues in Vientiane were planted during the French colonial time. The avenues are a French signature and can also be found in Hanoi and Phnom Penh. In Vientiane it was primarily the roads leading parallel with the Mekong River. (Fig. ?)

The avenues consist primarily of Mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) and are today mature trees giving the city a lush character. Since the trees weren't indigenous and didn't have a Lao name they were/are called French tree.



Fig. & The original Mahogany avenues based on an old map from 1931.

Unfortunately in later years the trees have been cut down when in conflict with the growing infrastructure. (Fig. %)



Fig. % The remaining Mahogany trees in Vientiane based on field inventory, 2006.

In some areas the trees have been replaced with palm trees not giving nearly the same shade or character. Along Setthathirath road the stumps are still visible one side. One the other side of the street the trees are still there but for how long?

Some of the old avenues consist of teak tree also used a lot in the forestry industry in S-E Asia. The teak tree has naturally a more narrow canopy shape compared to the Mahogany which is very wide. Further more there seems to be less problems with teaks roots destroying the

pavements. The roots of the old mahogany trees have in several places destroyed the pavement making it hard to walk. This could be one reason to the local reluctance of planting large growing trees.



Fig. % A common problem with mahogany roots

The trees value as shade giver is obvious during a hot and dry day, something that there are a lot of in Laos. As a western visitor not used to the heat one seeks your way through the city from one shaded area to another even if it mean not always walking on the most interesting streets. The avenues that have been planted during the last decades have been planted with different plant material.

My inventories showed that the most of the new avenue would not be able to give enough shade even when the trees reach a mature stage. The new trees are often a lot smaller but with other qualities such as nice flowers. Along the Lan xang road between the palace and the victory monument the tree character is dominated by flowering trees and bushes.



Fig € Section of the Lan Xang avenue

The same goes for the new avenue by the stadium. In the long run the lush character that so many people appreciate with Vientiane will disappear. Trees are an important part of the Laotian culture a proof for this is the tree-planting day the 1st of June every year. A lot o trees are planted on this day not only by school children but also by authorities such as VUDAA. The trees are planted just before the rainy season to as-

sure their survival. Unfortunately the trees often have problems with weeds and wildlife and don't get very old. During my inventories I found that only in a few areas the new trees were protected enough to survive the first couple of years. It also seemed that in these areas the local participation was high. So unless a tree planting project is properly anchored with the local inhabitants or enough funds are set of for the yearly maintenance the project is likely to fail.

Private gardens

Private gardens especially old ones are very important in the green network. Even if the gardens aren't public they add to the lush character to a street by the visual effect.



Older gardens with mature vegetation are important biotopes for several species. In Vientiane there are several areas with older colonial houses and these houses often have relatively large gardens giving the entire area a lush and peaceful appearance.



In the new built housing areas fruit trees and other valuable trees dominate the vegetation. These are often not very large giving little shade.

Not far from the city center the countryside is still present and just a short walk from the Mekong goats and cows graze the still vacant lots. These lots are however filling up fast with new buildings.



Water buffalos can be seen grazing the edges of the Mekongriver and small vegetablesgardens on a vacantspot.

Schoolyards

The schoolyards often consist of one large area with a couple of large shade giving trees. Football/soccer goals made of wood indicate a recreational potential. The school buildings area often situated in a U shape around the open area. The buildings are usually one or two storages high with many windows.



New/planned urban green

Nong chan

Nong chan is located in the central of Vientiane next to the morning market.



Its former wetland that was supposed to be changed into a park unfortunately the project never finished. The area today consists of a large open lake or pond and on the south side indigenous trees have been planted in a tree-planting project (DANIDA).

The largest problem when creating new areas like this is the annual funding for the maintenance.

One solution to this is that one part of the area would be turned into an amusement park with slides and rides. There would be an immissionfee. The income from this part would then see to the maintenance of the entire park. During the spring of 2007 the buildings for the amusement park were being constructed.



Fig. & The present and future of nong chan, The sign is place by the construction sight informing about the development plans.

The planned Nong chan has a jogging part around the lake, boats that you can rent and a flower garden and a lot of exclusive vegetation.



Lumpini park, a large and very popular park, in Bangkok, Thailand.

Mekongriverarea

Today the Mekongriverarea is a popular area and is probably the most tourist dense place in Vientiane. Every evening the area fills up with small portable kitchens offering fresh BBQ fish, cold Beer Lao and the most wonderful view when the sun sets.



Along the street that goes parallel with the Mekong the shops, cafes and restaurants are blossoming. The Mekong river area is however to be changed a lot in a near future. The plan is to extend the riverbank 100m out in the Mekong River. The former road will be extended and the new riverside will be landscaped into a new park. (Bounchan)

This action would enhance the areas attractively and solving the traffic problems.



Temple areas

When visiting Vientiane one cannot help but noticing the many temple areas. In fact there are about 30 just in the central part of the city.



The temple or wat as it is called in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos is also a religious school. Since most Lao men during a certain point of their lives live as monks the wats are still very active and a strong part of the local culture. The buildings consist of sacred buildings and living quarters for the monks.

The sacred buildings are often a temple with relics of Buddha, prayer rooms, library, school and an ordination hall where the new monks take their vows. Most of the wats in Vientiane were destroyed by the Siamese during the 1800 and the ones that we see today are not restored but rebuilt. (Vientiane civil and religious architecture)

During the celebration of the Lao new year (Pi mai Lao), a three daylong celebration, the wats are visited to water the Buddha. With scented water in silver containers the locals and everyone else who is in town walk from wat to wat, the more wats you visit the better your new year will be. Today it is no longer just Buddha that gets blessed with water. This tradition has during time evolved into a three daylong water fight on the dusty streets of Vientiane.



Fig. Wat area with surrounding walls and vegetation

A white stonewall surrounds the Temple grounds with gates that are open at daytime.

The Temple grounds have a lot of trees and flowering bushes making a nice green area in the city. The amount of temple areas in Vientiane contributes to making it the lush and beautiful city that it is today.

Pha That Luang

The name means great sacred reliquary or great stupa and is a symbol for the Buddhist religion and the Lao sovereignty. (Lonely planet)



The original stupa was erected in the mid 16th century and parts of were covered with real gold. The glory unfortunately diminished during the 18th and 19th century when the country was invaded by Burmese's and Siamese armies. The stupa was striped of everything of value. During the French colonial period the stupa was reconstructed and today the stupa once again amaze visitors with the it's glory. (Fig.%) The profile of the great stupa can be seen on the Lao flag. The stupa is located couple of km from downtown Vientiane. The easiest way

to get there is by tuctuc but it can also be a nice walk during a cloudy day. The That Luang festival takes place in November and culminates on the day of the full moon when thousands of monks gather for alms. During the festival the area around that luang becomes a carnival.



The golden stupa and the park around the wat.



That dam

The Black stupa is located not far from the central part of Vientiane.



French colonial houses with lush green gardens surround the stupa making it to a peaceful place almost forgotten. There are many myths of the stupa one of the most interesting is the one about the naga. A naga is a seven headed snake or dragon that appears a lot in the Buddhist culture. Many years ago the naga protected the Lao people during the war with the Siamese. Today fortunately the naga sleeps under the black stupa.



Children playing hide and seek by the Black stupa

Urban Blue

Mekong

One of the world largest rivers passing through China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia.



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mekong>

The river is an important feature in the city of Vientiane. The area next to the river is one of the most popular tourist attractions. During the dry season the water level is so low that large sandbanks become accessible. During

the celebration of Pimai Lao football tournaments are held on these sandbanks. The river also becomes a popular bathing area. Water scooter shows and horse riding are other activities that take place at this time.



Channels and wetlands

Until recent years the urban storm water management consisted of a natural system of channels and wetlands. There was no planned wastewater treatment but still the water quality was good. In 2000 many of the wetlands had been filled to give place for new buildings and several of the water systems changed into concrete channels.

In contrast to the old channels, which meandered the water slowly through vegetation reducing the nutrient levels the new channels are very efficient in transporting the water away from the city.

Local problems with flooding were reduced but new problems arise such as an increase in nutrient transport and sanitation issues.

The areas next to the channels are often used for transportation. Dirt roads and paths revealed the function. These areas have a great potential as future green corridors when the traffic in the city continues to grow.

Along some parts of the edges of the channels local residents take an active part in the maintenance. On one place the vegetation was kept as if it was their front lawn. It becomes clear that public participation really can make a difference.



That Luang

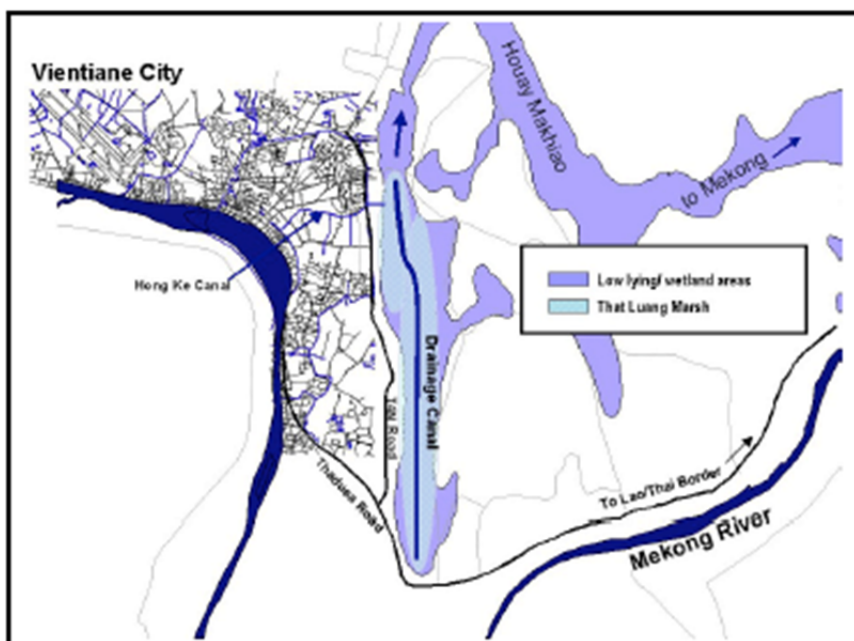


The difference in appearance between public participation and no maintenance at all.

Marsh

The largest wetland in Vientiane area and important for flood control and wastewater purification. Today the urban waste and storm water end up in That Lang Marsh.

Large parts of the wetland is used for rice production and important for the local economy. It is estimated that about 7000 households are located in a close vicinity of the wetland. The increasing agricultural and settlement development has had a great impact on the wetlands ecological functions. (Gerrard, P., 2004)



That Luangs drainage system.



Fig. ? Rice fields



Filling of the wetland to make place for new settlements.





Proposal

The city of Vientiane is lacking an organized green network. The importance of such a network cannot be stressed enough. It promotes movement by man, animal and plant life. It also promotes pedestrian movement something that a city of Vientiane's size and current development will benefit from in a long term. Different health aspects, pollution, recreation and tourism are all directly affected by the city structure and the presents of a well functioning green network.

The purpose with this proposal is to increase awareness of the importance of the green network and to identify possible actions. The proposal part is divided into different parts based on the scale and level of detail. The suggested actions vary in detail level and degree of development.

Vientiane and surrounding countryside

When visiting Vientiane it is easy to forget that this is the capital of a country of 5 million people. The city with 500 thousands inhabitants has the character of a city 1/10th it's size. With the unique scale, pace and infrastructure it is hard to imagine what the future will look like. The surrounding landscape is still a part of the city and one does not have to walk very far to see rice production, cows and banana plantations. However when comparing old maps, population statistics and remembering what it looked like just five years ago it suddenly becomes clearer.

If the city continues to grow this way it's reputation, as Asia's small dormant capital will be changed.

The contact between a city and the surrounding landscape is something that has been developed in several European cities. In Stockholm (Fig?) green wedges stretch from the city center to the surrounding rural areas. There are several positive functions such as health aspects for inhabitants by promoting local recreation, air quality is improved since air pollution is reduced and several ecological functions such as water management.

(<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/archi/programmes/cost8/case/greenblue/stockholmgreen.html>)

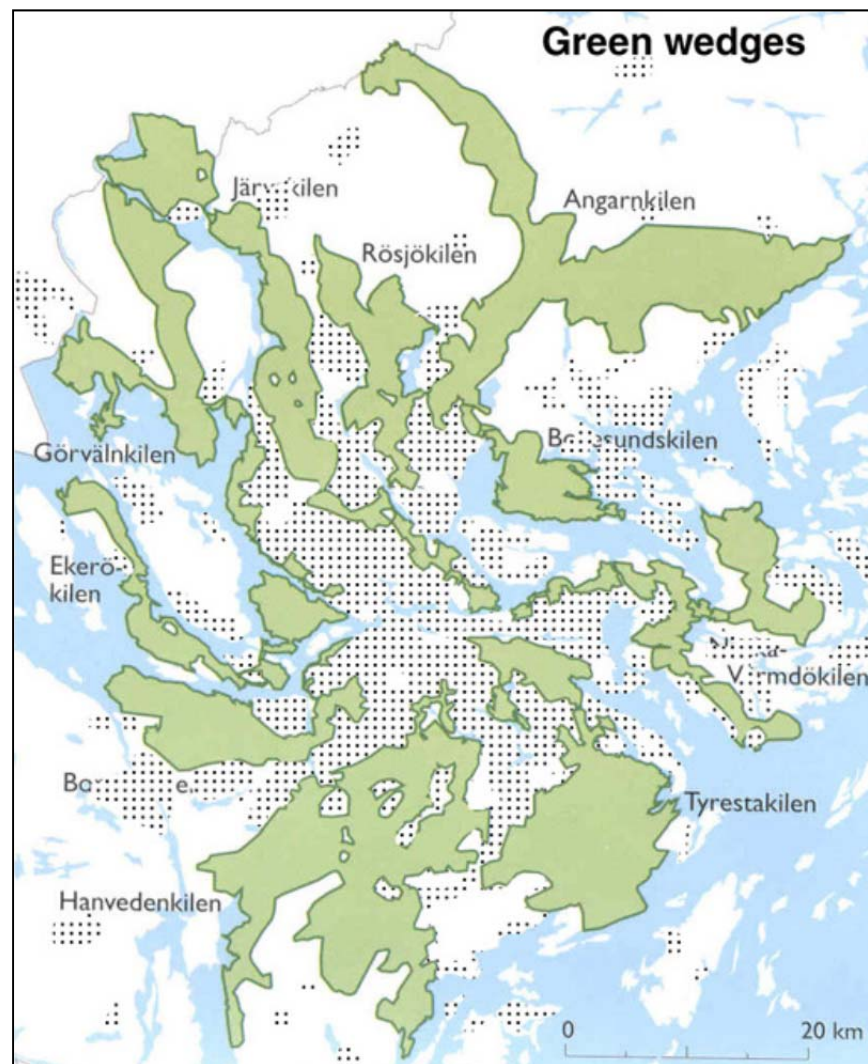


Fig. ? Green wedges in Stockholm

In UK the green belt concept was introduced in the 1950 to control the urban sprawl and protect undeveloped, wild, or agricultural land surrounding the city.

The objectives of green belt policy are to:

- *Protect natural or semi natural environments;*
- *Improve air quality within urban areas;*
- *Ensure that urban dwellers have access to countryside, with consequent educational and recreational opportunities; and*
- *Protect the unique character of rural communities, which might otherwise be absorbed by expanding suburbs.*
-

The effectiveness of green belts differs depending on location and country. They can often be eroded by urban rural fringe uses and sometimes, development 'jumps' over the green belt area, resulting in the creation of "satellite towns" which, although separated from the city by green belt, function more like suburbs than independent communities.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_belt)

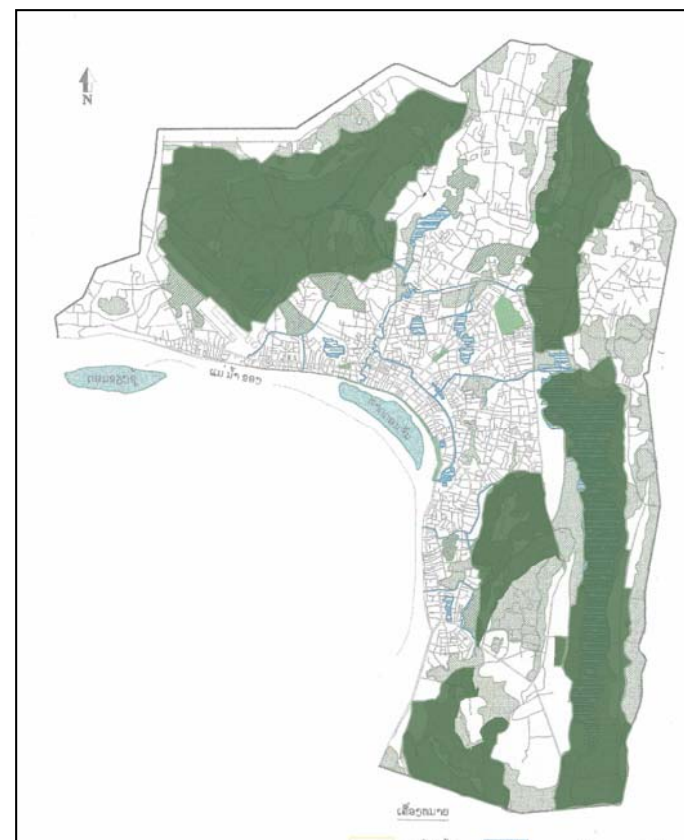
Other cities that have used similar concepts are Ottawa, Manila, Oregon and Melbourne.

Based on the Master plan of Vientiane and local inventories a green wedge scenario could be possible to ensure the urban development of Vientiane and still keeping some of the green values. This action is only possible if local planners and municipality work together and stop the urban sprawl.

Not far from the city center several larger green areas that are yet not developed still exist and these areas

should be protected until a detailed ecological, structural and social evaluations are made.

It is important to think about the future function and appearance of Vientiane when the development expands. The surrounding landscape can and should be a part of the future Vientiane.



Vientiane city

If good spaces of good quality are provided-they will be eagerly used

- More roads = More traffic

- Better conditions for cyclists = More cyclists

- Quality space= More pedestrians and life

Creating a better city for people does not necessarily mean leaving all the cars out. But a balance should be created.

(Gehl Architects)

One large problem Vientiane faces today is the increasing numbers of cars. The city wasn't built for cars and lacks a well-developed parking system. Cars are today parked on sidewalks, on the roads and wherever it is possible. Parking garages and parking lots should be a high priority. This is however not an optimal solution since it merely deals of the effects of the traffic and not the real problem.

Today bicyclists are often forced to travel along heavily trafficked roads since bicycle lanes only exist in some parts of the city. It is important to separate these different means of transport. It doesn't mean that every road must be changes, primarily the main roads. The condition of the sidewalks and the absence of streetlight do not promote pedestrian activity. Along the most frequently used roads the sidewalks should be repaired and streetlights installed. (Fig.#)

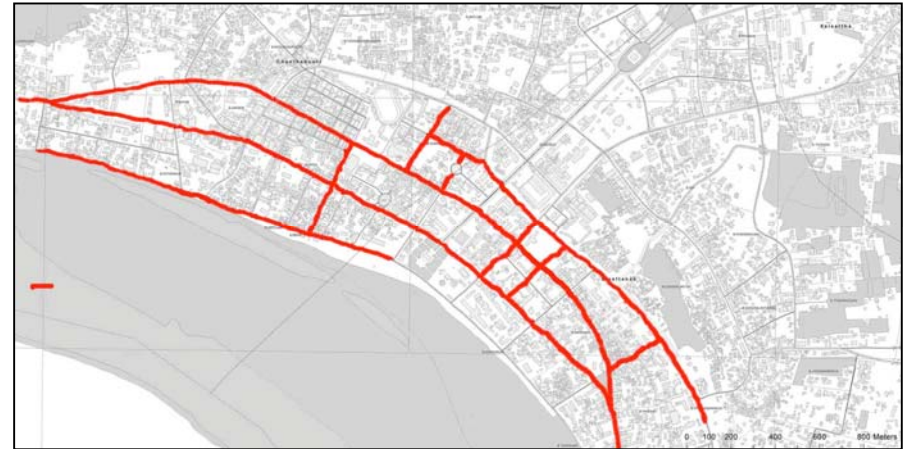


Fig. # Streets where sidewalks need to be repaired or installed

During daytime the heat dictate the pedestrians movement.

The existing green areas should be linked with important social, cultural and economical places.

Such as:

- Wat areas
- Culture hall
- Markets
- Banks, postal service
- Sport facilities
- Parks
- other public spaces

The new links can vary in shape, size and appearance.

Identity

As a result of the rapid structural changes made recent years, the identity of Vientiane changes. The architecture and city scale is changing to give room for global concepts of a good life. With the urbanization comes changes of both good and bad.

The small Asian capital known around the world as a lush peaceful city is changing into a capital of the world. Global culture wins terrain on the behalf of local culture. Commercial for large international companies are seen all over the city.

Street vegetation

By using different street vegetation you can promote navigation around the city. Old streets parallel to the Mekong, that once were mahogany allies, should be restored with large trees more suitable in a city with roads and side walks. Teak has been used in some areas with a lot less roots and problems.



Fig. € Different street vegetation

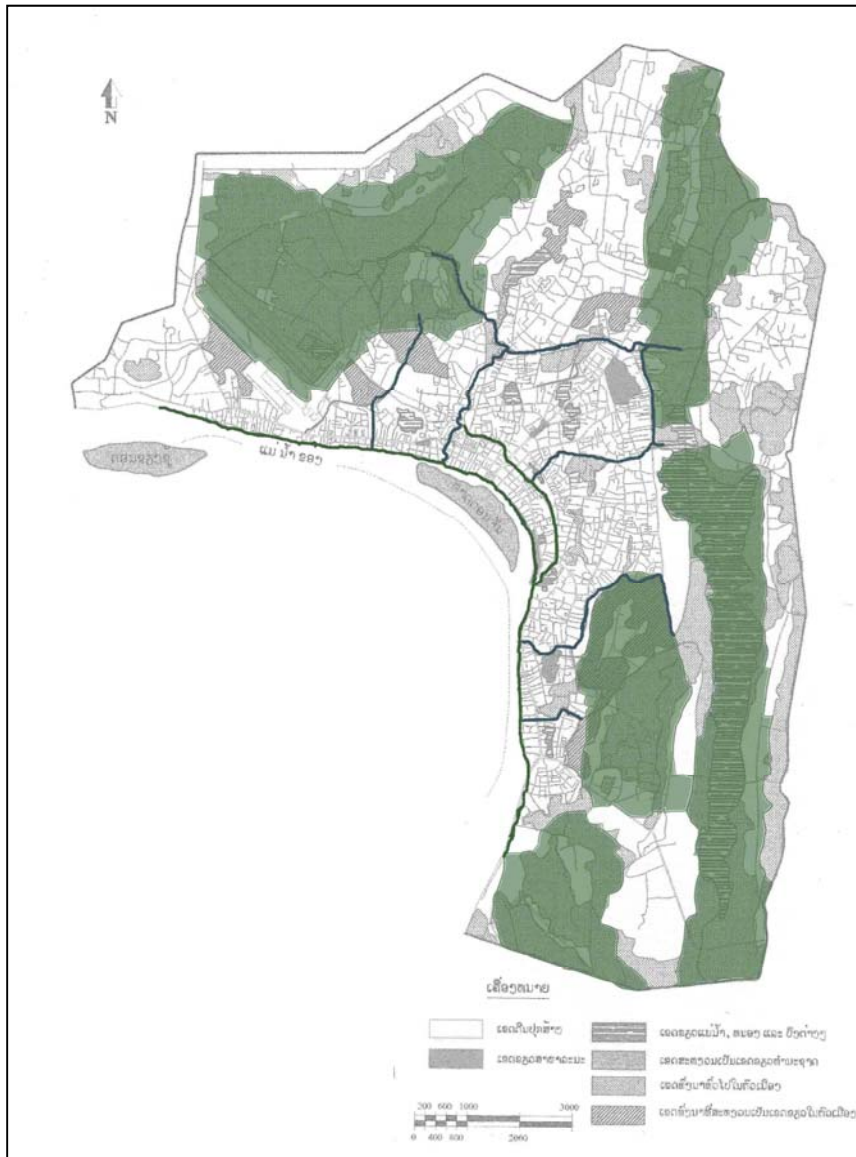
This will keep the green identity, the positive shading effect and replacing the " French tree" with something more indigios .

On the smaller streets vertical to the Mekong small flowering trees should be planted. This will create a nice link between the larger roads without cutting the view to the Mekong. The smaller trees are used a lot in Thailand and appreciated by the Lao people.



Fig. 4 Two common flowering trees that area used a lot In Vientiane *Plumeria acutifolia* and *Lagerstroemia macrocarpa*

New green and blue links



There are several possible ways to connect the green wedges with each other and the central part of the city. Several paths already exist and are used by local inhabitants.

In the central part I have found 4 possible green links. Two are along channels and are already used for transportation but could be developed creating a safe pedestrian and bike network separated from the highly trafficked roads.

The other two also already exist in some parts but miss some vital parts.



Fig. & New green and blue links

Mekong link

This could be the central part of Vientiane if the special values that make it unique today are kept. The scale should remain small and pedestrian friendly.

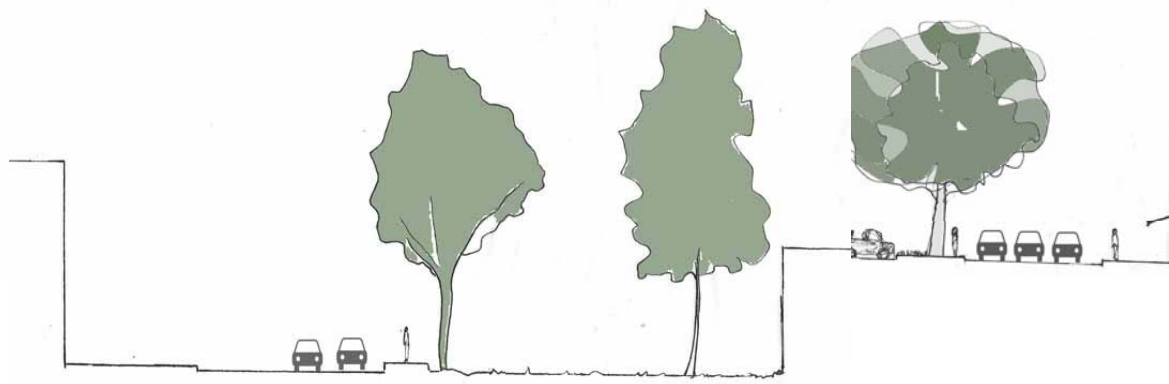
By reducing the traffic and the speed a safer pedestrian environment is created. More shade giving vegetation should replace the large trees that have been



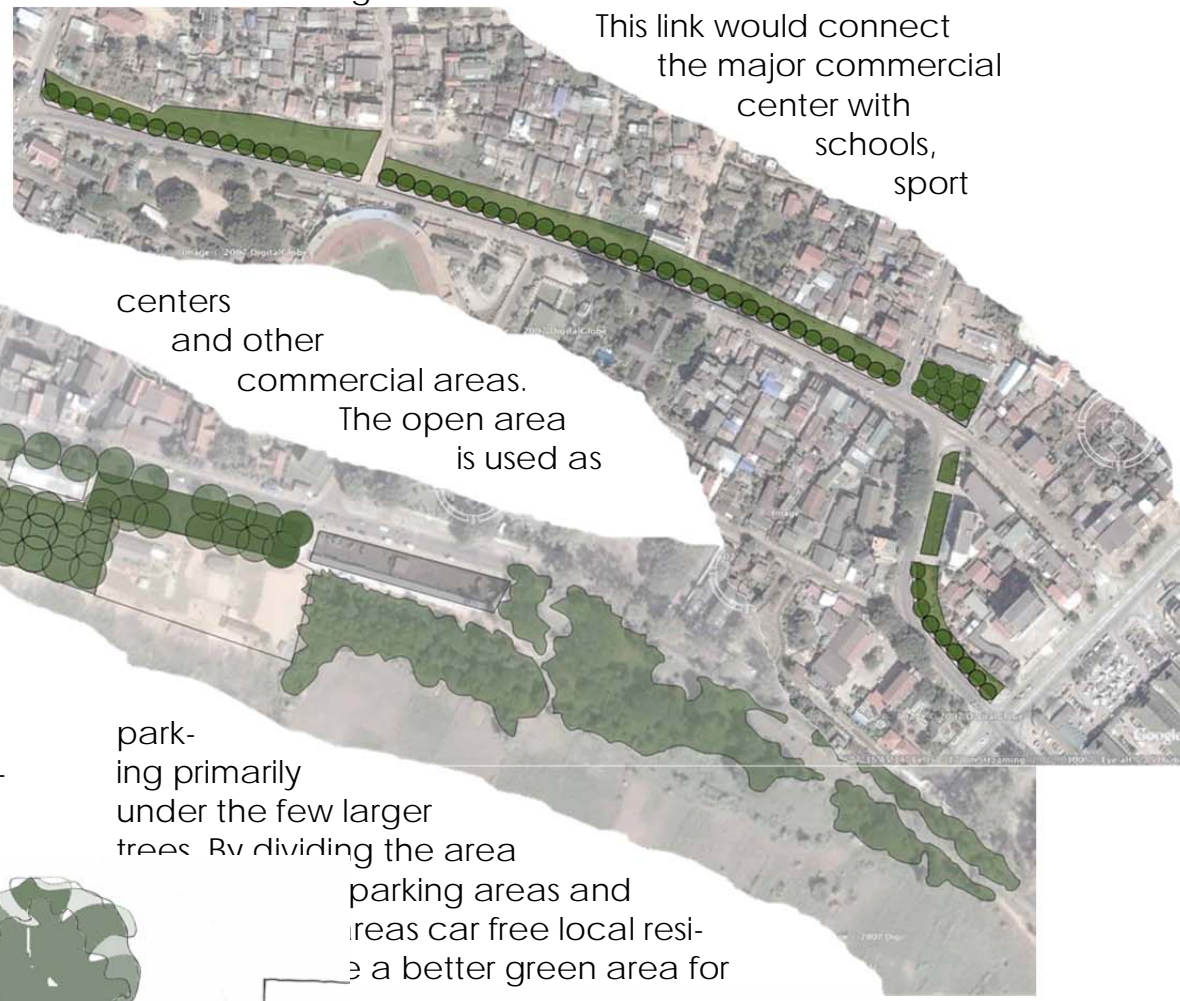
taken down. With vegetation the area would be linked to the Mekong park and a part of the green link along the Mekong.

Central green link

This link runs along the line where the defense walls and moats once were and is of great historical importance. Information about this could create awareness of Vientiane's past and a better understanding of the present



appearance. This link already exists in some extent, however the present vegetation doesn't promote pedestrian activity. The trees are too small and need to be raised and/or exchanged.



This link would connect the major commercial center with schools, sport

centers and other commercial areas. The open area is used as

parking primarily under the few larger trees. By dividing the area into parking areas and car-free local residential areas a better green area for

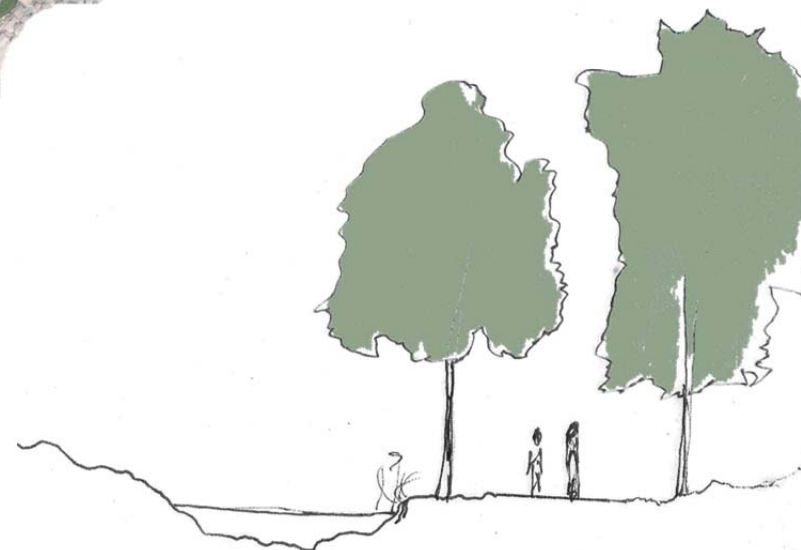
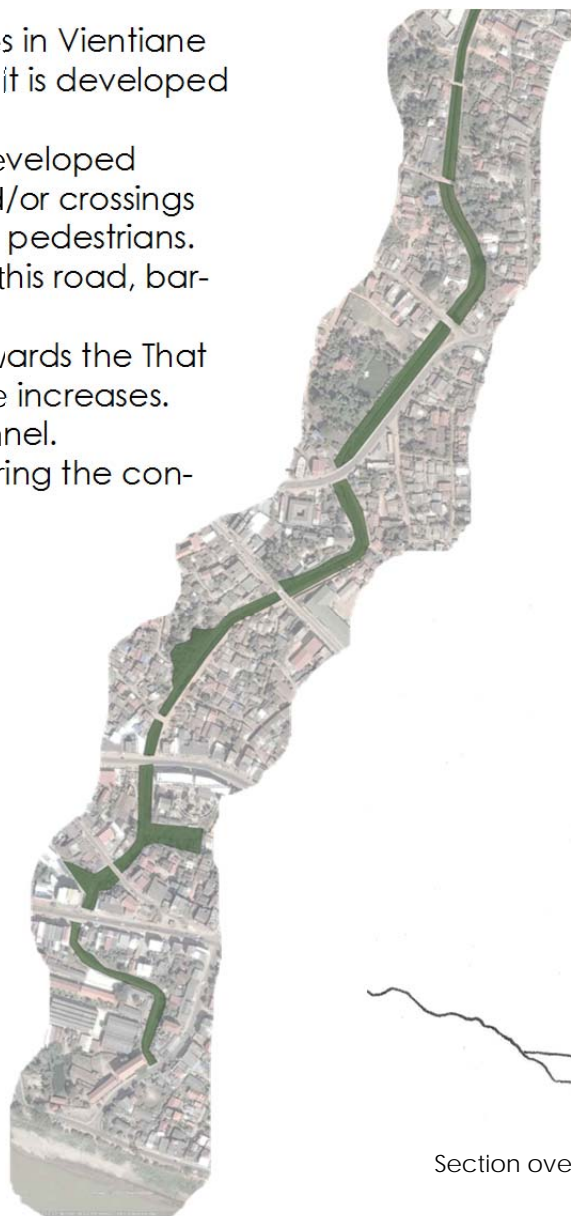
Channel link

Water is one of the most dominant features in Vientiane and it has a great recreational potential if it is developed correctly.

This link is already used a lot but can be developed more. Where the link cross roads, signs and/or crossings could be made insuring a safe crossing for pedestrians. Trucks and cars should not be allowed on this road, barriers could be put up to insure this.

As the channel flows from the Mekong towards the That Lang wetland the width and water volume increases. The small ditch increases into a large channel.

Safe bridges must also be spaced out insuring the connection over the channel.



Section over the chanel link

Green spots

Some existing local areas should be arranged in ways to promote and strengthen the local identity.

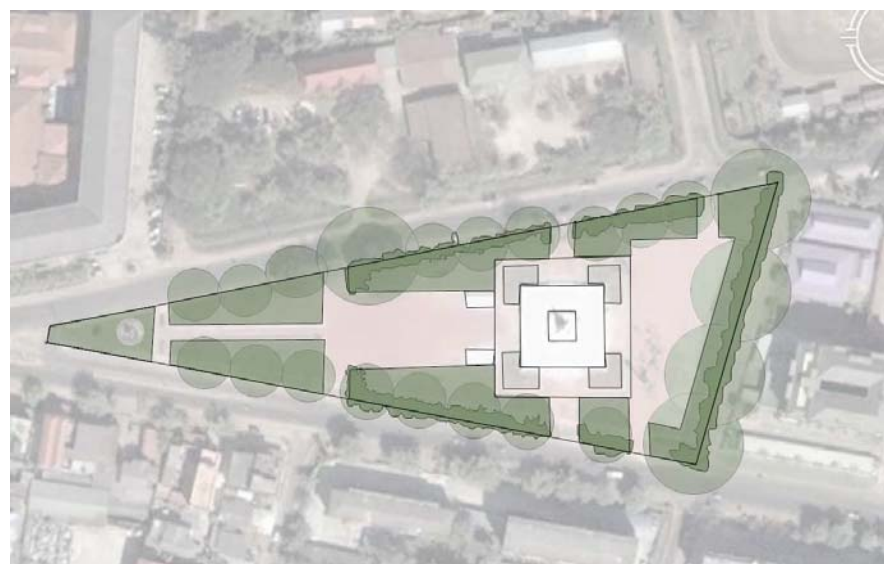


Novotel park

One of the city most important green areas and the first thing you see when entering the city from west.

Renovate to promote the usage and the positive impression. Repair the fountains and planting new trees and bushes is a good start but the daily maintenance is the most essential.

Simuang, which has a similar situation, look completely different and could be an inspiration.



Nam Puh

Nam Puh is one of the most central nodes in Vientiane and should be developed into a shaded and relaxing place. One way to do this is to add more shade giving vegetation. Large canopy trees with high stems placed around the open place. Low vegetation is focused around the fountain and the road keeping the open character of the square.

The lacking palm trees around the fountain and along the road should be replaced.

The fountain should be repaired since the neglect gives a negative touch to the area.



Discussion

I have with this rapport tried to understand the present situation of a city in a developing country. My focus has been on the urban green in the city of Vientiane, Laos PDR. By describing the present based on the past, future development strategies or proposals became clearer. In a country such as Laos the current need for new development is quite obvious. **Urbanization** People are moving from the countryside to the city in search for work, and a better living. This creates a need for new housing, industries, and infrastructure.

Wetlands are being filled and the entire urban structure is changed. This has also resulted into social, ecological and cultural changes. New needs have risen. The old markets no longer see to all the commercial interests, new activities for leisure time created new demands on parks and green areas. New meeting places have developed. The increasing amount of tourists has also affected the city with new tourist shops, cafes, Internet cafés, hotels and restaurants.

One of the most obvious changes the last couple of years is the amount of traffic. This creates problems since the existing infrastructure wasn't made for cars.

Problems

During the process of writing this rapport several things became very clear. The fact that I'm not a local resident and only been there a couple of months makes it hard

to really understand the different forces that control the social, economical and political structures.

The analyses that were made are based on Swedish/Western values and ideals. This limits the accuracy and credibility of the results.

This has unfortunately resulted in proposals where the tourist in many cases is placed in the center and not the locals. However tourism is one of the largest income resources that the country has and by making the city more attractive for tourists the locals indirectly benefit from the changes.

As Laos becomes more and more open for tourism the everyday life of the Loatians is being affected. The poverty is decreasing and the living standard continues to increase. New ideals and lifestyles is another result of the current globalization which has both positive and negative affects.

I'm still not sure how one should go about to get a more accurate result.

During my interviews with local planners I got support for my initial ideas and proposals. There is a lot of knowledge and some times it felt like we were talking the same language. The local planners have been educated abroad and influenced by modern ideas but still with the common interest in mind. The key to a sustainable development regarding the green structure is public participation. It doesn't matter how many plans are made if

the people living there don't understand or see the meaning with it.

Another aspect is the fact that Laos is a developing country where illiteracy still is high, the living standard is in some parts still low, and human rights still questioned.

Why should one think about trees or paths or green links when the sewage system and freshwater supply is insufficient?

Somehow these things must develop parallel. As the living standards continue to rise with a higher educated population the influences from other countries will continue to increase.

The urban green is just one part but an important part for the future inhabitant of Vientiane. The earlier this is recognized as an asset, something with a real value the better.

Which future roads will Laos take, will it follow its neighboring countries like Thailand or Vietnam or will it find its own path? One thing is clear Laos lacks the sandy

beaches that attract the majority of visitors to Thailand today. Another kind of tourism is one solution. Ecotourism has during the last decades or so become a stronger force to count on.

The tourism sector has grown rapidly, from 14,400 tourists visiting Laos in 1990, to 1.1 million in 2005.

During the 20 weeks that I worked with this subject it became clear that 20 weeks isn't enough. There are so many interesting things to work with that one could probably work a lifetime and still have things left.

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