

# A NEW VISION FOR WET MARKETS IN HANOI

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As a public health NGO, HealthBridge cares deeply about the condition of public wet markets in Hanoi. They provide affordable, fresh and nutritious food to urban residents, especially the poor. In 2011, there was a decision made by the Hanoi government to replace all markets in the inner city with supermarkets and commercial centres, which were considered more 'modern'. In response, HealthBridge conducted a 'Save the Markets' campaign and was successful in overturning the government's decision.

Still, the question remains: what *should* happen with the 350 wet markets in central Hanoi and surrounding districts? How can you 'modernise' these traditional markets while still retaining their authenticity and core reason for being? Leaving them in their current, often decrepit, condition is not an option.



Motorbike rides through Chau Long Market (left); a well-designed vendor stall, Ngoc Lam Market (right).

Markets are too important to the future of the city. Their trade areas cover the urban core of the city, and statistics show that they remain the preferred place to shop for fresh food, because of their convenience and low prices. Thousands of people — urban and rural — depend on these markets for their livelihoods, and it is these personal relationships between vendors and customers that bring people back day after day.

## THREATS TO WET MARKETS IN HANOI

Hanoian wet markets are challenged by a perfect storm of issues: modernisation in a country that has one of the fastest growing economies in the world, with one of the youngest populations; a lack of understanding the value that markets bring to the city; rampant, homogenised development; poor maintenance and food safety standards; and the fact that people now have choices ranging from entrepreneurial street vendors to an ever-increasing number of supermarkets, hypermarkets, and even online shops.

Another curious problem: shoppers are convinced that they must be able to drive their motorbikes right down the market aisles and stalls. At one market surveyed, 70% of customers arrived by motorbike and only 4% parked them. This presents a different kind of challenge: customer safety!

## DEVELOPING NEW DESIGN APPROACHES

HealthBridge invited Stephen Davies to Hanoi to assist local architects in developing design concepts to revitalise the wet markets in the city. The collaboration took place over three fruitful weeks and involved studying local needs and generating design concepts to meet the expectations of market operators and stakeholders — and to make markets better public spaces. Other key partners included the Hanoi Architects Association and a new design centre, AGOhub, who gathered over 20 young architects to volunteer to participate in our process. They based their project in part on policy work already completed by the city's think tank, the Hanoi Institute for Economic and Social Development (HISDED), which had prepared a lengthy report outlining recommendations for future action.

Their goal with this effort was to develop new design approaches to revitalise three wet markets in the city — Chau Long Market, Ha Market, and Ngoc Lam Market — as models for other markets. All had stakeholders who were interested in renovating the market in the near term, with varying levels of funding available. The plan was to put ideas into action as quickly as possible, so that the group could demonstrate each market's potential.

These projects could also be laboratories for identifying policy changes – and the changes in operation and management – that would be needed to make investments more effective.

“Leading up to the design workshop, we met with the management and key stakeholders for each of the markets; conducted customer and vendor surveys, and carried out extensive analyses and audits,” explains Stephen Davies. “Following the workshop, the designs were presented to these same stakeholders and later to a larger group of policymakers. In general, the response has been largely favourable, including some 25 articles in local media, all of them positive.”



A map of Hanoi showing the location of wet markets and the walking distance (in orange) to them, demonstrating how they serve most of the city.

## KEY DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR WET MARKETS

During the design process, the team sought to develop practical solutions to a series of specific problems:

- **Signage and identity:** How can a market’s signage and architecture be designed so as to give it an iconic presence in the neighbourhood, while supporting the historic neighbourhood context?
- **Roof structures:** How can roof structures better protect the market from the weather (heat, rain) while still allowing natural light and ventilation?
- **Entrances and exteriors:** How can markets be designed to connect to surrounding districts? How can indoor markets have vibrant and active exteriors at the same time?
- **Circulation:** How can circulation be improved to create easy access to all vendor stalls and minimise dead areas in the market?
- **Floor and drainage:** What materials and design details could be used to enable floors to be more attractive as well as easily cleaned and drained? What interesting aesthetic features could be added (e.g. tile patterns)?
- **Vendor stalls:** How can vendor stalls be better designed to display products, improve sanitation, add storage, and attract more customers? How can these stalls be made flexible to accommodate different types of products and made affordable for vendors? How can food safety be enhanced?



Chau Long Market today.

- Waste facilities and recycling:** How can markets better manage trash systems, including recycling and separation of organic materials? How can service areas be kept cleaner and more sanitary?
- Fire safety:** What materials and fire safety systems should be incorporated into the design to bring markets up to modern standards?
- Parking:** How can we minimise the impact of motorbikes on the interior of markets? Can more parking be provided so that customers can be 'weaned' from riding directly to vendor stalls?
- Placemaking and public spaces:** What are strategies to add more public seating and gathering spaces in markets? How can the areas around markets become better public spaces?

This last question inspired great creativity in the designs. Markets are public spaces in themselves, but seating and recreational spaces are often limited. Interior public

spaces can be the focal points for markets and communities. Furthermore, markets can anchor any public space around them and create opportunities to enliven these spaces as community destinations. Designs developed showed how markets could help create new public spaces in districts where space is limited (such as a waterfront esplanade next to a market, or a rooftop park on top of one). Public officials in Hanoi had not thought of their markets in this way before and found these ideas especially exciting.

## EXAMPLE DESIGNS

The design ideas that emerged from this project are just that: ideas. They are intended to stimulate interest and demonstrate the potential that Hanoi wet markets can achieve with the right kind of reinvestment, management and operations, and policy support.

As the design of the three model markets were developed, important lessons were learned that will be applied as HealthBridge and the Hanoi Architects Association move forward with this project.

## DO'S

- **Maintain the core functions and traditions of wet markets.** Markets need to be improved while still retaining their core functions as markets, not as second class tenants of shopping centres.
- **Engage vendors, customers, and key stakeholders.** People are passionate about their markets and have great knowledge about them.
- **Identify phased approaches to market renovations.** Sometimes simple changes can be made at first that are less expensive but that can be the first step towards major renovations and additions.
- **Support vendors to improve their businesses and design of their stalls.** When people shop at markets they focus on the products, and if these products are well displayed on clean, well-lit, and well-functioning stalls, with adequate storage not visible to customers, sales should increase.
- **Make markets 'more than markets' with other complementary uses and public spaces.** The concurrent improvement of public spaces can be an important motivator to the city government.
- **It is important to address broader city policies regarding market investment, in addition to upgrading Market Design and Infrastructure.** Engage new partners, and modernise the operations and management systems of the markets.

## DON'TS

- **Don't forget to carefully plan for the private investment and management of markets.** The experience of markets in Hanoi, where private operators have not always been consistent with maintenance efforts, demonstrates that it is important to carefully plan and execute future private investor involvement, which is currently the preferred government policy.
- **Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Create knowledge exchange, share design and management innovation more widely, and create a more unified system for all markets in Hanoi.** Learning from cities such as Barcelona, London, and Hong Kong, which have established different forms of city-wide policy, Hanoi can shape its vast, largely untapped treasure of markets into a more coordinated systems.

## NEXT STEPS

Although challenges remain, there are some very positive signs that have emerged from this project. Vietnam is now working on a new policy for wet markets to be adopted in 2020, and is collaborating with HealthBridge on this effort. The goal is for them to recognise that the recommended principles described above should be considered when approving any project to rebuild or improve wet markets. The 'New Vision for Wet Markets' project was also nominated as a finalist in the For Love of Hanoi Awards in August 2019, which honours significant contributions to the capital city. The awards are organised annually by the Hanoi People's Committee and sponsored by the *The Thao & Van Hoa* newspaper and Bui Xuan Phai Fund.

Finally, HealthBridge is continuing to work with local authorities in the districts of the three markets to discuss, plan and pilot the improvements of each market, taking into consideration the proposed design concepts.

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One design concept for the renovation of Chau Long Market included a public park on the roof and a new mezzanine for cafes and cooking demonstrations (top), proposed Improvements to Ngoc Lam Market (middle), and proposed public space, Ha Market (bottom).