

The Essential but Uncertain Role of the Vietnamese Association of Cities of Vietnam in Promoting Community-Based Housing Upgrading

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Abstract : Municipal Associations, also called Unions, Leagues or Federations of municipalities have been established worldwide to represent the interests and needs of urban governments in the face of increasing urban issues. In 2008, the Association of Cities of Vietnam (ACVN) joined the Asian Coalition of Community Action Program (ACCA program) and introduced the community-based upgrading approach to help Vietnamese cities to address urban upgrading issues. While this community-based upgrading approach has only been implemented in a small number of Vietnamese cities and its replication has faced certain challenges, it is worthy to explore insights on how the Association of cities of Vietnam played its role in implementing some reportedly successful projects. This paper responds to this inquiry and presents results extracted from the author's PhD study that sets out with a general objective to critically examine how social capital dimensions (i.e., bonding, bridging and linking) were formed, mobilized and maintained in a local collective and community-based upgrading process. Methodologically, the study utilized the given general categorization of bonding, bridging and linking capitals to explore and confirm how social capital operated in the real context of a community-based upgrading process, particularly in the context of Vietnam. To do this, the study conducted two exploratory and qualitative case studies of housing projects in Friendship neighbourhood (Vinh city) and Binh Dong neighbourhood (Tan An city). This paper presents the findings of the Friendship neighbourhood case study, focusing on the role of the Vietnamese municipal association in forming, mobilizing and maintaining bonding, bridging and linking capital for a community-based upgrading process. The findings highlight the essential but uncertain role of ACVN - the organization that has a hybrid legitimacy status - in such a process. The results improve our understanding both practically and theoretically. Practically, the results offer insights into the performance of a municipal association operating in a transitioning socio-political context of Vietnam. Theoretically, the paper questions the necessity of categorizing social capital dimensions (i.e., bonding, bridging and linking) by suggesting a holistic approach of looking at social capital for urban governance issues within the Vietnamese context and perhaps elsewhere.

Keywords : bonding capital, bridging capital, municipal association, linking capital, social capital, housing upgrading

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