CITIES IN A CHANGING WORLD:
QUESTIONS OF CULTURE, CLIMATE AND DESIGN

• Paper / Proposal Title:
From garden houses to a garden city, Thua Thien Hue (Vietnam)

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• Abstract (300 words):
In the ever globalizing and urbanizing world, traditional settling patterns are often neglected in design, planning and management. However, traditional settlements and their related cultural values could be crucial in envisioning new urban typologies which are strongly linked to landscapes and can adapt to the consequences of climate change. The paper builds a spatial biography of the garden house tradition in Hue City, Vietnam. Garden houses were initially designed for Mandarins (servants to the royal state, the Nguyen Dynasty) beginning in the early 19th century. Their form embodied both a formal hierarchy, with the number of bays and size relating to status, as well as deference to climate and topography. The garden houses were structured by the principles of phong thuy (feng shui) and included the careful choreography of earth (rocks), vegetation and water. The royal citadel complex contained an array of garden house types that were embedded in the larger engineered construction of the capital. Each garden was associated with a specific building typology—palace, pavilion, temple, or villa—all which were implicitly or explicitly connected by the Perfume River and its tributaries. The wide range of gardens combined with a complex water landscape, creates a rich landscape structure that carries both ecological and socio-cultural value. Nowadays, the structure is blurred, garden houses are disappearing, and related values are forgotten in the generic planning schemes resulting from the fast-paced
urbanization. As gardens disappear, concrete constructions expand, the contemporary territorial challenges amplify—including rising air temperature, pollution, intensified drought and flooding, and increasing demands on living, cultivating, and entertaining lands. The paper will unravel the past, present and future of gardens in relation to urbanism.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Minh Quang Nguyen is a PhD researcher at OSA research group, KU Leuven. He is from Vietnam, a country that has a long history and strong culture of settling with forests and water. Currently, Vietnam is at the front line of climate-change consequences which are exacerbated by its drastic urbanization and changes of its forest and water landscape. As its focus on economic growth is relentlessly pursued, he conceived that cities need to be understood in relation to the importance of ecological systems. Therefore, he decided to conduct the research on forest and water urbanism as a strategy for climate change adaptation. Prior to that, Quang was trained as an urban designer and obtained M.Sc degrees in sustainable architecture and human settlements (both from KU Leuven). He has extensively collaborated with OSA/RUA on design research commissions and competitions in Vietnam.