

# A CONSERVATION PERSPECTIVE ON THE BA DINH ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper presents one of the four recommendations on the conservation and presentation management of the Ba Dinh Archaeological Site drafted during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Asian Academy for Heritage Management Field School in Hanoi in 2005. It presents the site's background and identifies heritage issues, significance and values. It also covers the appropriate international charters and protocols on cultural conservation of heritage sites. It concludes with a statement on the impact of Ba Dinh to the people of Vietnam as regards their cultural and historical heritage and its worth in nation building.*

## THE UNESCO-ICCROM AAHM FIELD SCHOOL

The UNESCO-ICCROM Asian Academy for Heritage Management (AAHM) was established to answer the increasing demand for improved professional management of cultural heritage resources of the Asia-Pacific region. It is a network composed of institutions from the Asia Pacific region that are engaged in the research and teaching of heritage conservation and cultural institution management. It also promotes capacity building among professionals and communities in the region. One of AAHM's programs is its annual field school on heritage sites. Chosen AAHM member institutions host this.

The theme for the 2<sup>nd</sup> AAHM Field School 2005 was the conservation and preservation of archaeological heritage in an urban context. The focus of this field school was the Ba Dinh Archaeological Site located in the center of Hanoi. The archaeological site was accidentally found when a new parliament complex was proposed for construction in that area. The site features historical and cultural values that may determine it to be a heritage site (Nguyen Viet Chau 2005). This posed a challenge for city planners and relevant stakeholders in the conservation aspect of the site. With this in mind, the field school aimed to present and apply integrated conservation management programs for the Ba Dinh Site. This was to be achieved by (1) learning about the urban context of Hanoi, (2) learning about the different cultural management systems that could be applied to the site, and (3)

interpreting heritage through appropriate research methodologies.

Several professionals from Australia, China, India, Japan, Mongolia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam participated in this field school. It was held in the Architectural Research Institute in Hanoi from December 1 to 12 2005. Besides UNESCO and ICCROM, organization was also undertaken by AAHM institutional members, the Architectural Research Institute, and Deakin University.

## THE BA DINH SITE: BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE<sup>1</sup>

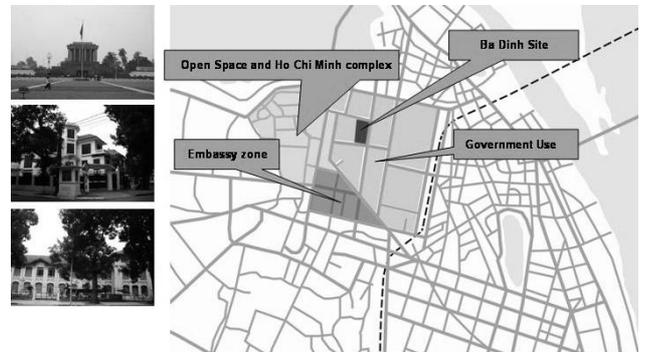


Figure 1. Location of Ba Dinh and its surroundings.

The Ba Dinh archaeological site (Fig. 1) was selected for the 2005 AAHM Field School. It is located at 18 Hoang Dieu Street, Hanoi. The site is interesting because of its sensitive location and historical context. Ba Dinh is situated within the political centre of Hanoi, surrounded by government buildings that date from the French colonial era. Many other important complexes have been built near the site, such as the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, Ba Dinh Parliament Hall and Office, Bac Son War Memorial, the International Conference Building and buildings for the Ministry of Defence. The site itself was proposed as the location for the new parliamentary complex (Dinh Quoc Phuong and Groves 2004). Therefore, in 2002, in preparation for the new construction, an archaeological survey was conducted. This resulted in the

exposure of the Ba Dinh archaeological site, which subsequently led to an urgent decision in 2005 to move the new Parliament Complex to My Dinh.

Historically, Ba Dinh is part of the Thang Long Citadel, one of the most important urban components (including the Red River, the Ancient Quarter and the French Quarter) in the creation of Hanoi as a capital (Pedelanhore 1983; Logan 2000). The site is located next to the main axis of the citadel complex and on its west side. Thang Long was one of the most important citadels in Vietnamese history (Nguyen Vinh Phuc 1994), used under the Ly, Tran, pre-Le, Mac and post-Le Dynasties between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Prior to this period it was the site of Dai La Citadel between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1010, the ruler Ly Thai To selected Thang Long to be the capital of Vietnam. The capital consisted of two parts: *Hoang Thanh* (the Royal Citadel) surrounded by *Kinh Thanh* (the civic areas). *Hoang Thanh* was the place for the Kinh and the royal court lived and worked. *Kinh Thanh* consisted of craft villages and trading streets. The citadel has gone through many changes due to war (Tran Quoc Vuong 2004), since most Vietnam dynasties fought against foreign troops, especially from China and Mongolia. Thang Long was often partly destroyed when enemy troops got inside.

The most significant change came in 1802, when the Nguyen Dynasty decided to move the capital to Phu Xuan. Thang Long was turned in to the provincial capital of northern Vietnam (Nguyen Vinh Phuc 1994). In 1805, the King, Gia Long, decided to pull down Thang Long citadel, as its role as *Hoang Thanh* no longer existed. A smaller one was built. It was called Hanoi Citadel (Fig. 2). A gateway to this citadel still stands in Cua Bac Street. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French colonial government implemented urban planning and improvement for Hanoi. This led to major destruction of Hanoi citadel including its fortified walls and gates. Many new buildings and roads were built upon the site of Hanoi citadel. Some old buildings were given new functions serving the colonial government.

The physical evidence unearthed recently at Ba Dinh is beginning to illustrate the historical transformation of Thang Long citadel through different periods. The site is about 48,000 square meters in area, with 19,000 square meters excavated. The excavated area is divided into four sections: A, B, C and D. Each archaeological lot is about 4 meters deep. Section C has not yet been excavated. According to the archaeologist Tong Trung Tin (2005), vestiges, relics and artifacts have been found in large numbers, estimated at more than a million items. They represent different and overlapping cultural layers of different periods. The relics include construction materials such as bricks, tiles, stone column bases and timber poles (Fig. 3). Other artifacts which might have belonged to the ruler and the royal family are ceramic wares that originated in Vietnam, China and Japan, jewellery, coins, and weapons of different types. The architectural vestiges are the most significant. They include building foundations, brick walls, tiled floors, road sections, drainage

systems, wells, traces of an ancient lotus pond and column bases made of stone or packed gravel (Fig. 4).

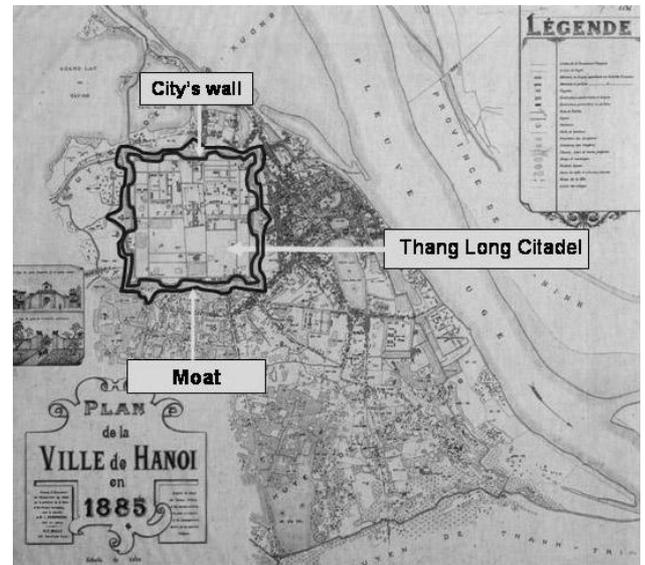


Figure 2. Map of Hanoi citadel dating from 1885 (Courtesy Nguyen Dinh Toan).



Figure 3. Architectural vestiges found in the Ba Dinh site.

Tong Trung Tin (2005) adds that the excavated trenches and relics demonstrate four major cultural layers. The oldest belongs to the Dai La or pre-Thang Long period, 7<sup>th</sup> to early 10<sup>th</sup> century, when Vietnam was ruled by the Tang Dynasty of China. The objects include burned timber columns and ceramics found at a depth of 3-4 meters in all four sections of the excavated area. The second layer belongs to the Ly-Tran period, from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The remains were found at a depth of 2-3 meters in sections A, B and D, and belong to two dynasties: the Ly from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and the Tran from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. These two historical periods shared cultural similarities. The artifacts consist of building foundations, column bases decorated in typical Ly-Tran sculptural style, a square pond full of ceramic objects and wells tiled with red bricks. Other

smaller artifacts include ceramic bowls, plates and boxes, replicas of towers, jars and pots. Many bricks were carved with Chinese characters showing the year of manufacture in 1057.



Figure 4. Tiled floors and drainage pipes exposed at Ba Dinh..

The third layer belongs to the Le period, including the pre-Le, Mac and post-Le Dynasties (15th to 18th centuries) (Tong Trung Tin 2005). Most artifacts of this period have been found at a depth of 1-2 meters in sections A and D. There are building foundation made of brick, together with bowls, jars, jugs, cups, lime-pots and food containers. Some objects are decorated with dragon patterns and Chinese characters which indicate the Le period. For example, in his report on *Thang Long Imperial Citadel Site* (2005), the archaeologist Bui Minh Tri notes that a five-clawed dragon and the names of palaces of the queen or the King's mother were popular decorative patterns of the Le Dynasty.

The youngest archaeological layer illustrates the Nguyen period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It includes vestiges of the French colonial period. The artifacts were found at a depth of 1 meter in sections A and D. They include wells lined with stone, ceramic bowls, jars, incense burners and bottles of wine labeled as being from Bordeaux. The ceramic items for daily use were mostly made in Bat Trang and Phu Lang villages.

Even though the excavation work is not yet complete, the artifacts found at Ba Dinh are concrete scientific evidence for evaluation of its significance. Ba Dinh is a multi-component site that signifies Vietnamese nationality through the presentation of the Thang Long Capital, its history, its urban setting and development. Based on the artifacts and architectural vestiges discovered at the site, it exhibits the development of Vietnamese Royal Authorities and interprets more than 1000 years of continuous habitation.

#### KEY ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE BA DINH ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Identifying issues regarding the conservation of archaeological sites is an initial step in general, and particularly

important for the Ba Dinh site. The relevant issues relate to the values associated with site significance and preservation, especially cultural and social-economic values (Feilden and Jokilehto 1998). Formulating such issues allows a deeper evaluation of the site. Based on Ba Dinh's historical background and significance in the urban context of Hanoi, this paper will address some conservation issues.

#### *Environmental Issues*

The excavations have exposed the site and *in situ* artifacts to damage by environmental factors which can cause deterioration. Of particular concern to local experts are the effects of radiant heat and water (Tong Trung Tin 2005). Not only is rainfall a problem, but the site is below the level of the river. Flooding can occur. Also, the excavation extends to 3 to 5 meters below the ground level, which is below the level of the water table, so there is a problem of water seepage. Drainage wells have been dug in the site and pumps are used to remove water, and these will need to be maintained and monitored to ensure that the water is properly removed. More permanent drainage will be necessary in the long term to lower the water table at Ba Dinh by utilizing perimeter drainage systems.

Two sections of roofing have already been built over the excavated sections and these need to be maintained to ensure that degradation from climatic factors is limited. All the excavated areas will need to be roofed to protect against heavy rainfall in particular.

#### *Social and Land Use Issues*

The population of Hanoi has increased in recent years and in the context of further increases in population and urbanization there is likely to be pressure to utilize the land for general urban use (Logan 2000). Development controls are required to ensure that Ba Dinh is not adversely affected by urbanization. New development around Ba Dinh should be limited and the site should be zoned so that it can be protected. Urban planning and zoning of the area surrounding the citadel is required to minimize detrimental affects to the site, such as high-rise buildings and roads.

As mentioned before, Ba Dinh is located in the citadel, an important area of Hanoi. It is adjacent to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and close to the Ancient Quarter. Also located within the old citadel are embassies, government offices and army facilities. A majority of the land in the citadel is managed by government agencies, so control of development should be more readily undertaken. New construction should not be permitted within the citadel and to ensure this there is a need for development planning policies.

#### *Economic Issues*

*Doi moi* or economic reform since 1986 in Vietnam has boosted national economic development. It should be feasible for the Government to finance the preservation of Ba Dinh due to the significance of the site.

Economic development is important in raising living standards and this is likely to be encouraged by the government. However, development in the citadel area should be properly planned. The citadel is only a small area of Hanoi, and although it is in a central location the majority of it is already under government control. Therefore, there should not be the same pressure to develop it as there would be for privately owned land. A large section of the citadel is controlled by the army and if control of this is to be given back to the Peoples' Committee of Hanoi, it would be important to protect this land from further development.

#### *Historical Issues*

The Ba Dinh archaeological site provides evidence of Vietnamese history and continuous settlement in Hanoi for 1300 years. As mentioned before, the uncovered artifacts belong to different stratigraphic periods that lay overlapped, so that preserving one period can mean destroying or leaving covered other periods. It is important to determine how to incorporate features from different periods for *in situ* display. A methodology should be determined and used for selecting different periods for such a display. Artifacts removed from the ground need to be catalogued, stored and displayed.

#### *Resources and Skills*

Technical skills are required for excavation, maintenance, monitoring and management of large archaeological sites such as Ba Dinh. It is essential that Vietnamese archaeologists and other specialists should be provided with training in urban archaeology and archaeological site management, as well as related technical training.

Already, over one million artifacts have been unearthed and storage facilities are required for these. To determine historical information about the site and its artifacts it is essential that the artifacts unearthed be catalogued. Substantial human resources are required for cataloguing and analysis as part of an ongoing and long term process.

#### *Interpretation*

Ba Dinh provides an educational tool that can be used in conjunction with school and university study. It is a site that will be of interest to school children and adults, and different levels of interpretation will be required to suit this range of audiences. Foreign visitors will also be interested in the site and interpretation for this audience will require further information on the different dynasties in Vietnamese history, as well as information in different languages.

As the site has produced artifacts from the 7<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day, there will need to be an identification of various time periods within the interpretation. A range of displays illustrating the long time period of occupation of the site should be presented.

Integration of site interpretation with that for surrounding buildings and monuments will provide a unified interpretation of the whole area. It will also provide for the interpretation of the continuous history of the citadel.

Nearby buildings such as Kinh Thien Palace could be adapted as museums to display artifacts.

#### DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT CONSERVATION CODES

Cultural significance for the Ba Dinh Archaeological Site can be evaluated based on codes such as those outlined in the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 1999) and the Hoi An Protocol (ICOMOS 2005) These codes are referred to in this paper because they are the most recent that seem to be appropriate for the site's context. The Burra Charter is a standard of conservation practice aimed at historic places with cultural values. The Hoi An Protocol provides "professional guidelines for assuring and preserving the authenticity of heritage sites in the context of the cultures of Asia" (ICOMOS 2005). These two codes have similar principles for the establishment and management of sites of cultural significance.

The Burra Charter suggests that the first step is to "identify place and associations". For Ba Dinh the site has been identified and is now secured by fencing and security guards. However, the extent of the archaeological site below the ground has not yet been fully established. As Ba Dinh is west of the main north-south axis of the citadel, it is highly likely that the archaeological site extends further to the east of the area presently excavated. To the east of the site is a road, the Kinh Thien palace buildings, and east of this again is another site occupied by the army. Some test pits have been dug in areas around the site, but the entire extent is still uncertain.

The Hoi An Protocol looks at the authenticity of sites and measures the degree of understanding of the extent of a site, the degree of understanding of its chronology, and the extent to which it is encroached upon and its accessibility. For Ba Dinh, the extent of the site is considered to be the area inside the citadel, well known through maps from as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as well as through the location of the citadel walls. There appears to be a good level of understanding of the chronology, with the layers uncovered being dated to some extent. The remainder of the site has been encroached upon by buildings, but Kinh Thien palace has already been handed over to the Hanoi Peoples' Committee, and therefore this area is accessible if further excavations are planned. The area held by the army is also likely to be handed to the Hanoi Peoples' Committee in the future and it will then be accessible.

The Burra Charter looks at the issue of significance and how this can be assessed. Significance is determined to assist in estimating the value of a place. Places considered to be of significance are those that help in understanding the past, and Ba Dinh certainly falls in this category, as it provides information about the past and establishes that there was settlement at the site from as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century, during the pre-Thang Long period.

Based on the two codes, a determination of the threats to the site is necessary so that they can be managed, perhaps by legislation. Threats to the site can be archaeological and environmental, through urbanization and

developmental encroachment, through social and economic pressures, and through the affects of tourism and making the site safe. Moreover, the archaeological digs themselves threaten the site and artifacts. The Ba Dinh archaeological dig has gone below the groundwater level so that water threatens to flood the site. Pumping and drainage are used to mitigate this threat. A majority of the excavated area is covered by roofing to protect against the climatic effects. The rapid development of Hanoi gives rise to a threat of encroachment. Such threats are best managed with legislation and zoning of the surrounding land to protect against development. Making the site safe for tourism requires fencing, paths and facilities, which can also threaten the site.

Documentation of information about the site is a step outlined in both codes. The UNESCO Hoi An Protocol (2003) suggests that

...in order to understand the authentic heritage values of a place we must employ credible and truthful sources of information....it is of the highest importance and urgency that, within each culture, recognition be accorded to the specific nature of its heritage values and the credibility and truthfulness of related information sources....Significance is measured by the credibility and truthfulness of the information/documentation....Documentation includes recording archaeological information, cataloguing all the artifacts uncovered physical conditions, as well as the resources needed for management.

Documentation is also an important step in applying for World Heritage status. To understand the significance and authenticity of the site requires documentation of the information so that it can be studied and interpreted.

According to the two codes, the development of policies and management strategies to protect the site is necessary to maintain its significance. Ba Dinh is not an exceptional case. First, a Management Board should be established to have ultimate responsibility for the site. This Management Board should consist of representatives from relevant institutions and departments. The Management Board will develop policies to manage the site, and implement them. A phased action plan will be established for the implementation of policies.

As the phased action plan is implemented it will require monitoring to determine if the policies and strategies developed are suitable for the protection and management of the site, and if the policies and strategies are actually being implemented. Monitoring will provide information on how successful the action plan is and provide for changes to the plan as required.

The Burra Charter and Hoi An Protocol provide guidelines for the determination of significance and authenticity, as well as procedures for managing sites. Such codes are important in steering management bodies in the management process so that all factors affecting sites can be understood and managed for the maintenance and protection of the site in the long term. On the other hand, referring to the codes during the course of conservation of heritage sites in general, and Ba Dinh in particular,

might lead to implications which can initiate other related issues not intensively covered.

## CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT OF THE BA DINH SITE: A PROPOSAL

### *Vision and Objectives*

Based on our study and observations of the site we conclude with a vision for the Ba Dinh archaeological site. The site is envisioned as a *place where all people can converge and witness Vietnamese culture and history*. As expressed in Ba Dinh's significance, the site exhibits a thousand years of historical and cultural values through its excavated features and artifactual remains. This opens an avenue for the people of Vietnam today to explore and relate to these values for heritage and the future development of the country. The vision might be achieved by setting out three objectives: (1) to preserve Ba Dinh for present and future generations, (2) to educate and interpret the heritage, archaeology and history of Vietnam and (3) to have Ba Dinh recognized as a World Heritage Site.

### *Involved Institutions*

The success of the conservation and preservation plan for a cultural site depends on the composition of the people and organizations participating, as well as the information available. Therefore, identifying the stakeholders for the conservation of the Ba Dinh archaeological site is very important. Bringing the right groups and organizations together will lead to good plans and decisions (Demas 2002). The following Vietnamese institutions are those which show interest in conserving and preserving the Ba Dinh Site in terms of usage, development and interpretation:

- (1) Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI),
- (2) Institute of Archaeology (IA) under the Vietnamese Academy of Social Science (VASS),
- (3) Architectural Research Institute (ARI) under the Ministry of Construction,
- (4) Hanoi Peoples' Council of Hanoi,
- (5) Department of Tourism,
- (6) Ministry of Culture and Information,
- (7) Ministry of Defense,
- (8) Ministry of Education and
- (9) Ministry of Finance.

## RECOMMENDATION

The background, significance and issues of the Ba Dinh Archaeological Site exemplify a good case study for heritage management in an urban setting. Initial plans are suggested only for the site itself. Since the site is divided into sections A, B, C and D, it will be better to focus future excavations first in one section. This will yield better orientation and information about the site. The organizational part of the excavation should place more stress on documentation and analysis of the data gathered, and produce more intensive reports and publications about the site for the public. In terms of the facilities for the materials excavated, many artifacts are still being unearthed. This situation needs immediate action. Storage

is important in the conservation of a site. This is to avoid material damage.

In order to achieve the vision for the site, a management board is recommended. A long-term plan should be formulated, where the management board should oversee this plan. This is to satisfy the initial proposed objective, to preserve Ba Dinh for present and future generations. The management board will lead in protecting and preserving the site and will be composed of representatives from the institutions indicated above. The Hanoi Peoples' Committee will head this board. The organization's main activities are administration, legislation/policies, finances, and monitoring and maintenance of the site.

Research and museum/interpretation centres need infrastructure facilities for their activities. They will provide better services that take place in and around the site, and buildings should be structured according to these activities. For the research centre, facilities should provide library, archives, laboratories and storage. On the other hand, the museum/interpretation centre should provide a reception area, catering facilities, space for education groups, as well as interpretive facilities such as display and exhibition areas. As such, the Kinh Thien Palace buildings can be adapted for use as a museum to display excavated artifacts and as an interpretation center. For the preservation of the site, more roofing is needed.

Physical integration with surroundings is also relevant in conserving the site. Ba Dinh is strategically located in the Thang Long Capital. Different important sections that represent Vietnamese socio-political culture and history surround Ba Dinh. It is a part of the Royal Citadel, adjacent to the Ho Chi Minh Complex, and a visual connection between these would provide a link from the early periods to contemporary times. Urban planning for the site is very relevant.

#### *Proposed Activities*

There are three phases for the conservation of the Ba Dinh Archaeological Site (Fig. 5). The first phase is from the present up to 2010. The activities planned in this phase will coincide with the millennium celebration of Hanoi as the capital of Vietnam. The second phase will be from 2011-2020. This will incorporate activities for conservation and preservation of the site with the heritage preservation and development master plan for 2020. This master plan outlines development of the City of Hanoi until 2020 (Ministry of Construction 1999). The last phase will be from 2021-2050. This will provide more time and better implementation of the site conservation programs.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### NOTE

1. Information for this section was taken from the site visits during the field school. The site visits were instructed by Dr. Tong Trung Tin and Dr. Bui Minh Tri, who have both worked as archaeological experts at the site.

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| Plan Implementation                           | Phases |      |      | Institutions |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|--------|------|------|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | 2010   | 2020 | 2050 | 1            | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| <b>Research Centre</b>                        |        |      |      |              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Further Excavation                            |        | X    | X    | /            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | / |
| Storage and Handling                          | X      | X    | X    | /            | / |   |   |   |   |   |   | / |
| Documentation and Analysis                    | X      | X    | X    | /            | / |   |   |   |   |   |   | / |
| Publication                                   | X      | X    | X    | /            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | / |
| Library/Archives                              |        |      | X    | /            | / |   |   |   |   |   |   | / |
| Laboratories                                  | X      | X    | X    | /            | / | / |   |   |   |   |   | / |
| <b>Museum/Interpretation Centre</b>           |        |      |      |              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Temporary/Preliminary Site Information        | X      | X    |      | /            | / |   |   |   | / | / |   |   |
| Further Site Interpretation                   |        | X    | X    | /            | / |   |   |   | / | / |   |   |
| <b>Infrastructure</b>                         |        |      |      |              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Permanent Roofing                             |        | X    | X    | /            | / |   |   |   |   |   |   | / |
| Facilities                                    | X      | X    |      | /            | / |   |   |   |   |   |   | / |
| <b>Physical Integration with Surroundings</b> |        |      |      |              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Urban Planning                                | X      | X    | X    | /            | / |   |   |   |   |   |   | / |

Figure 5. Plan implementation schedule for Ba Dinh..

Institutions: (1) Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), (2) Institute of Archaeology (IA) under the Vietnamese Academy of Social Science (VASS), (3) Architectural Research Institute (ARI) under the Ministry of Construction, (4) Hanoi People Council of Hanoi, (5) Department of Tourism, (6) Ministry of Culture and Information, (7) Ministry of Defense, (8) Ministry of Education and (9) Ministry of Finance.