hanoi youth public space

Youth-friendly public spaces in Hanoi

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May 2015

Executive summary

This project brings together Canadian and Vietnamese researchers and an NGO to examine the provision and use of formally-designed public spaces in Hanoi in relation to the use, needs, and aspirations of youths aged 18-25 years old. In this research, we have described the evolution of public spaces since the year 2000 (in terms of overall spatial distribution, available areas, quality, and usage) and explored some of the driving forces behind these changes. We have also analyzed how a variety of youth users (male, female, couples, groups) access, use, and relate to public parks and gardens in the Vietnamese capital city. The research relied on a mixed-method approach. This includes qualitative case studies of three parks respectively located in the inner city (Lenin Memorial Park), a new suburban area (the 34T Plaza of Trung Hòa Nhân Chính) and the outer edge of the city (Hòa Bình Park). It also includes a geographic information system (GIS) mapping of geographic data about the evolution of the city's parks, public gardens and bodies of water, and the quantitative analysis of survey data on public space's accessibility and "publicness."

Evolving public policies for the production and maintenance of public spaces

Policies guiding the production of urban public spaces in Vietnam have evolved considerably since the early 2000s. A review of relevant planning policies recently adopted by the central government highlights three positive changes: i) an explicit acknowledgment of the positive contributions that public space make to cities; ii) heightened attention to the spatial dimensions of public spaces; and iii) a recognition of the need to protect public spaces from degradation and encroachment. Despite these positive changes, several problems still plague Vietnam's public space policy framework: 1) multiple definitions of urban public spaces coexist in policy documents that do not always overlap, 2) responsibility for the management of these spaces is divided amongst different government agencies, and 3) some planning norms regarding the production of formally-designed public spaces are inconsistent.

Evolution, accessibility, and quality (publicness) of public spaces in Hanoi

The number of public gardens and parks within Hanoi's territory increased significantly between 2000 and 2010. However, the vast majority of new public spaces (and parks in particular) were established at the city's periphery. During the same period, the city also witnessed a dramatic diminution of the number of bodies of water (lakes and ponds) and the total area covered by them. As a result, the inner city continues to suffer from a lack of formally-designed public spaces, and the few that do exist are over crowded. The scarcity of parks has particularly impacts Hanoi's youth and their ability to engage in their desired activities.

A quantitative survey with 402 youth users conducted in four city parks shows that proximity to a park is the most important factor encouraging usage of public space by youths. In the

current context, young people travel very far to get to parks (average travel time is well above the 10 minutes recommended by many public health agencies). These long travel distances to parks are exacerbated by further travel impediments such as the poor road network. An assessment of forty parks and public gardens in the inner city in terms of facilities, maintenance, and possibilities of engagement with each place further shows considerable variations in the quality of existing public spaces. Most importantly, we observed that the design of public gardens constrain usages and that, in view of the current dearth of public space in the inner-city, these smaller public spaces are not utilized to their fullest potential.

Youths and public spaces: Activities, social norms and obstacles

What does it mean to be young in Vietnam? How and why do youths use public spaces? This study highlights three elements that need to be accounted for in the analysis and policy action targeting youths in Vietnam. First, cultural and moral values (some related to Confucianism) combined with parental control affect the way youths use public spaces. For instance, the presence of young romantic couples or adepts of new "lifestyle sports" in public spaces causes discomfort for other users who perceive these activities as inappropriate. Second, in the Vietnamese conception of transition to adulthood, autonomy is not valued and the family remains a central form of control, even after young people get married and have children. Third is the importance of group identity. Youth groups are not seen as threatening in Vietnam's public spaces, as is frequently the case in other societies, even if their behavior is sometimes not completely socially acceptable.

Overall, formally-designed public spaces are very beneficial to the health of young people. They appreciate the contact with natural spaces, and utilize public spaces to pursue active lifestyles. In addition to benefits related to physical health, youths appreciate peer support and socialization through their activities in public spaces. Particularly for migrant youths, public spaces are a means to counter isolation and loneliness. Youths enjoy relaxing in public spaces, which may keep them away from more risky ways of releasing stress through drugs and alcohol.

What do youths do in public spaces?
Youths practice a wide range of activities in formally-designed public spaces, some static (chatting, studying, watching people) and others more active (older sports such as football and badminton but also newer "street disciplines" such as skateboarding, hip hop dancing, or inline skating). Public spaces play an important place in the daily lives of those youths who use them. This is especially true for those who practice a physical activity there. These young people spend a sizeable amount of their free time in the public space, come from far away, stay long periods of time and visit these places very frequently. The study finds that a diversity of activities and spaces (varied park designs and a mix of users) is highly appreciated by youths.

Are there gendered differences in the use of public spaces?
Spending time in public spaces is among young women's preferred leisure activities. However, they face more constraints than young men in using the spaces: they have less free time, worry more for their personal safety, and fear harassment. Young women cope with these constraints by going to parks in groups, choosing more crowded places with good lighting, and dressing "properly" (with clothing that is not too provocative). Parents generally approve of young women using public spaces and they generally perceive no gender

inequalities. However, young women insist that there are gender differences. They report that women in public spaces are expected to practice "softer" activities, often times related to taking care of children and younger siblings. But things might be changing. Many young women who see the few young female park users who practice "strong activities" such as street dancing, inline skating, and skateboarding describe them as "stylish" and speak positively about such "socially transgressive" activities.

Constraints on youths' use of public spaces

How do youths deal with overcrowding in Hanoi's public spaces, while maintaining harmonious relationships with other users? Youths avoid conflict by relying on tactful negotiation strategies and on a broad awareness of others' needs in terms of space. While levels of social conflict in public spaces remain low, users still express dissatisfaction about the lack of space. This is likely to be heightened by the growing demand of youths for space in the city where they can practice new "lifestyle sports" (i.e., inline skating, parkour, street dancing, etc.).

Youths also report that social norms limit their ability to claim space over older groups making it more difficult for lifestyle sports and unmarried romantic couples to be accepted. They further point to the role of management and guards in tolerating or limiting youth activities in public spaces, and express ambivalence about the presence of vendors who encroach on recreational space but offer useful and affordable services. They see entrance fees as unaffordable, arbitrary, and as a hassle as they need to go through a "check point" (i.e., park gate) to enter parks.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study illustrates the importance of public spaces for youths in Hanoi - and for the wider urban society - and the need for more and better public spaces in a rapidly urbanizing city. Our findings and dialogues among all researchers and participants in the project support four sets of recommendations to improve Hanoi's public space:

Reduced area of public spaces per capita, fragmented accessibility and uneven quality:

- Pursuing the construction of public spaces for a larger range of users in the inner-city and not only at the city's periphery;
- Adopting coercive measures to strictly monitor and preserve all existing public spaces (public gardens, parks, lakes, etc.);
- Making the best of existing spaces (public gardens, parks, and lakeshores), by renovating those in poor conditions and by maintaining them so that they can be used to their fullest; and
- Establishing new public spaces in areas of the city identified as having a poor degree of accessibility to a public space (further than 900m distance).

Public spaces are important for youth development and the whole society:

- Promoting the role of public spaces in the city's agenda for youth development, particularly with regards to youth physical and mental health (and the general health of all urban citizens);

- Re-evaluating the management system of public spaces, with specific attention to the role of guards in order to set up mechanisms to ensure they protect all users;
- Setting up a system that structures vendor activities in space, with stricter rules and guidelines for maintenance; and
- Re-evaluating motorbikes parking near public spaces, while connecting them to the public transport network.

What are youth-friendly public spaces?

- Easily accessible places at a maximum of 900 meters from their residence, with no fence or entrance fee, and many street entrances, which are:

  - well-planted with diverse greeneries (trees, shrubs, flower beds, floating plants, etc.);
  - include flat, open, and hard surfaces that support and a diversity of unstructured activities;
  - designed to welcome mixed-users, rather than developing youth-only parks; and
  - part of a network of complementary public spaces to provide options and variation.

Implementation and feasibility: The policy framework

- Adopting a more qualitative and integrated approach towards public space planning and management, including policies that bring various departments to collaborate in urban public space development;
- Adopting a wider and more qualitative definition of urban design and integrate it better with other policy documents to facilitate implementation;
- Seveloping and adopting more comprehensive guidelines for public spaces in Hanoi. A distinct Design Standard should be envisaged.

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Introduction

This project brings together Canadian and Vietnamese researchers and NGOs to examine the provision and use of public spaces in Hanoi, especially in relation to young people, and to offer policy recommendations about how the provision of public spaces for this group can be maintained and improved. Our focus is on young people between the ages of 18 and 25 years old (and some 16 year-olds), a transitional segment of the Vietnamese urban population whose socio-spatial practices have received scarce research and policy attention. In exploring this group's uses of public spaces, this study sheds light on the means by which teenagers and young adults, standing between older socialist ideals and emerging middle-class aspirations, have attempted to carve out a space for themselves during Vietnam's urban and market transitions.

Vietnam has been undergoing an urban and societal transition and Vietnamese youth are an important demographic that will shape the future of this transition. In 2009, nearly 30% of the Red River Delta urban population (including Hanoi) was under 18 years old (General Statistical Office 2009). In 2012, 15 to 24 year-olds represented almost 16% of Hanoi's population.[1] Most rural migrants to Hanoi are between 15 and 34 making this a constantly expanding segment of Hanoi's population. Among these migrants are large numbers of students from other provinces along with youth pushed out of rural areas by under-employment. It is also the first generation, since at least the 1950s, to be widely exposed to the global flow of cultural materials, trends, and ideas (Hsing-Huang and Wan, 2007). While they hold a central position in Vietnam, the needs and roles played by urban youth has attracted limited research attention. This report begins to fill this gap by studying the *relationship between youth and public spaces* in Hanoi.

The impact of Vietnam's urbanization policies on the *transformation of public spaces* (in terms of uses, accessibility, ownership, and design) remains poorly understood. Hanoi combines some of the worlds' highest human densities (up to 404 persons/ha) with a general scarcity public space. Public space represents only 0.3% of the city's territory and less than 1m^2 per capita (HAIDEP 2007)[2]. In comparison, Bangkok has an average of 1.8m^2 per capita (Thaiutsa *et al.* 2008). In addition, the media reports encroachments over limited green and water spaces by public and private real-estate developments since the *đổi mới* (DTINewS 2012; Vietnam News 2012; Vietnam Net 2012). Despite these problems, few studies have tracked public space transformations in Hanoi.

In this research, we provide a picture of the evolution of public spaces on the urban administrative territory of the Vietnamese capital (in terms of overall spatial distribution, available areas, quality, and use) and an understanding of the driving forces behind these changes. Qualitative studies tell us that Hanoi citizens are making extensive use of various forms of public space, such as plazas, shopping centres, squares, the front yards of ritual buildings, along with sidewalks, which are crowded with private uses (cooking, cleaning, playing) and petty-trade. This scholarship further highlights conflicts between users and rulers, among generations, and across social classes, all of which arise from the limited availability of public space and its intensive use by an increasingly diversified urban

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[1] Unpublished data provided by the Institute of Sociology in 2014.
[2] This proportion may change depending on the definition given to "public space".

population (Thomas 2001; Koh 2008; Kim 2012; Geertman *et al.* 2010; Geertman and Le Quynh Chi 2010).

Vietnamese society has a particular and complicated relationship between the public and private spheres. The state is very involved in the private sphere, and private activities are very visible in the public domain. It is therefore very difficult to characterize spaces according to their property regime or according to a clear distinction between private activities (such as commerce or domestic activities related to hygiene or cooking) and public ones. This peculiarity has attracted research attention, particularly on the development of "informal" public spaces (e.g. private uses of the sidewalks or commercial use of parks) (Drummond 2000; Koh 2008; Harm 2009). Fewer studies, however, have looked at the use of formally-designed public spaces in Hanoi, while in Vietnamese policy-making circles, there are important debates on the very notion of "public space" (*không gian công cộng*), a term which only made its entry into legal planning texts in the last decade, and which remains poorly defined (Geertman et al., forthcoming). Given these social and scholarly realities we have chosen to focus this study on formal public spaces, combining geographic data, quantitative analysis and a qualitative focus on three parks. The important issue of the "privatization" of public spaces is explored in terms of degrees of publicness and encroachment.

The aim of this interdisciplinary research is twofold. Firstly, we seek to analyze the impacts of new urbanization policies on the quantity, quality, and accessibility of four types of formally-planned public spaces in Hanoi (parks, public gardens, bodies water, and shoreline walkways and promenades). Secondly, we seek to understand whether and how these formally-planned public spaces fulfill the needs of youth in Hanoi. Our specific objectives are to:

1) Analyze transformations in the provision, form, and accessibility of Hanoi's formal public spaces between 2000 and 2010, that is in the period of intense pro-urban development policy-making;
2) Critically review the evolution of the pro-urban policy frameworks governing the production of public spaces in Hanoi in relation to actual youth practices;
3) Characterize youths' uses of existing, formal public spaces;
4) Formulate policy recommendations related to the planning, design, and governance of public space in Hanoi to better meet youth needs.

After a brief overview of the methodology, we begin with a policy analysis as it relates to public spaces in Vietnam (section 1) and a discussion informed by the particularity of Vietnamese cultural modes as these relate to what it means to be young in Hanoi (section 2). We then turn to an overview of the evolution of public spaces in terms of geographical space covered and levels of accessibility, before looking more specifically at the quality of these spaces in terms of degrees of publicness (section 3). We then look at the diversity of activities and users in Hanoi's public spaces, and at the benefits youths get in terms of health, socialization, and relaxation (section 4). We devote a section to the specific needs of young women in public spaces and the limitations they face in terms of social control and safety (section 5). We then broaden the discussion to include the limitations that all youths face in their free use of public space. We specifically discuss difficulties related to access, overcrowding, relationships or conflict with management authorities, the encroachment of vendors, entrance fees, and the sociocultural restrictions on two types of preferred activities, "lifestyle sports" and romantic coupling (section 6). In the last section, we return to some of these constraints in order to explore how youths manage competition for space and conflicts. We specifically discuss issues related to children, vendors, romantic couples,

motorbikes and security (section 7). In the conclusion, we make a number of policy recommendations.

Action-research design and methodology

This research project steps out of the traditional role of keeping its research objects separate and at a distance from researchers. To the contrary, we have engaged in what is sometimes called action-research. In this case what we mean is that there is a more active and intimate engagement with those who are being researched and the goals that they have related to the research. Specifically, the core researchers on this project invited and sought out the active engagement of multiple stakeholders (users, policy-makers, and civil society organizations) in both the production of knowledge, and also thinking about how to turn that knowledge towards the production of positive outcomes (policy, government and/or civil society action) for those stakeholders related to the area of research, here, of course, public space for the young people of Hanoi. We gathered around the common objective of finding strategies to better youth access to public spaces in urbanizing Hanoi and thus allow this generation to engage positively with the place where they live. We use a mixed-method approach combining:

Analysis of documents and archives
1. An analysis of the central government policies mentioning public spaces;
2. A press review in Vietnamese, English, and French of youth and public spaces in Vietnam (2009-2013).

Qualitative interviews
3. 20 semi-structured interviews with older and younger generations of urban professionals (planners and others), local administrative representatives and private management companies about changes in meanings/uses/roles of public spaces for youth;
4. 62 semi-structured interviews with youths in three parks which were our primary research locations (Lenin Memorial Park, 34T Plaza, and Hòa Bình Park) in order to understand their use of the park, what they like and dislike, and their general opinion about public spaces in Hanoi;
5. 20 semi-structured interviews with young women in the three primary locations to speak more specifically about gender differences in the use of public spaces (16 interviews with female users and 4 interviews with women who do not use public spaces);
6. 9 interviews with lifestyle sport groups (3 in each primary location) + 3 interviews with pioneer skateboarders (the early adopters who were among the first people to ever skateboard in Hanoi);
7. Interviews with 7 couples in Hòa Bình Park;
8. 6 interviews with guards and vendors in the three primary location parks; and
9. 4 interviews with Vietnamese experts on youth issues (mostly drugs and sexuality) in order to better grasp the cultural context of youth research in Vietnam.

Most of the 130 interviews were conducted in Vietnamese (see questionnaires in Appendix 1) between January and August 2014, by researchers from the Institute of Sociology and by the Canadian team. They were fully transcribed in Vietnamese, and then translated into English.

Systematic observations

10. Systematic observations in the same three primary location parks between 5PM and 10PM during one full week in order to better understand who uses the park to do what, and whether there were tensions or conflicts between any of the following: users, vendors and management.

Systematic observations were conducted by the team of Canadian researchers between June and August 2014.

Quantitative surveys and mapping

11. A survey with 50 users in each of the same three primary location parks (total 132 respondents) in order to understand how young people get to these public spaces, how much time it takes and how often they use the space (see questionnaire in Appendix 2);
12. A survey related to park accessibility for 18 to 25 year-olds, for the purpose of having a larger sample (402 respondents), and a more general overview of accessibility to public spaces in Hanoi, was conducted in 4 secondary survey sites: Thành Công Park, Nghĩa Đô Park, Linh Đàm Park, and Ngọc Lâm public garden (see questionnaire and detailed maps in Appendix 3). This survey was used to compute service areas around parks, public gardens and lakes in order to identify areas of the city where there is no reasonable access to public spaces;
13. A survey of the quality of 18 parks (*công viên*) and 16 public gardens (*vườn hoa*) of Hanoi based on a scoring method; and,
14. A mapping exercise of the evolution of public spaces between 2000-2010, based on topography maps and Google Earth images (table 1).

For the mapping exercise, we considered four types of public spaces in Hanoi:

- Parks (*công viên*): identified from maps obtained through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE).
- Public gardens (*vườn hoa* - lit. 'flower garden'): identified from maps obtained from the MoNRE.
- Bodies of water (lakes, ponds, and marshes[3]): given that such spaces play a central role in local life.
- Promenades or walkways around lakes (only for 2010, because most of these were built after the year 2000): given that such spaces play a central role in local life.

A small note on definition is in order before me move on with methodological considerations about the surveys conducted for this study. Vietnamese policies define a park (công viên) as *"a large green area serving the goals of outdoor activities for the entertainment of urban residents, for mass cultural activities, contact with nature, and improvement of material and spiritual life"*. A public garden (*vườn hoa*) is defined as *"a green area mainly for pedestrians to stroll and relax during short periods of use. These are not large areas, but instead cover a few hectares or less. Their main content includes flowers, plants, grass, trees and their construction is relatively simple"* (Public-Use Greenery Planning in Urban Areas – Design Standards, art. 3.1). However, several places officially called "parks" and "public gardens" in Hanoi, including those identified by the MoNRE, do not fit these official definitions. For instance, a number of Hanoi's "public gardens" cover between 5 and 20 hectares and therefore hardly qualify as small. Conversely, some of the city's designated "parks" are not "large green areas" as they cover 5 hectares or less.

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[3] Rough translation of đầm

In order to evaluate the distribution and provision of these spaces over the period of 2000-2010, we use multiple maps and data from different sources. Sources and descriptions are provided in table 1.

Table 1: Maps and data description. Source: Authors

Maps	Sources	Scale of analysis
Parks in 2000, 2010	Topographic maps (MoNRE) Google Earth image in 2000 and 2010	Topographic map: 1:2000 Images of Google Earth
Gardens in 2000, 2010	Topographic maps (MoNRE) Images from Google Earth in 2000 and 2010	Topographic map: 1:2000
Bodies of water in 2000, 2010	Topographic maps (MoNRE) Images from Google Earth in 2000 and 2010	Topographic map: 1:2000
Promenades and walkways around bodies of water in 2010	Images from Google Earth in 2010	
Population data: age groups in 2000, 2010	Census in 1999 and 2009 (General Statistical Office)	Per commune/ward
Commune/ward boundary in 2000 and 2010	Topographic maps (MoNRE)	Topographic map: 1:2000
Streets in 2000 and 2010	Topographic maps (MoNRE)	Topographic map: 1:2000

A brief presentation of the three qualitative case studies

Lenin Memorial Park, the 34T Plaza and Hòa Bình Park (figure 1), the three public spaces on which this research focuses, share a number of characteristics that make them particularly attractive to youths. They are adjacent to main streets and so are easily accessible, they are unfenced, and do not charge an entry fee.[4] More importantly, they feature rather large, flat, and non-programmed surfaces suitable for youth practices, and are also relatively large public spaces by Hanoi standards. The ability of youths to access and use the spaces is shaped by the different histories, spatial locations, and management systems that characterize each of our study sites.

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[4] Most of Hanoi's large city parks are fenced off and charge a small entrance fee to users.
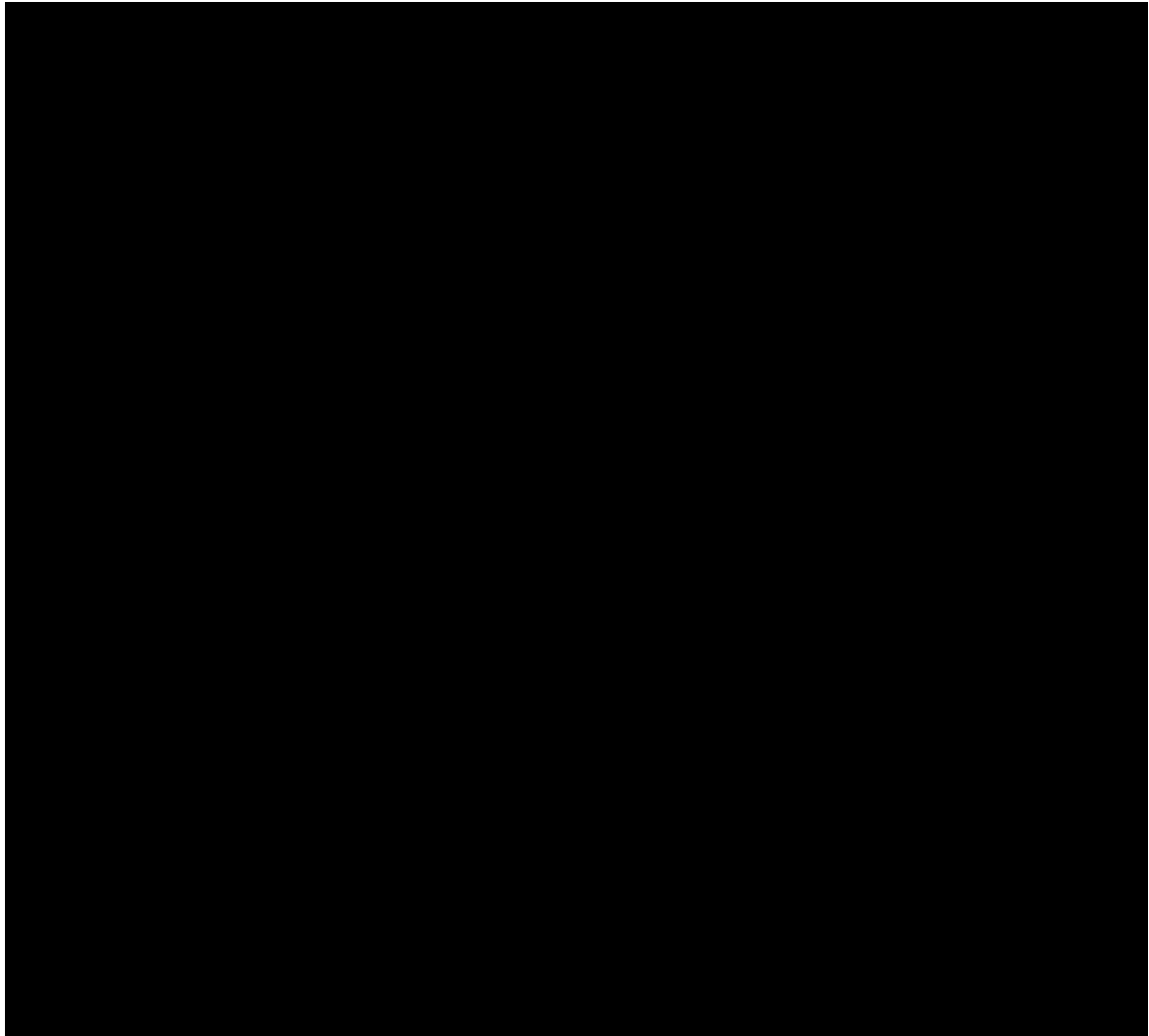
Figure 1: Location of Lenin Memorial Park, the 34T Plaza and Hòa Bình Park. Source: Authors

Lenin Memorial Park

Lenin Memorial Park is located in the inner-city district of Ba Đình, the city's political heart. The history of the park is closely tied to the communist State's attempt to impose its power on the Vietnamese capital city (Logan 1994). The park is in the midst of political and historical public buildings and in a district where residents largely live in French colonial villas and military compounds. Its population, however, represents a mix of all classes. The park is surrounded by a number of foreign embassies (including the Chinese Embassy) and sits a few hundred metres away from the National Assembly, Presidential Palace and Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum.

The Lenin Park, known before as the "Agricultural Park," was symbolically appropriated by Hanoi's city authorities in 1976 who then replaced a French Statue with a statue of the Soviet figure Vladimir Lenin. The space in front of the statue was redesigned to include a large paved area that acts as a politically symbolic space for this major communist figure. This paved square, which accounts for almost half of the total park area (17 000 m2), is the area where youth activities are concentrated. With its main access from the avenue Điện Biên Phủ, the square provides a direct view of the adjacent Vietnamese History Museum (mostly displaying rockets and airplanes celebrating the nation's victory in the first and second Indochina Wars) and the former Imperial Citadel.

Lenin Memorial Park is considered by authorities as a "cultural park" (*công viên văn hóa*), which are parks serving as historical and political symbols. The statue of Lenin is intended to symbolize (communist) State authority. Similarly, the statue dedicated to Peace in Hòa Bình Park refers to communist State authority (at peace with all countries). There are several other cultural parks in Hanoi, the most well-known is probably Ba Đình Square in front of the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum. Cultural parks function as political tools of the State. To preserve the reverential character of cultural parks, city authorities restrict —at least in principle— recreational activities in them.

Figure 2: Lenin Memorial Park. Source: Authors

Hòa Bình Park (Peace Park)

Hòa Bình Park (Peace Park) is another cultural park, located on the northwestern urban fringe, on the road from inner city Hanoi to Nội Bài airport. The park was inaugurated on October 8, 2010, to mark 1000 years of Hanoi's founding which is symbolized by a giant statue at the main gate of a bird (*Chim Lạc*), the traditional symbol of the first (*Au Lac*) dynasty in Vietnam. The park is 20 hectares, with almost 6 hectares being a lake, and in addition to marking Hanoi's history is also intended, as its name would suggest, to honour the idea and hope of communist Vietnam living prosperously and at peace with the nations of the world. The Peace Memorial statue in the middle of the park is a 30 metre high column topped with a 7.2 metre high statue of a woman holding a child and doves of peace flying above them. There are five coloured metal bars at a park gate that refer to the five continents of the earth with whom Vietnam is at peace. Beyond the symbolic functions of cultural park, Peace Park was also designed to serve as a new leisure space for residents living in its immediate surroundings, including the Xuân Đỉnh commune, Từ Liêm suburban district, and several university campuses with their students, as well as migrant neighbourhoods in the area.

Figure 3: Hòa Bình Park. Source: Authors

The 34T Plaza

Completed in 2006, the 34T Plaza, whose name comes from the 34-storey tower facing it, is located in an area now known as Trung Hòa Nhân Chính. This is a new, mixed-use development on the near periphery of Hanoi, built and managed by a former State-owned enterprise called Vinaconex. Well-connected to the inner city, this area has become one of Hanoi's suburban centres hosting space for a new middle class and a new economy of headquarters, banks and enterprises. The area is characterized by highrise towers, big-box stores, and malls (Labbé and Boudreau, 2011). Located at the heart of this bustling neighbourhood, the large (by Hanoi's standards) 34T Plaza is 4,000 m^2, surrounded by residential towers and borders Hoàng Đạo Thúy, the main thoroughfare of this neighbourhood.

The 34T Plaza, according to Hanoi's planning regulatory framework, falls into the category of 'multi-purpose space' (*không gian đa năng*). This category includes mainly neighbourhood-level public spaces, such as schoolyards and playing fields. As the expression suggests, 'multi-purpose spaces' are meant for a variety of activities, and use restrictions are less severe than in cultural parks. In line with this institutional definition, local residents of Trung Hòa Nhân Chính see the 34T Plaza as a collective space primarily built to serve their recreational needs, while understanding that it remains open and accessible to other users living outside the neighbourhood.

Figure 4: The 34T Plaza. Source : Authors

1. Public space policy: definitions, evolution, and debates

Formal policies guiding the production and management of public spaces in Hanoi evolved considerably over the last few years. A first observation is that policy-makers, at all levels of government, pay considerably more attention to the issue of urban public spaces today than they did in the first years of the *đổi mới* reforms. A quantitative sense of this evolution is given by a search for the word 'park' (*công viên*) in an exhaustive online database of Vietnamese legislation.[5] Only 154 policy documents (laws, decrees, decisions, orientations, etc.) adopted during the first 14 years of the reforms (1986 to 1999) mentioned the word 'park.' This figure however rose to 1,287 texts for the subsequent 14 years (2000 to 2014).

The evolution of Vietnam's public space policy however goes beyond the mere increase in the number of legislative documents. The *content* of policies also changed significantly over the last decade or so. Five major changes stand out:

- Policies have become more specific both with respect to terminology and content;
- The Vietnamese planning model is moving slowly towards a more systemic and integrated approach;
- Policy-makers show a greater awareness for the positive contributions that public spaces make in cities;
- More attention is given to the spatial quality of public spaces; and
- There is recognition of the need to protect these places from degradation and encroachment.

This section reviews and discusses these undoubtedly positive changes. It also highlights the gaps, incoherencies, and ambiguities that still plague some of the key definitions, planning orientations, and ruling principles which constitute Vietnam's public space policy framework. The ultimate aim of this policy review is to establish a context-sensitive foundation on the basis of which policy recommendations can be formulated to improve the production and management of public spaces in Hanoi and other Vietnamese cities.

Following this introduction is a note on the methodological orientation of this policy review. Next is a brief outline of Vietnam's urban planning model. This is followed by an overview of the issues associated with the definition of public space in policy documents. Building on this contextualization, the rest of this section critically reviews key public space policies, highlighting changes which deserve to be reinforced, as well as problematic areas which need to be addressed in the future.

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[5] Thư Viện Pháp Luật [Law Library] is an online database which collects legal texts published by all levels of the Vietnamese government since 1934.

a) A note on methodology

This section focuses primarily on policies issued by the central government and by relevant line ministries over the last decade or so. While we are aware that local-level governments in Vietnam (such as the People's Committee of Hanoi) issue important policies that regulate the provision and management of public spaces, these documents were not analyzed in this study due to time and resource limitations. Also, the following discussion only looks at what we might call 'policies on the books' (i.e., policies as codified in official texts and legislation), leaving aside the issue of 'policy in action' (i.e., policies as implemented and enforced). We are conscious that this limits the scope of our analysis, as discrepancies between policy prescriptions and everyday governing practices are common occurrences in Hanoi.

Nevertheless, we should not conclude that a critical review of national-level public space policies is irrelevant or useless. In urban Vietnam, State agents and citizens move in and around policies according to their respective (and changing) interests (Labbé, 2014). NGOs, civil society associations, and individual citizens can—and occasionally do—use policies and legislation "as tools to hold the State accountable to its own rules" (ibid.: 172). In other words, even those policies which are not enacted can be used as buttresses to limit social agents' ability to manipulate the rules of the game during the urbanization process. In line with this, policies which are widely accessible and easily understandable by lay people can become powerful levers on the basis of which citizens and advocacy groups can ask for more and better public spaces.

b) Public space planning in Vietnam: The limits of a functionalist approach

Inherited from the pre-reform era and much influenced by Soviet planning (Logan, 1995), Vietnam's urban and regional planning model is founded on a highly functionalist and primarily two-dimensional conception of the city. This model follows a normative and somewhat arithmetic approach. It understands the city as an assemblage of 'functional zones' (*khu chức năng*) which need to be furnished with infrastructure in order to work properly and efficiently.

Planning in this context is confined to the distribution of infrastructure and functions across urban territories. The primary tool used to bring this about is the 'construction plan.' The Ministry of Construction (hereafter 'MoC') is responsible for producing these plans periodically and at various scales. Such plans seek to meet various ratios, quotas, and targets. For instance, a circular published by the MoC in 2009 (34/2009/TT-BXD) stipulates that 'special grade cities' such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City should have at least eight public spaces (*không gian công cộng*) on their territory and 15m^2 of 'urban greenery land' (*đất cây xanh đô thị*) per capita.[6]

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[6] Note that two other policy documents also stipulate target ratios of public space to be met by "special-grade cities" such as Hanoi. The Vietnam Building Code on Regional and Urban Planning and Residential Planning establishes the ratio of "public use greenery land outside of residential units" for Hanoi at 7m^2/person (art. 2.6.3). The Code also establishes a minimum of 2m^2/person of "public use greenery land" within so-called residential units, and at least 1m^2 in each "group of residential houses" (art. 2.4.2). For its part, the Public-Use Greenery Planning in Urban Areas - Design Standards stipulates a target of 12-15m^2 of "public use greenery land" per person (art. 5.1, Table 1). A summary

The ratios, quotas, and targets that guide the production of construction plans are established ahead of the planning process. Many of these numbers are set for political purposes and prove, in practice, to be impractical or unrealistic (Paddi and IMV, 2014). For instance, Trang Hung and Pham Khanh Chi (2010: 70) indicate that most cities in Vietnam only meet between a third and half of the ratios of 'public-use greenery' set by the MoC. In many cases, attempts to meet the unrealistic targets set in policies lead to sub-optimal planning decisions (for example, trying to meet a quota of green space by designating large tracts of agricultural lands in periurban areas which are inaccessible and unusable for recreational or leisure activities as green space).

Conventional city planning in Vietnam is mainly concerned with the task of equipping cities with two main types of infrastructure. The first type, called 'technical infrastructure,' refers to roads, utility networks, waste and environmental sanitation facilities, and cemeteries (Vietnam Building Code, art. 1.2.12). The second type of infrastructure, called 'social infrastructure' (*cơ sở hạ tầng xã hội*) includes urban public spaces that have a broad array of other urban functions. The notion of 'social infrastructure' is officially defined as including: "residential houses; public and service works for healthcare, culture, education, sports, physical training, commerce and other urban service works; public squares, parks, greenery, and water surface areas; urban administrative offices; and other social infrastructure works" (Vietnam Building Code, art. 1.2.12).

Two problems emerge from this approach. First, planning policies in Vietnam pay much greater attention to technical matters than to social issues (Wilson, 2009). Accordingly, providing cities with physical infrastructure is the main concern and occupies most of the space in policy texts. Another problem in policy documents, such as the 2009 Urban Planning Law, is that the provision, design, and management of public spaces are dealt with as an indistinct element of the wider 'social infrastructure' category — a category which is so broad as to be almost completely useless in the decision-making processes related to planning.

Yet, for all its shortcomings, the Vietnamese urban planning model is changing (Paddi and IMV, 2014; Söderström and Geertman, 2013). One example of this shift is provided by Decree 38/ND-CP of 2010 on the management of urban space, architecture, and landscaping. This document promotes a more systemic planning approach by stipulating that "system of greenery, water surface and transport shall be combined to create interrelated space in urban centres" (art. 6.1-d). This provision reinforces an earlier policy innovation which required that parks, public gardens, and streets be envisaged as an interconnected "system" of "public-use greenery" (QCXDVN 01/2008/BXD).

The language of planning policies is also becoming more specific with regard to public space issues. While the concept of 'social infrastructure' still predominates in policy texts, new expressions have started to appear that distinguish collective open spaces from other types of social infrastructure. That said, there is still a lot of ground to cover before an operational definition of urban public spaces is integrated into formal policies.

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table in this same document suggests that this ratio should include 7-9m^2/person of "park greenery land," 3-3.6m^2/person of "public garden-greenery land" and 1.7-2m^2/person of "street greenery land" (art. 5.5).

c) Definitional issues or the *"không gian công cộng"* conundrum

Although there exists a direct translation of the expression 'public space' in Vietnamese (i.e., *không gian công cộng*), this term only recently made its entry into the country's policy language, where it remains scarcely used.[7] Why this notion—or any equivalent—has not further penetrated Vietnam's policy language is a timely question. In interviews, planning experts established a link between the lack of a clear definition of public space and the current confusions and contradictions about what is an 'adequate' or 'good' public space in urban Vietnam, how it should be produced and managed, and what essential characteristics these spaces should have to fulfill their "public" role (Ex-03; Ex-12; Ex-13). Moreover, exploring the factors underpinning policy makers' reluctance to integrate a general term such as 'public space' in official policies sheds light on ongoing debates among urban specialists about the nature, role, management, and ownership of these places in contemporary Vietnamese cities.

History of the concept of public space in Vietnam

Before delving further into issues related to the formal definition of public space, a brief discussion about the history of this concept in Vietnam is in order. As a senior architect we met for this study remarked, the expression *"không gian công cộng"* *"does not belong to the Vietnamese tradition"* (interview, Ex-02, November 19, 2013). This term is instead an import, which dates back to the colonial era. As several informants told us, this expression was abandoned after the country gained its independence from France (1945-1954) only to resurface in the Vietnamese planning discourse about ten years ago. We will revisit below the role the legacy of socialism plays in the problematic definition of "public" space in Vietnamese planning. For now, let us first briefly discuss what might be called the "historical misfit" between the notion of "public space" as it took shape in Europe during the 19th century, and the reality of East Asian cities such as Hanoi.

A Vietnamese planning expert interviewed for this study set the matter down somewhat bluntly by stating "[in Vietnam,] *we don't have places that fit in with the term public space as it is understood in European countries*" (interview, Ex-02, November 19, 2013). This view is widely shared among the community of experts that we met in Hanoi. It also echoes findings from the small but growing literature on urban spaces in Vietnam (Gilbert, 2014; Drummond, 2000; Kürfürst, 2011; Nguyen Pham Anh, 2005). In support of this view, both local experts and scholars emphasize the profound differences in the urban forms and socio-spatial uses that have historically set Western and Vietnamese cities apart. In the next section on "Being Young in Hanoi," we will see that similar cultural differences set Vietnamese "youths" apart from their Western counterparts as a social category of analysis and action.

With regard to urban form, scholars and local experts point out that while the formation of European cities was structured by a network of public spaces, such places were traditionally nearly absent from East Asian cities (Gilbert 2014: 51; interview, Ex-02, November 19, 2013). The literature further suggests that up to recent times, the citizenry and authorities of Hanoi did not envisage open spaces (especially parks, plazas, and squares) as "common use properties," nor did they consider that everyone is formally equal in respect to the use of these spaces. Instead, our informants and the literature concur that open spaces in Hanoi have long been in the service of representing State and religious powers, as described above in the presentation of two of our case studies, Lenin Memorial Park and Hòa Bình Park

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[7] This expression was first mentioned in the 2003 Construction Law (art. 3, 10). It later appeared in Decree 42/2009/ND-CP and Decree 38/2010/ND-CP. Neither document however provides a definition for this term nor what qualifies an area as a "public" space in Vietnamese cities.

(Kurfürst 2011; Hue Tam Ho Tai, 1995; Drummond, 2000; Nguyen Pham Anh, 2005; interview, Ex-09, October 1, 2013).

The foreignness of the Western concept of 'public space' might explain why the term *không gian công cộng* did not further penetrate the Vietnamese planning discourse during the postcolonial period. But the historical conditions that once made the notion of 'public space' inadequate or irrelevant in the context of Hanoi have changed. Over the last two decades in particular, the Vietnamese capital witnessed the construction of a significant number of new public gardens (*vườn hoa*), parks (*công viên*), and squares (*quảng trường*) which display—at least physically—many similarities with Western urban public spaces. Furthermore, experts and scholars point to the fact that residents use the old and new public spaces of Hanoi increasingly freely and actively (Kurfürst, 2011; Gilbert, 2014; Thomas, 2002; Nguyen Pham Anh, 2005; interview, Ex-11, October 11, 2013).

Moreover, interview data indicates that Hanoi planning specialists regularly use the expression *không gian công cộng*. A shared understanding of this notion even seems to be taking form among this community of experts. In interviews, planning practitioners and scholars concurred that 'public spaces' are places in the city where everyone can go to socialize, rest, and practice recreational activities.[8] When asked to provide examples, these same experts agreed that parks, squares, plazas, lakes, playgrounds of residential areas, public markets, green spaces, sidewalks, and streets all constitute public spaces. Interestingly, when informants disagreed, it was mostly over spatial types characterized by a lesser degree of accessibility (e.g., water and theme parks, computer game rooms, shopping malls, and cafés).

Why is the term "public space" not used more extensively in policy documents?
As the 'reality' of public space form and use in Hanoi is getting closer to the situation in Western cities, and as a relatively consensual understanding of the expression *không gian công cộng* is gaining acceptance among the Vietnamese planning community, why is this term (or any vernacular expression embracing the same reality) still used so sparingly in policy documents?

Two main 'obstacles' seem to stand in the way of integrating this concept in official discourse and documents. First, the definition of *không gian công cộng* which is slowly taking shape among Hanoi's community of urban planning experts entails a socio-spatial conception of urban space which is at odd with the conventional Vietnamese planning model. ***The new understanding of public spaces includes people uses of the space, which is at odds with the conventional Vietnamese planning model, which was solely focused on the space itself.***

Second, and perhaps more problematic, the broad and multi-sectoral reality encompassed by the notion of '*không gian công cộng*' requires a profound rethinking of the administrative functioning of cities. Cities in Vietnam are managed by a highly segmented administrative apparatus, characterized by inter-departmental competition and by a general lack of coordination (Albrecht *et al.* 2010: 21).

To give just one example, squares, sidewalks, and streets are considered to be 'technical infrastructure' in the Vietnamese administrative framework and their administration falls under the jurisdiction of transportation departments. But public gardens, parks, and playgrounds in residential areas are 'social infrastructure,' yet they are under the

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[8] In a recent study, Drummond and Nguyen Thi Lien (2009: 185) report a similar understanding of the notion of public space among Hanoi's citizens and planning professionals.

responsibility of the (highly technical) construction departments. ***As this example suggests, managing public spaces as defined by Hanoi's planning community, cuts across administrative sectors (land, transportation, planning, culture and communication, etc.). It calls for cross-agency coordination and for a recasting of planning categories and jurisdictional powers which governmental agencies are likely to resist.***

The usual translation of 'public space'—i.e., *không gian công cộng*—poses a more profound political problem. In Vietnamese, the expression 'cong cong' conflates the general idea of 'public' with that of 'public administration.' Designating a place as a 'public space' thus introduces a level of ambiguity with regard to management responsibilities. This would not be a problem if all the places generally considered by professionals as 'public spaces' were owned and managed by the State. But this is not the case in Hanoi—at least not anymore. ***As in other cities, contemporary Hanoi has witnessed a diversification of public space ownership and management arrangements marked by the growing presence of corporate and non-State actors.*** This is often called "privatization" in the public debate. But given that ownership and management remains very ambiguous, we prefer to avoid this expression here. As developed below, we will speak instead of 'degrees of publicness.'

Ultimately, integrating the expression '*không gian công cộng*' into formal policies would entail a clearer definition of public ownership—a thorny issue in contemporary Vietnam. As emphasized by a member of the Vietnamese Association of Architects interviewed in Hanoi, the "erasure" of the notion of public versus private ownership during the subsidy era (1954-1986) has left the country in a difficult position (interview, Ex-12, September 30, 2013). As this same informant recalled, prior to the *đổi mới* reforms, professionals avoided discussing the politically sensitive notions of public versus private ownership. In their day-to-day practice, planners stopped talking about 'public space' and relied instead on spatial types emphasizing the functional categorization of public spaces. As a Vietnamese consultant in urban development recalled: "*We used to call [public spaces] công viên (park), or chợ (market), or chùa (pagoda), something like that. But we did not use a general conceptualized name or general name such as không gian công cộng*" (interview, Ex-07, October 3, 2013).

The *đổi mới* reforms eroded the notion of universal public ownership upheld during the planned economic era. But the simultaneous transition from a State-led, command-and-control economy to a more market-coordinated economic system modified the conditions of urban space production in Vietnamese cities. This transformation in turn called for important institutional adjustments. The privatization of land-use rights and housing production, in particular, led to the reaffirmation of the notion of private property rights.

But while the redefinition of private ownership rights is well underway, a similar institutional redefinition process has yet to occur for public property rights, an area which remains fuzzy in Vietnam's institutional system. The process, however, seems to be underway. As a planner interviewed for this project remarked: "*currently in Vietnam, we are discussing what belongs to individuals and what belongs to the public in our laws and even in our mindset [...] But it is difficult to unify these concepts*" (interview, Ex-12, September 30, 2013).

In the meantime, a definitional and theoretical gap in the treatment of urban public space persists. The official planning language has nevertheless made some advances by introducing new and more general terms to discuss these components of cities. Among the recent terminological innovations spotted in policy texts are:

- 'Land used for public purpose' (*đất sử dụng vào mục đích công cộng*), an expression introduced in the latest revision of the Land Law and defined as "land used for

transport, land with historical-cultural relics, land for community activities or public entertainment and recreation, for markets, and for other public facilities" (art.10.2.f);

-   'urban landscape' (*cảnh quan đô thị*), a notion introduced in the Law on Urban Planning, and defined as "a specific space having multi-directional views in an urban area, such as space in front of an architectural complex, plaza, street, pavement, sidewalk, park, greenery area, orchard, public garden, hill, mountain, earth mound, isle, natural land strip, coastal land strip, lake, river, canal, stream in urban areas and collective space in the city." (art. 3.14);

-   'Public-use greenery' (*cây xanh sử dụng công cộng*) introduced in the 2005 Design Standard issued by the MoC and defined in the latest version of the Vietnam Building Code as: "squares, parks, public gardens, promenades, etc. including water surface area in their premises and areas of riverside landscape greenery planning for urban inhabitants' access and use for physical training, rest, recreation, relaxation, etc." (art.2.6.1-1)[9]

While these new expressions appear in the definition of terms section of the policies listed above, the actual body of these same documents continues to refer to urban public spaces either through the vague notion of 'social infrastructure' or by listing spatial types in the same way that pre-reform planners used to do it.

d) Positive policy changes

This last part explores the last three changes mentioned in the introduction, that is: acknowledgment of the positive contribution that public spaces make to cities; the heightened attention paid to the spatial dimensions of public spaces; and the recognition that public spaces must be protected from degradation and from encroachment.

The need for public spaces and positive contributions to cities

Recent policy changes acknowledge that the quality of life offered by cities depends on the provision of enough and adequate open and green spaces. Decree 38/2010/ND-CP, for instance, suggests that there is something like a 'right to public space' in Vietnamese cities by stipulating that "all organizations and individuals living and operating permanently and temporarily in urban centres may enjoy urban space, landscape and architecture" (art. 4). The Urban Planning Law operationalizes this orientation by requiring that construction plans for urban centres meet use demands for "parks, trees, water surfaces and other social infrastructure" (art. 6).

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[9] Another piece of legislation, the 2008 Building Code, gives a fairly similar definition of "public-use greenery land outside residential units in urban areas" which, however, also explicitly includes theme parks as public use greenery space. This definition "embraces parks, public gardens serving one or more residential units, the whole urban area or region (***including theme parks***); water surface area within premises of parks and public gardens, of which water surface area converted into greenery land area per person must not exceed 50% of total area of public-use greenery land outside residential units, excluding special-purpose greenery" (authors' emphasis, art. 2.6.3).

Recent policies further recognize that urbanites need different types of public spaces. The 2008 revision of the Vietnam Building Code stipulates rules to ensure that cities include both neighbourhood-level and city-level public spaces. Other policies go one step further in recognizing the need to increase the presence of public spaces and greenery in cities. Decree 38/2010/ND-CP encourages municipal administrations to "increase areas of greenery [...] and public space" in urban centres by "setting construction density limits and minimum ratios of greenery and land for public space" (art.9) as a way "to improve urban quality and environment" (ibid).

Enhancing the spatial quality of public spaces

The most telling policy changes with regard to the rising attention paid to the spatial quality of public spaces relates to the introduction of 'urban design' (*thiết kế đô thị*) in formal policies. This notion was first mentioned in the 2008 revision of the Vietnam Building Code, but was only really institutionalized after the passing of the 2009 Urban Planning Law. The Law requires the inclusion of urban design considerations in all detailed construction plans (*quy hoạch chi tiết*) and in specific projects (*đồ án riêng*) (art. 32.1). Even plans for existing urban quarters require the preparation of a separate urban design plan (art. 32.2).

Open, collective, and green spaces occupy an important place in the urban design plans required by the Urban Planning Law. The law lists the following elements as the object of urban design: large squares, green spaces, water surfaces, open space areas, greenery space, and public gardens (art. 33.1-4). Innovative, urban design principles are also found in the Public-Use Greenery Planning in Urban Areas – Design Standards. This document encourages planners to conceive of roadside greenery as 'corridors' (*tuyến*), public gardens as 'points' (*điểm*), and urban parks as 'surfaces' (*diện* or *mảng*).

On this basis, the Standard encourages planning interventions that use roadside greenery as links (*liên kết*) to connect 'points' and 'surfaces' so as to create an actual system or network of public-use greenery across the entire city (art.6.4).

Three recent decrees complement the orientation towards a greater spatial, visual, and aesthetic quality of urban public spaces by emphasizing the need to maintain overall harmony (*hài hòa*) and elegance of streetscapes (Decree 38/2010/ND-CP, art.12.4), providing specific regulation aimed at protecting and improving the management of urban trees (Decree 64/ND-CP of 2010) along with guidelines for the public lighting of streets, parks, and squares (Decree 29/ND-CP of 2007).

Tightening management and limiting degradation and encroachment

Finally, recent policies seek to better protect existing public spaces. The main innovation in this area is the clearer identification of which organizations are responsible for the management of public spaces, and the clear and specific definition of the roles and responsibilities of both managers and users.

The Law on Urban Planning includes provisions requiring that "parks, public gardens, and trees in urban centres" be assigned to organizations or individuals for management (art. 68.1). This is reinforced by Decree 38/2010/ND-CP which defines "the rights, obligations, and responsibilities of organizations and individual agents engaged in activities related to urban space, architecture and landscape" (art.1). This legislation requires municipal administrations to "elaborate, announce, promulgate and implement" "plans for the management of urban areas" with "drawings illustrating the management of [...] streets, [...]

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squares, parks, water surfaces, trunk roads and city gateways" (art. 22.3 and 23.2a) (see also Circular 19/2010/TT-BXD)

Other laws define the responsibilities of urban residents with regard to urban space. Decree 38/2010/ND-CP, for instance, stipulates that "all organizations and individuals living and operating permanently and temporarily in urban centres" "shall protect and preserve, and observe the law on exploitation and use of urban space, architecture and landscape" (art. 4.). This same decree states that "greenery in urban centres shall be grown, tended, maintained, protected, classified and arranged under planning and current regulations, standards, and laws" (art.12) and that "natural landscapes in urban centres shall be strictly protected and have their natural terrain characteristics preserved" (art. 13).

A second innovative provision to protect public spaces consists in policy measures aimed at putting a break on the physical degradation of these places and on encroachment by private and commercial functions. This orientation is, however, not as marked as the specification of responsibilities over management discussed earlier. Two articles of the Law on Urban Planning forbid encroachments on urban "lakes and natural water surfaces" (art. 68.3) and require that "organizations and individuals [...] protect parks, public gardens, trees and water surface and other natural areas in urban centres" (art. 68.4). Circular 19/2010/TT-BXD requires the formulation and adoption of provincial-level regulations to protect existing public spaces along with lakes and the river systems and trees in cities from any form of encroachment or degradation.

e) Conclusion

The various policy changes discussed above are all indications that public space is gaining more policy attention in Vietnam. In itself this is a positive development, but there are still many weak aspects to this process. The number of observed positive changes mentioned in this report, still represent a rather timid policy response to what is needed, and it lacks sufficiently coercive measures to effectively enforce what it does require. Moreover, none of the above changes have genuinely altered Vietnam's conventional planning approach. Public space policies are still centred on the spatial distribution of two-dimensional surfaces and most are still based on quantitative targets (square metres per person, minimal surface areas, service radii, etc.). We will discuss in the conclusion to this report possible ways to better this policy framework.

2. Being Young in Hanoi

In this section, we discuss what it means to be young in Vietnam. These are still exploratory reflections based on the literature and on interviews with Vietnamese experts on youth issues. As a team of foreign researchers arriving in Hanoi to study youth practices in public spaces, it quickly became clear to us that the very meaning of youthfulness is fundamentally different from what we know of youths in the Western world. This is why we decided to pause here in order to present some reflections on youth in Hanoi, as a way to introduce the analysis of their uses of public spaces in the following sections.

Just as 'public space' has a thorny history in policy documents, as illustrated previously, youth is not an easy category to grasp either. In subsequent projects, we would like to conduct a similar policy analysis on the meaning of "youth" in Vietnam. But for the moment, we have identified three main elements in Vietnamese society that make youthfulness a category of analysis and policy action very different from what we see in Western societies: the role of neo-Confucianism, the conception of transition to adulthood, and the importance of group identity.

We will discuss these three elements, before turning to a brief analysis of how youths are perceived socially, specifically with regards to their use of public spaces. But let us begin first by a general overview of how youth and youthfulness are perceived in the Western world.

a) Youth in the Western world: Individual autonomy

In Europe and North America, youths, especially young non-white males, are objects of intense anxieties. Their visibility in public spaces is seen as suspicious. Most governmental youth programs target groups of young men. The objective is to keep them busy with various structured activities (often times lifestyle sports and street dancing) in order to prevent them from getting involved in criminalized activities (such as drug selling or prostitution). The numerous youth programs that exist in Europe and North America are generally influenced by the United Nations *Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime* (2002) and the earlier United Nations *Guidelines for the Prevention of Urban Crime* (1995), which call for a *local* approach to problem solving, focused on offering youth structured activities in public spaces.

These programs rest on a specific understanding of youths. In the West, youths are seen as a social group with specific characteristics: volatility, dispersion of energies, "a greater tendency for experimentation, adventurism, idealism, autonomy, mobility, and change" (Bayat, 2010: 128), and one could add: a tendency to assert one's individuality, creativity, lightness, and freedom from anxiety over concern about their prospects for the future (ibid.: 18). Youthfulness refers to a distinct period in life trajectories. **Being young in the West means experiencing transitions and gradually acquiring autonomy**. Being young assigns the person to "a distinct social location between childhood and adulthood, where the youngster in a relative autonomy is neither totally dependent (on adults) nor independent, and is free from being responsible for others." (Bayat, 2010: 116).

In the West, youths are seen as a specific social group because of their common experience of "transition into adulthood." One becomes "adult" through the gradual acquisition of autonomy through various steps: moving out of the family house, finding a first full-time job, having children. Young people are conceived of as going through various socially-determined stages: pre-teen, teen, post-teen, young adult, and then adults (Goguel d'Allondans, 2004: 262, our translation). Each stage is associated with a specific set of challenges related to corporeal transformations (puberty and related changes in personality such as aggressiveness, mood swings, etc.), the construction of an individual identity, and gradual exposure to social realities (sexuality, drugs, etc.).

This conception of youthfulness rests on the central idea of gradually acquiring autonomy, and thus is rooted in a fundamentally individualistic conception of society. A young person will become fully socially functional once s/he becomes an autonomous adult. This is a different social conception from what we found in Vietnam. As Björk (1997: 10) suggests: "Children in Vietnam are, in general, conceptualized as passive objects, not as individuals with special rights and needs."

b) Youth in Vietnam: The importance of the family

Youth development is one of any society's major concerns. Such concerns are magnified during periods of social and economic change. In the wake of Vietnam's reforms, increased standards of living and participation in higher education mean that many young people do not need to move directly from primary or secondary school to the labour market, as their parents previously did. Longer periods of education and later marriage are two important differences between today's young generation and their parents. Generational gaps exist and this can result in new conflicts in daily life, within families, communities, and in the workplace.

Social and economic change in Vietnam also places new stress on young people, who find themselves caught between traditional values and emerging ones. The process of market transition and globalization has eroded some traditional values (Dang Nguyen Anh et al., 2005: 1; Valentin, 2008). Nonetheless, despite the many changes in Vietnamese society, Confucianism still defines the social position of youths, though the traditional Confucian conception of these roles is also beginning to change. Gao Ersheng, et al. (2002: S13; see also Tran Dinh Huou, 1991) describes the role of Confucianism (*Nho giáo*) in Vietnamese society as an,

> ethical-moral system [that] governs all relationships in society and sees the society as a hierarchical and vertical structure of superiors and subordinates (typically, ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife). The main principle of social hierarchy is wisdom, responsibility, and benevolence descending from one's superiors and obedience, loyalty, and respect ascending from subordinates. Family is the prototype social organization, and the principles of family living are applied to the larger society.

Given the importance of the family in Vietnamese society, youths cannot easily be seen as a social group in the same way as in the West, because youths cannot be "extracted" from

their family unit as easily as in an individualist society. It is through the family that gender and generational regulation occurs (Wiersema et al., 2006).[10]

But, Confucian values, already syncretic in modern Vietnam, (overlaid with the values of Buddhism, Taoism, and Marxism, among others (Jamieson, 1993)), have begun to weaken. In line with this weakening of Confucianism the power of parents and older people over young people has declined in recent decades. Gender and generational relations are no longer as strictly codified. The increasing availability of housing has given rise to increases in the number of nuclear families and individuals living alone (Hyun Kyoung Ja, 2001: 206). As a result, dependence and connectedness in the extended family have weakened and individual needs and rights are emphasized. This has transformed gender and generational relations by giving women more autonomy in how to manage their households (Nguyen Thi Hong Xoan, 2008: 32-33). Moreover, as Nguyen Thi Hong Xoan explained, "Since the International Conference on population and Development in Cairo in 1994 (…), Vietnam has paid much attention to youth and adolescent issues" (Nguyen Thi Hong Xoan, 2008: 32).

In the 1990s, government family planning programs began to distribute information targeting teenagers (expert interview 2b, July 9, 2014).[11] However, in Vietnam, schools do not play the same role as they do in Europe and North America with regards to providing information about the consequences of sex, drugs, and other issues that may attract curious youths. The focus in Western schools is largely preventative and based on the idea that youth need to learn how to make rational decisions. As a Vietnamese sociologist, expert on youth sexual behaviour, explained to us, it is mostly parents in Vietnam who try to "repress any curiosity" (expert interview 2b, July 9, 2014). But parents do not make these decisions alone. The extended family is still very much involved in putting pressure on youths about such behaviours.

Most children will accept their parents' will, or if they challenge it, the parents may ignore the transgression. There is, however, a difference between the discussions between teenagers and their parents where teenagers may resist their parents' opinions, and a refusal to comply with the behavioural expectations of the larger family. Conflicts of opinions and views are frequent, but many teenagers will not cross the line of familial expectations about their behaviour. However, for those who do go against familial wishes and expectations, they are likely to be ultimately met with acquiescence rather than a larger conflict or break with the family. There is a Vietnamese refrain that said, "when the earth does not want to listen to heaven, heaven comes to the earth." Such flexibility with the rules can be explained by the high value of the child for the Vietnamese family, and the necessity of keeping the family together (expert interview 2b, July 9, 2014). As teenagers get older, as in Western countries, relationships with parents tend to change. This difference came out clearly in our interviews with youths over 20 years old, in comparison to our interviews with youths who were only 16 years old.

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[10] Burr (2006: 30) explains: "From the Confucian perspective relationships within the family are always hierarchical. The person in the position of superiority should guide, love, and care for inferiors, while those who are inferior should always obey their superiors. The Confucian family works within a hierarchy with particular value attached to the men of the household. The wife obeys her husband, the son and daughter obey their parents, younger siblings obey older ones. Confucianism holds that the firstborn boy has higher status than any boys who follow. The eldest boy is sometimes given a particular name to signify his importance. It is also the eldest son who continues to live with his parents after marriage and who will be expected to take over the practice of maintaining the family ancestral worship table after they die."
[11] According to the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 34.3% of schools provided life skills based HIV education in the 2009 academic year.

Transgression in Vietnam is not tightly associated with youthfulness, whereas it is at the core of the understanding of young people in the West. Hence, unlike the often negative connotation ascribed to (mostly male) youths in the West, youth (*thanh niên*) in Vietnam has long symbolized hope and social dynamism. While youths have long been a key target of political propaganda and a strategic group for the Communist Party (through mass youth organizations for instance), recent research on youth suggests that they can no longer be organized through conventional socialist mechanisms: "*[T]hey are no longer interested in partaking in grand causes, such as building socialism, which once enthused their parents. Instead, they are interested in integration with the capitalist world, in creating time for entertainment and recreation, and in achieving individual goals through professional, financial and family successes.*" (Nguyen Phuong An, 2005: 11-12). This also provokes a new public discourse on "spoiled youths".

Through their aspirations for "entertainment" and for "achieving individual goals," youths adopt and disseminate new "urban" lifestyles shaped by the use of new technologies and consumption practices (Pham Thi Thanh Hien, 2011). This not only translates into a specific urban street culture but also redefines the meanings, uses, and purposes of public spaces in Hanoi (Thomas 2002; Kürten 2008).

c) Becoming an adult in Vietnam

In the Western conception of youth, becoming an adult means gradually acquiring autonomy. In Vietnam, autonomy is not something valorized. The family remains central to social control, even after young people get married and have children. Nevertheless, marriage and children, more than finishing school or moving out of the family house (which are key in the West), are considered the most important steps in becoming an adult.

In this subsection, we will briefly explore the importance of marriage and children for the transition to adulthood, as it helps understanding the broader context in which they seek a place of their own in public spaces. We will come back to some of these societal constraints in section 5 on girls in public spaces, and section 6 on the constraints to the use of public spaces by young people.

Marriage as the main social institution

In Vietnam, the nuclear family, a married couple and their children, has been the main social unit for many centuries (Whitmore, 1984). The task of 'building a family' is viewed as incomplete until children arrive (Pashigan, 2002: 142). The first child is particularly eagerly awaited when the man is the eldest son in his family (Pham Van Bich, 1999; Le Thi Thuy Nga, 2004). As stated by Pashigan (2002: 143): "Especially eldest daughters-in-law are eager to have their first child very soon, one year after marriage, to demonstrate their fertility. They feel pressured by their parents' in-law to give them a male grandchild who can carry on the family name. Thus for women childbearing is expected to bring happiness and family harmony."

The 1990s have brought changes in the way the bride and groom meet. Until the 1960s, it was often the family that brought potential spouses within its circle for unmarried children to meet, although meeting outside the family space was already gaining in popularity. Since the 1970s, most encounters between unmarried youngsters escape the direct supervision of

parents. Although love between two individuals was widespread in the discourse of married couples in the 1960s, the union of two families was an integral part of the project. Beginning in the 1970s marriage is increasingly understood as a union between two individuals, rather than the more traditional idea of it uniting two families (Bélanger, 1997). Another important change since the 1990s is that couples began to frequently meet through friends, rather than through family members arranging introductions. These changes transform the social perception of youths who are increasingly viewed as individuals who are independent of their families, which, as a consequence, gives friends a more central role in their lives.

In our interviews with young couples in Hòa Bình Park, marriage was mentioned as their main expectation for their relationship. Consider these two examples:

> *Of course we expect all the best, such as getting married, and live happily together.* (Male, 24 years old, student, couple 3, HB, June 19, 2004)

> *I expect a wedding […] Because, when people come to mature in age, they want to start a family. We have been together for a long time and understand each other quite well. We are getting along very well, and have so many things in common.* (Female, 23 years old, student, couple 3, HB, June 19, 2004)

While some couples say they have already thought of living with a partner before marriage, they explain that they have not considered it seriously in their current relationship. Two men explained that if unmarried cohabitation is widespread in other countries, it is not part of Vietnamese culture to live together outside of marriage; couples who want to live together must be married:

> *The ultimate end is to stay together until the very end […] In this Vietnam differs from foreign countries. In Vietnam, we always get married to live together. But in foreign countries, they can live together without being married.* (Male, 22 years old, student, couple 5, HB, June 20, 2014)

However, these responses may be biased because the interviewees did not have sufficient trust with the interviewers. In reality many young people do live with their partner before marriage, even if they do not tell their parents. The couples we interviewed said, however, they do not consider living together outside of marriage because of suspected complications that could lead to a separation. The just quoted young man continued: "*Of course, it cannot be without problems. Such as [problems related to the household's] economic situation*" (Male, 22 years old, student, couple 5, HB, June 20, 2014). A couple also explained that living together outside marriage is not possible because family and friends are aware of their relationship and they do not want to jeopardize their chance of living together in the future (couple 4, HB, June 20, 2014). Marriage secures the bonds between partners and diminishes risks: "*[w]hen you are married] you get more mature about economic issues, and emotional issues such as jealousy. From then on, you have to pay more attention [to these things]*" (Male, 22 years old, student, couple 5, HB, June 20, 2014).

Thus, marriage is wanted for the stability it brings, even if couples are also aware that a divorce can occur between married partners. Marriage is also seen as a family commitment with responsibilities. But marriage is generally not considered to be an option for students before they finish their studies: "*Love and career stability take another 3-4 years [after graduation]*" (Male, 20 years old, student, couple 7, HB, June 20, 2014)

Having children to have a harmonious relationship

Having children after marriage is important for the family (Dalton et al., 2002); children continue the family lineage and provide security for the future (Wiersema et al, 2006: 4). According to Vietnamese custom, it is normally the son who takes care of and/or supports his parents until they die (Pham Van Bich, 1999), with his wife (the daughter in law) assuming much of the responsibility in practice. Because of these arrangements traditional thinking in Vietnam holds that a couple that has only daughters will suffer from loneliness and lack security in their old age since there will be no son at home (and no daughter in law). The need to have male children is thus felt acutely, but women, in particular, associate having a son with improved social status, and the lack of a son as leaving them lacking social status. (Le Thi Thuy Nga, 2004). Pashigian writes:

> An important aspect of having children in Vietnam is the establishment of harmonious relationships with the living, as well as ritualized respect for the dead. Childless women expect that the birth of children will create a closer relationship with their husbands, increase the chances of having harmonious relationships with their in-laws, and, in the case of a son, contribute to the husband's filial piety by producing a descendant who continues the lineage and maintains ancestor worship after the death of his parents. (Pashingian, 2002: 139-140; see also Rydstrom, 1998; Mai Huy Bich, 1991)

It is not socially acceptable for a married woman to choose not to have a child. To do so would be an affront to her husband's filial piety, in particular, his obligation to his parents to produce descendants, and a potential threat to the stability of her marriage. Infertility is thus an extremely difficult issue, and recognized as provoking serious social consequences for a woman. If adherence to tradition and cultural practices in a given family are not flexible enough, the consequence of infertility may be marital dissolution. Adoption or the use of donor-sperm, are generally not considered alternative solutions.

Becoming an adult in Vietnam mainly means getting married and having children. As in the Western world, youths now wait longer than previous generations to initiate these transitions. Until the time they do get married, an increasingly important aspect of their young lives is peer support and group life initiated by themselves and for themselves. Public spaces play an important role in these new social realities and are central to the possibility of this new kind of social life and peer relationships that have increasingly come to define the pre-married life of young people in Vietnam.

d) The function of group identity for youth in Vietnam

Group behaviour in Western youth studies has a very ambiguous status. Much of the scientific literature and the public debate around youths concern the fear generated by groups of young people in public spaces. As Ungar suggests: "Youth thus become objects of collective fear, seen not as individuals, but for the anxieties they cause and the jarring cultural changes they are seen to embrace. The particular impulsiveness of youths, wrapped up in their hostility to tradition and authority, only serves to aggravate these tensions" (Ungar 2009: 208). Groups of young people are easily considered "dangerous" because they are difficult to control and follow their own dynamic. In the public debate, benign groups of young men and criminalized street gangs are easily conflated. However, in Vietnam, peer groups are recognized as central for normal development and the construction of identity of

young people. In Vietnam, youth groups have long been organized by mass organizations for patriotic and socializing goals. Because these youth groups are organized by the State, they are not seen as being "out of control", as it is often the case in Western countries. For instance, the Youth Communist Union's Charter states that, "The Youth Communist Union has a responsibility to organize activities, create a favourable environment in which to educate and train its members, youths and teenagers, to contribute to the implementation of political, economic, social, cultural, defence and security duties of the locality and units." (art. 20, item 2: 2)[12]

A key characteristic of the youth we studied at the three main research sites, Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park and the 34T Plaza, is that they mostly gather in groups, where they experiment with hip-hop, skateboarding, parkour, freestyle soccer etc. These groups differ from mass organizations in that they use public spaces for activities that are self-directed and motivated. In other words, they practice unstructured play in very similar ways to what we see in Western public spaces.

The groups we observed at the three main research sites are organized bottom up, by youths for youths, and members of the groups function as peers for each other, they call each other "bro", indicating that they support one another as a family, which goes beyond the specific activity they are practicing. The groups are engaged in active networking with other youths through social media (Facebook) and sport competitions. These things provide them with channels to develop their social network and specific youth identities. Beyond showing their skills to other groups, they visually differ from others through specific dress codes, ranging from specific clothing styles to group logos.

Group members emphasize their differences from previous generations and the specificity of their perspective on life. For instance a hip hop dancer explains that "*The older generation thinks that hip hop is not good, they think that people doing hip hop are squirming and rude. But society is changing, there are more and more young people practicing hip hop, the perception has to change, people are not only good at dancing but also at studying and other fields; Life has to change, right?*" (Interview with 22-year-old female, LN-4, August 28, 2013). Several of the youths we interviewed compare their vision of life with that of older generations by saying they approach life as 'art' (*nghệ thuật*), understood here as a non-competitive, self-motivated and self-directed existence that may or may not fit into existing models promoted by the State, or by their families. Some also talked about a "*Bụi bặm* lifestyle," a colloquial expression that connotes a youthful and nonchalant way of life, characterized by freedom, carelessness, and insubordination. Along these same lines, the words "freedom" (*tự do*) and "ease" (*thoải mái*) regularly came up during interviews when we asked youths to explain the benefits they get from practicing a lifestyle sport. A member of the parkour group in the 34T Plaza explains this as follows: "*It's considered as an art because contemporary art is not competitive, each artist has his own style. […] this kind of art doesn't force us to practice to achieve anything, it doesn't force you to go to one or another direction to reach an achievement, it's free, if you are busy, you can go to work, if you have free time you can come to practice.*" (Interview with a 23-year-old, male, parkour practitioner, 34T-19, November 16, 2013). Social difference also functions as a strong connector for these groups. For example, the same parkour practitioner explains how this common way of thinking provides the members with alternatives to what is imposed on

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[12] Tổ chức các hoạt động, tạo môi trường giáo dục, rèn luyện đoàn viên, thanh thiếu nhi nhằm góp phần thực hiện các nhiệm vụ chính trị, kinh tế, văn hóa - xã hội, quốc phòng, an ninh của địa phương, đơn vị. (http://doanthanhnien.vn/newsdetail/DoanTNCSHCM/19226/%C4%91ieu-le-%C4%91oan-tncs-ho-chi-minh-khoa-x.htm).

them elsewhere: "*if you understand the philosophy of this activity, you will see that it frees your spirit.*"

The influence of these largely foreign lifestyle sports entered Vietnam during a period marked by a redefinition of the relationship between youths and the party-State. Lifestyle sports are growing in popularity around the world. They involve not only practicing sports, but indeed, living your whole life according to the common values shared by all practitioners. These sports promote fun, self-realization, and living in the present moment. They require technical know-how about controlling one's environment, body, and emotions (Wheaton, 2004; Daskalaki et al. 2008; Borden, 2001). As the leader of the parkour group at 34T Plaza explained, "*We talk with each other very often because this kind of sport is not competitive so it's a lot of fun to practice together. It's not like other sports where winning and losing is important, in this sport there is no competition, everybody is friendly, even though some people here practice individually, that is, they are not members of our group, but they still practice with us*"(interview, 34T-19, November 16, 2013). Practicing parkour is perceived as a lifestyle more than a sport.

The Vietnamese Communist Party is currently softening their long held view that young people are 'blank sheets' (*tờ giấy trắng*) on which social behaviours, moral values, and political ideologies can—and must—be imprinted (Nguyen Phuong An, 2006). Even if only partial, this shift is opening the way to more autonomous identity formation processes which are placing youths in a unique position to transform and redefine Vietnam's urban culture. Public spaces give youths room to explore behaviours that are not imposed from above. For many youths, the practice of a lifestyle sport serves—among other things—to explore self-directed ways of being and identities that differ from the values and models predefined for them by the State and by their families. These activities allow youths to partially break free of the demands of a society that expects them to let State organizations and the family control their leisure time.

This does not come without resistance from more traditional social forces, as we will explore in more detail in section 6. In order to convince their parents to allow them to pursue these sports, youths emphasize their health benefits and the positive support they receive from their peers. Illustrating this, youths explain that members often study together for exams, help each other finding jobs, and encourage each other to quit smoking or to stay away from drugs. For example, a break-dancer explained: "*I have become a good- natured person [since entering the group]. I am not at war and I don't bully others anymore*" (focus group discussion, FGD-1, LN, November 4, 2013).

Youth groups we studied in Hanoi mobilized arguments about positive health and peer support in ways that would resonate well in Western societies, but Vietnamese lifestyle youth groups nonetheless differ from Western groups in the ways they are organized. In the West, discussion about youth groups generally indicates that hierarchical structures, formal rules and group control are characteristics associated with 'organized crime' and street gangs.[13] Indeed, being a member of a group with territory, a clear leader, and membership

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[13] For example, the Montreal Police defines street gangs as follows: « Belonging to a group is an integral part of growing up for teenagers. […] As violence and crime begin to take over a group's identity, however, that group gets increasingly closer to the profile of a street gang. [… An] emerging gang [is a] group of individuals, usually teenagers, who model themselves on major gangs. Their activities are less structured and more improvised: emerging gangs focus on acquiring and defending a territory. The gang members make use of taxing, make threats and commit armed assaults in the areas around certain public places. They are the first choice of recruits for major street gangs. [… A]

rules are seen as threats to individual decision-making. In the Vietnamese context, however, such hierarchical and formal structure is widespread in many aspects of daily life. It does not carry the same negative connotation.

The groups in our three case studies in Hanoi have various degrees of hierarchical and formal rules, ranging from no leadership to a clear leader, from no rules for becoming a member to a clear set of steps to follow, some have membership 'fees' and all have a name. These modalities of group organization reproduce many social characteristics, such as age hierarchy (the leader is often chosen because s/he is the eldest) and formalized group structures. But despite these similarities with mass youth organizations, *these lifestyle youth groups serve new social functions related to the development of youth autonomy*.

e) How Vietnamese society perceives youth in public spaces

From our various interviews, we discerned a diffuse anxiety towards large city parks, especially after sunset. For example, the leader of the parkour group practicing at 34T Plaza relates his experience while practicing with his group in Thong That Park: "*In parks [where they used to practice], there are many drug addicts and bullies, we already had a fight with them.*" He explains further that at 34T Plaza the situation is much better, "*It is peaceful here, residents here don't chase us away, the atmosphere is comfortable […] there are large airy spaces that are safe, no social evils*" (interview, 34T-19, November 16, 2013). Such anxiety towards public spaces is intensified with regards to young women (section 5).

However, despite some brief remarks related to "social evils" this kind of discussion was largely absent from most of our interviews. When asked directly, rumours were mentioned, but only two of our interviewees witnessed inappropriate behaviour related to drugs or sexuality (though some expressed discomfort towards the presence of romantic couples, see section 6e). A 25-year-old woman in Hòa Bình Park explained: "*I have never seen anything myself, but I have heard from others that there are prostitutes in this park.*" (interview, HB-21, June 25, 2014). Or again, a young woman explained, "*But once, I came here around 4:15 AM and saw drug users on the bench. That brought me a lot of worries and confusion because this place should be a safe place for everybody. A girl might feel unsafe when she sees such things*" (interview, HB-22, June 25, 2014).

Social evils in public spaces, in contrast to the general perception in Western societies, are not associated with youths. In Europe and North America, drug use and inappropriate sexual behaviour in public (prostitution, but also the "sexualization" of young girls who dress very scantily to attract men) are seen as major themes for youth development programs in public spaces. In what follows, we briefly detail how these two issues are not directly associated with the presence of youths in public spaces in Vietnam.

Drug use
According to a Vietnamese public health expert working for a methadone program, the average age at which eventual addicts start using drugs is around 17 or 18 years old, when men start working and are exposed to other users (interview, youth expert 4, July 5, 2014). Drugs are not really present in schools, and are mostly associated with men (in the case of

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major gang [is a] group of adults or teenagers who commit high-level crimes with targeted violence." (http://www.spvm.qc.ca/en/jeunesse/ado-quoi-gang.asp)

injected drugs). Another expert who offers sexual education workshops in schools explains that in schools,

> *they already have some beer, alcohol and some go to bars or dancing clubs so they can try it a little bit to know the feeling of some kinds of drug. They try wine or cigarettes and many things like that when they are 17 or 18. But in secondary school, the schools are very strict so it is very difficult to smoke at school. It is also difficult outside of school. They [youth] spend a lot of time in school. Their parents take them there, and pick them up so, they do not have time for those things. But when they are older, they can go by themselves, use motorcycles, go to their friend's house and have sex or party. They can do many things.* (interview youth expert 1, June 30, 2014)

In urban areas, when youth start going out in nightclubs they get exposed to 'ice' (crystal methamphetamine (crystal meth) or *đá* in Vietnamese).[14] Other drugs such as cannabis are not readily available. Youth therefore start rapidly with hard drugs, there is not really an "in-between." Experts agree that youths begin using drugs as a response to the level of stress related to school performance. The public health expert we interviewed suggested that depression and mental illness is not largely recognized in Vietnam, and youths therefore have much less support than in other societies. 'Stress' is a word that does not translate well into Vietnamese (interview, youth expert 4, July 5, 2014).

As in Western societies, youths can start doing drugs "to experience something new," but this generally takes the form of alcohol consumption given the lack of marijuana and that the alternatives are either crystal meth or injectable drugs. New exposure to drug use generally comes from the peer group, sometimes when youths first migrate to the city, or when they start going out to clubs together.

In Vietnam, there are about 200,000 drug addicts (interview, expert 4, July 5, 2014). Even if a person transgresses social norms by using drugs, it is very rare s/he will lose financial support from the family. Most addicts live with their families. Unlike in North America or Europe, there is no real problem of the drug-addicted homeless in Vietnam. However, because of overcrowding in houses and family pressure not to do drugs (at home), most addicts will normally inject in public spaces. This often takes place in dark streets, pedestrian bridges (Truc Linh, 2013), corners, parks, or water parks at night, but is not directly associated with youth.

Youth sexuality

Premarital sex is increasingly accepted by young people and has become more prevalent (Belanger and Khuat Thu Hong, 1999; Ghuman *et al.*, 2006). According the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth 2009 (SAVY 2), the average age for the first sexual encounter is 18 years old for both men and women.[15] Of the SAVY 2 respondents aged 14–25, 9.5% reported that they had had premarital sex. A majority of those who were currently married, and who reported having had premarital sex before marriage, had had sex with the partner who later became their spouse. Amongst all those in the survey who had had pre-marital sex, 3.2% (70 people) reported having paid cash or exchanged goods for sex. The

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[14] According to a newspaper article, "*It has reportedly been in use for 5 years, especially among young people in Ho Chi Minh City. HCMC Mental Hospital examined 800 cases of ice addicts last year.*"(*Tuổi trẻ*, 3. published on: 01/05/2013).

[15] Youth in rural areas initiate sex slightly earlier (18 years old) than their urban counterparts (18.4 years old).

proportion of those who had purchased sex in urban areas was 6.5%, higher than the 2.2% in rural areas. About 44% of those aged 14–25 (58% of males and 30% of females) had "modern attitudes" about premarital sex. Those over 21 years old had the most modern attitude.

However, if sex may be talked about openly in private, there is still some unease in talking publicly about premarital sex, as sex outside of marriage is prohibited by Confucianism:

> Confucianism sees sexuality as taboo and forbids discussion about sex. It states that sex is regulated by formal arrangements (marriage) and culminates in childbirth, so sex outside of marriage is not condoned. In particular, the virtue of chastity is supposed to be observed by women, which means remaining a virgin before marriage and faithful to their husbands, alive or dead. In sexual activity, women are also supposed to be submissive and less sexually aggressive than men. (Kaljee et al., 2007: 50)

In the interviews we conducted with couples in Hòa Bình Park, many said they wanted to wait to have a stable career before starting to have a sex life. Others (mostly men) explained that premarital sexual intercourse could occur from the time when the couple is in a stable relationship and understand each other. Here we see that men have more permissive attitudes toward sex than women. For instance, "*It is different from person to person. For us, when we are deeply in love, when we do not have any confusion, when we understand each other, then we could have it*" *(*Male, 20 years old, bodyguard, couple 2, HB, June 19, 2014). For most women, however, they will accept premarital sex only if marriage will come soon: "*It is the time when they decide to get married […] We don't need to get married right away but I mean it is the time when you decide to get married in the future*" (Female, 22 years old, student, couple 6, HB, June 19, 2014). Men also expressed more traditional attitudes about gender roles than girls did. For example, a man explained that it is better to wait to be married to have sex with his partner because if the couple has sex before marriage and the relationship does not last until marriage this can be detrimental to the woman.

Studies have shown that most youths who have premarital sex do not use contraception. Each year there are millions of abortions in Vietnam (1 700 000 in 2011) and one third of abortion cases are performed on unmarried young women (Ministry of Health, 1999; Sedgh et al., 2007). The proportion of the youths infected with sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV/Aids is increasing, as this group lacks knowledge of prevention measures.[16]

f) Conclusion

In sum, we have seen that youth groups are not seen as threatening in public spaces in the same way that groups are in Western societies. Youths are not 'directly' associated with social evils, even if their behaviour is sometimes less socially acceptable. But these societal

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[16] In Vietnam, young people between 20-29 years old constituted 62% of all HIV/AIDS cases (at the end of 2002). This figure has increased from 15% in 1993 (NCADP, 2004). In the Viet Nam Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2006, 95.4% of adolescent females aged 15-19 had heard of AIDS; 53.4% knew all three ways of preventing HIV transmission, while 6.9% did not know any method of prevention. The proportion of those surveyed who had comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS transmission (i.e. identified two prevention methods and three misconceptions) was 45.9%.

constraints, as we will discuss further in section 6, are related to new challenges to Vietnamese traditional culture more than to 'social evils.' Youths do not confront these social and familial constraints directly. Instead, they try to convince others of the social acceptability of their chosen lifestyles by positively promoting them. From what we have witnessed, challenges to Confucian values linked to sexual behaviour and family control, as seen in the use of public spaces by young romantic couples and by lifestyle adepts, are the main sources of discomfort that youth users of these spaces cause for others.

3. Mapping public spaces in Hanoi: Evolution, accessibility, and quality (publicness)

a) Evolution of public spaces between 2000 and 2010

As a result of the increasing attention given to public space in public policy in Hanoi, three main changes characterize the recent evolution of Hanoi's public spaces (figure 5). ***Eleven new public gardens were created between 2000 and 2010 (figure 6). This represents nearly a three-fold increase in the total area covered by these spaces in the city, from 8.58 ha to 22.11 ha.*** A few of these new public gardens are located in the four historic urban districts, for instance the new Văn Miếu garden located to the south of the historic site of the same name, and Hàng Trống garden on Nhà Chung street. However, mirroring a tendency observed in the recent creation of new types of public space throughout the city, the majority of Hanoi's new gardens are located in newly urbanized areas, especially in areas west (Trung Yên) and south of the city (Đền Lừ public garden, in Tân Mai).
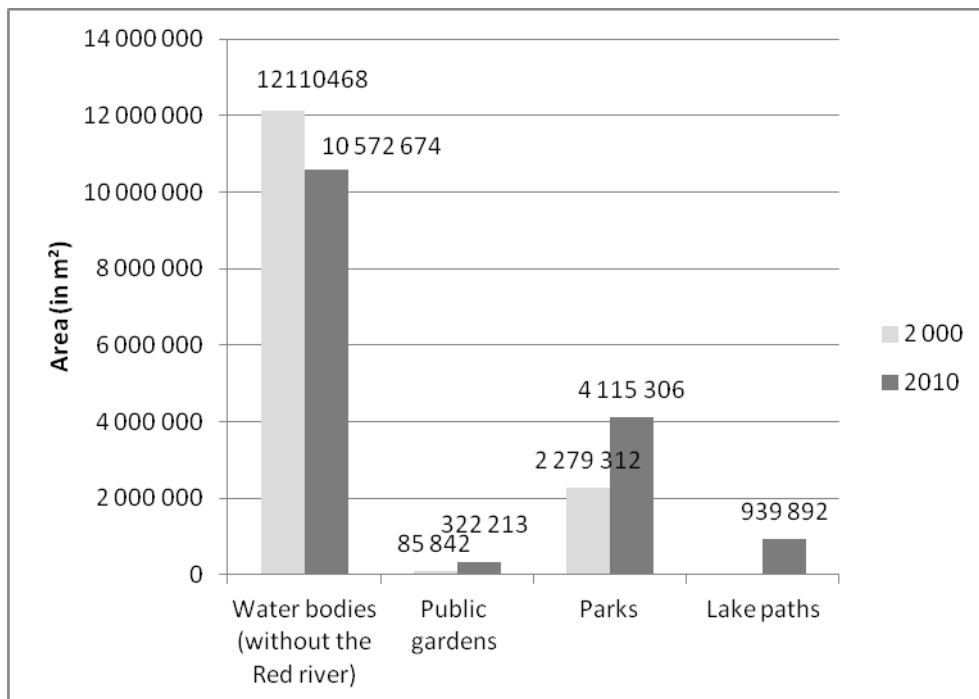
Figure 5: Change in total area of bodies of water, public gardens, and parks between 2000 and 2010 and total area of lakeside paths in 2010. Source: Authors

Distribution of public gardens in Hanoi
in 2000 and 2010
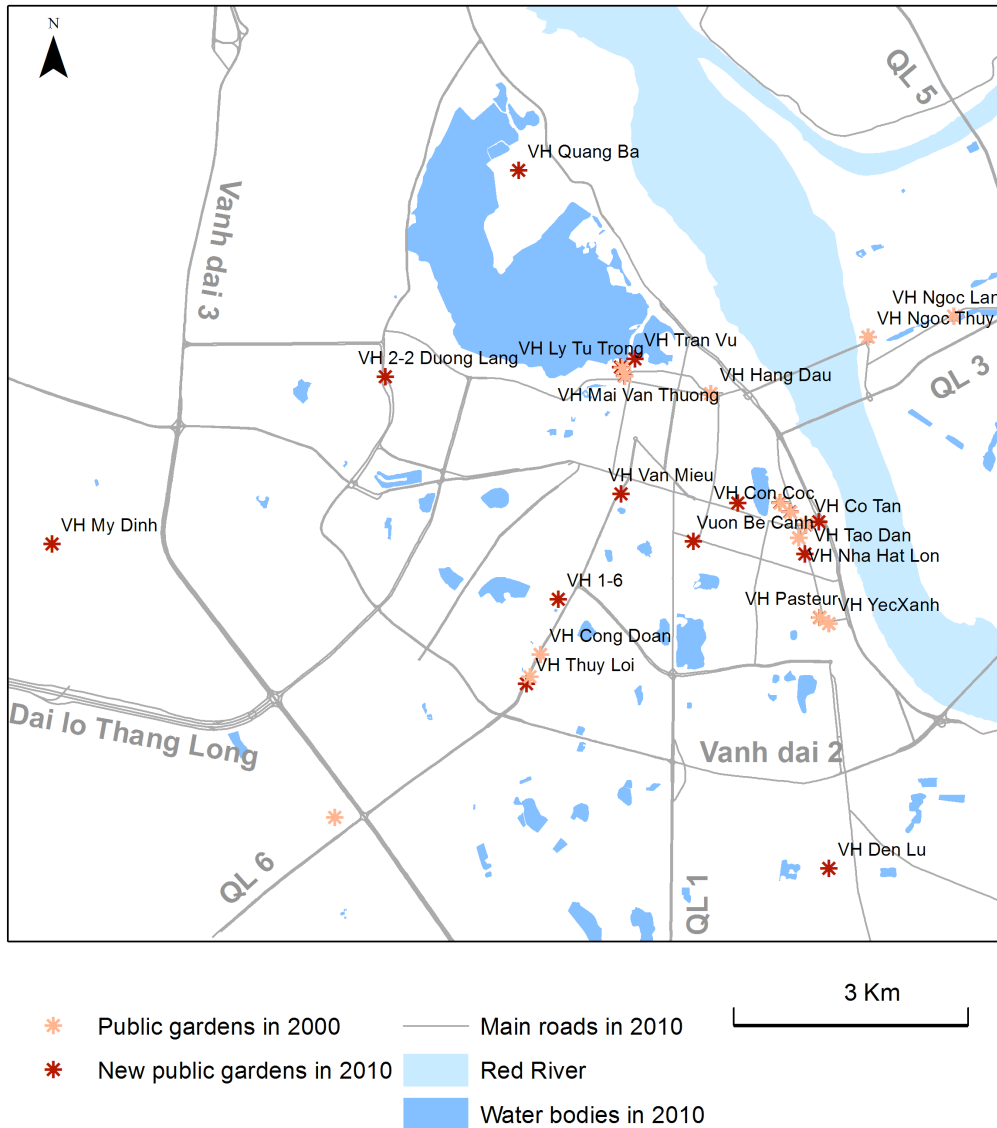
Figure 6: Distribution of public gardens in Hanoi as of 2000, and new ones as of 2010. Source: Authors

A similar trend is also observed when studying the growth in overall area for public parks. The number of parks in Hanoi doubled from 2000 to 2010, with the addition of 10 new parks during the 2000s, raising total park area to 352.00 ha in 2010, compared to 227.93 ha in 2000 (figure 7).

Distribution of parks, gardens and water bodies in Hanoi
in 2000 and 2010
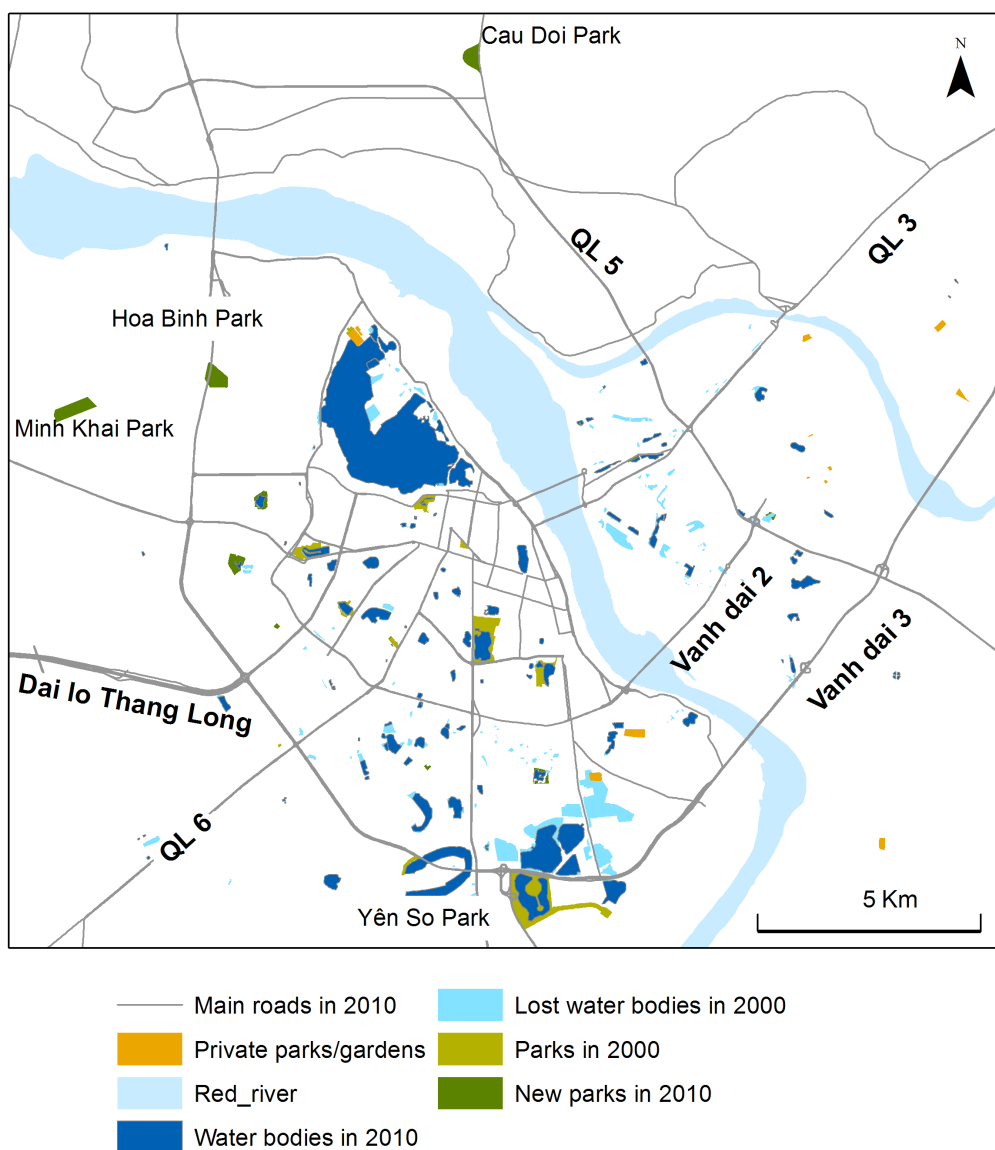
This represents a remarkable 40% increase in park area in merely a decade. ***The vast majority of these new large public spaces are found in the new and peripheral urbanized areas***. Some are located in new urban districts (for example, Cầu Giấy park to the west of the inner-city, and Đền Lừ and Yên Sở park to the south) and some are sited even further from the city core (i.e. Cầu Đôi and Hòa Bình parks). It should be mentioned that as of January 2014 our team did not include Yên Sở and Cầu Đôi in our study since these parks were closed at the time, and in the case of Cầu Đôi, in a state of severe dilapidation (photos in figure 8).

Figure 8: Degradation of infrastructure and rubbish in Cầu Đôi park (photos taken in January 2014). Photo courtesy: Tạ Thị Trầm. Source: Authors

Third, and most striking, is the dramatic diminution of the surface area of bodies of water in the city, from over 1211 ha in 2000 down to 1057 ha in 2010. This represents a 15% decrease within just a decade. While several factors have contributed to this decrease, we noticed a reduction of surface area of big lakes and a marked disappearance of smaller ones, many of which were filled in and built upon during the 2000s. This has translated into a sharp decrease of the total number of bodies of water in the city (lakes, ponds or marshes). Indeed, over half of Hanoi's bodies of water disappeared, bringing the number down to 123 in 2010 from 224 in 2000 (figure 7 for the map of lakes). Examples of disappearing bodies of water are found not only in dense areas such as Đống Đa, in Khương Trung, but also in quickly urbanizing areas such as Long Biên district (figure 9).

Despite the loss of many small lakes, the city of Hanoi has actively pursued the beautification of lake edges through the construction of new promenades and walkways surrounding some of the city's lakes, for example around the West Lake, or even around smaller ones such as Xã Đàn and Ngọc Khánh lakes (figure 10). These efforts seem to be part of a larger infrastructure programme aimed at improving the sewage system of Hanoi. The installation of benches, sports facilities, walkways, trees and flowerbeds around many lakes allow these public spaces to play a significantly more important role in the life of nearby residents, especially during morning hours when they are most heavily used. It should be noted, however, that these same lakeside promenades are often occupied by coffee shops and other commercial activities in the evening.

In the area of Dong Da lake

In the area of Khương Trung

In the area of Bồ Đề lake (Long Bien district)

Figure 9: Illustration of disappearing bodies of water (circled in white) in the 2000s.
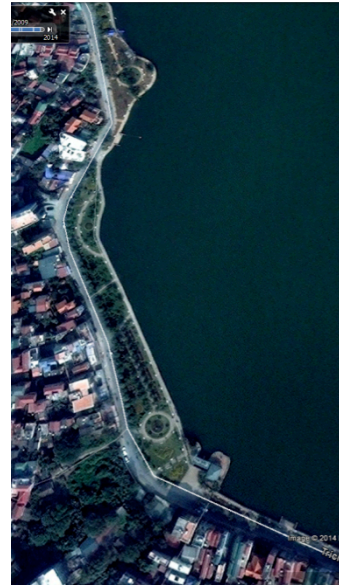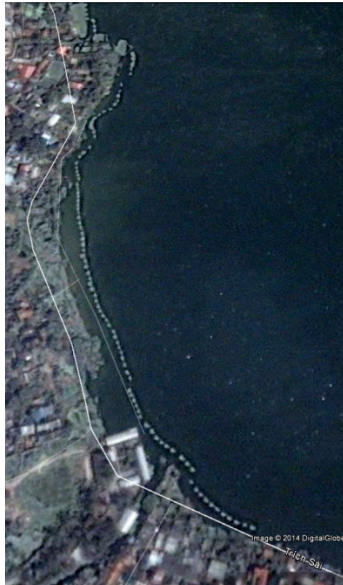
In the Trích Sài area, near the West lake
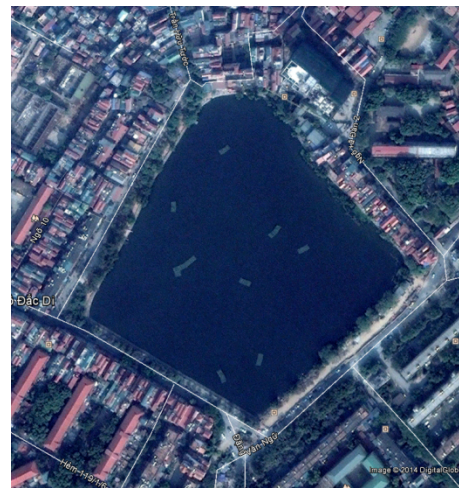
Xã Đàn lake

Figure 10: Illustration of beautification and promenades in the 2000s.

When analyzing population data, it is noteworthy that the population living in Hanoi's urban wards doubled during the decade of 2000 to 2010 (an absolute growth of a little over 1 million people). The number of young people residing in the city's urban wards (18-25 years old) increased by a factor of 1.5 (representing an addition of about 125 000 youths) (figure 11).
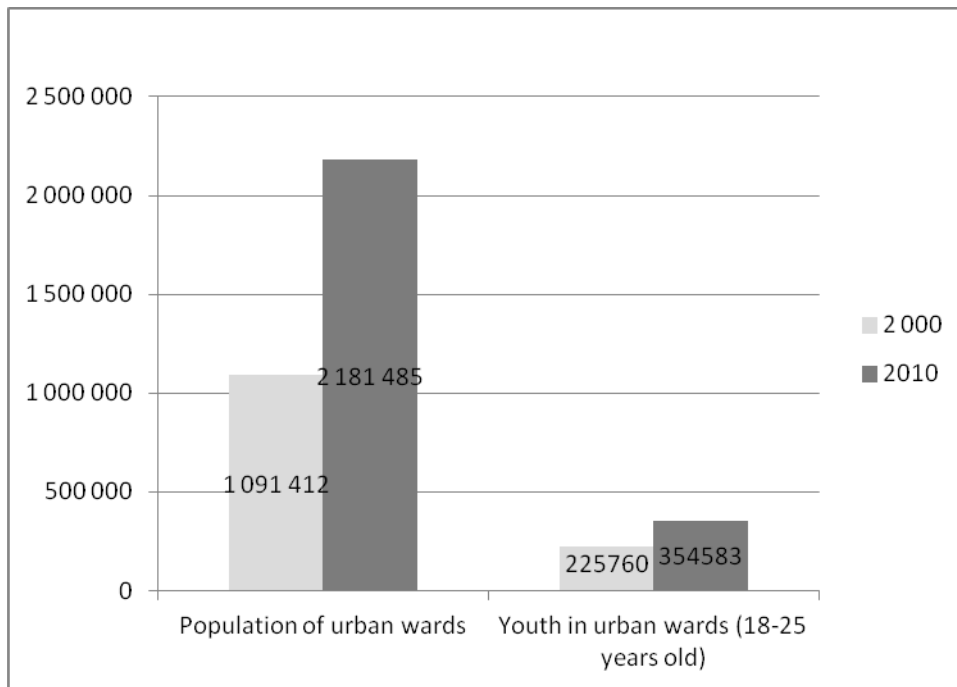
Figure 11: Total population and youth population in urban wards in 2000 and 2010. Source: Authors

The total area of public gardens per capita improved slightly, moving up from 0.08 m^2 to 0.10m^2. However the total area of parks per capita declined from 2.09m^2 to 1.48m^2. During this same period, the city also witnessed a dramatic decrease in the area of bodies of water per capita (from over 11m^2 to less than 5m^2 per person) (figure 12). ***When only taking young people into consideration, there is a significant reduction in the total area of bodies of water per young person (from 53.94m^2 to 29.82m^2), an increase in the total area of gardens per young person (from 0.38m^2 to 0.62m^2) and a slight decrease in the total area of parks per young person (from 10.10m^2 to 9.09m^2)*** (figure 13).
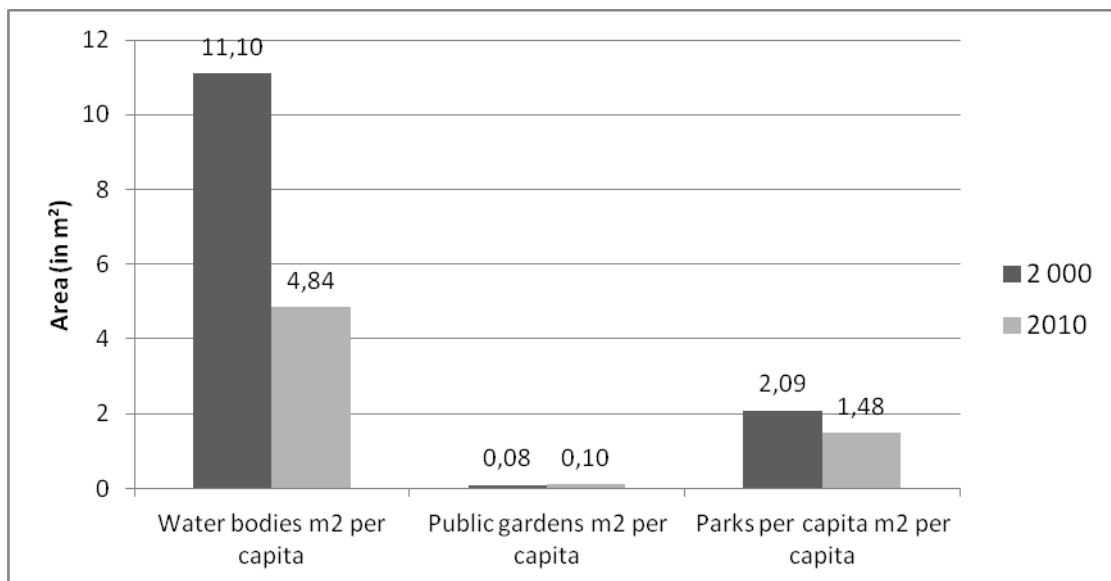
Figure 12: Total area of the three kinds of public space per capita for 2000 and 2010. Source: Authors
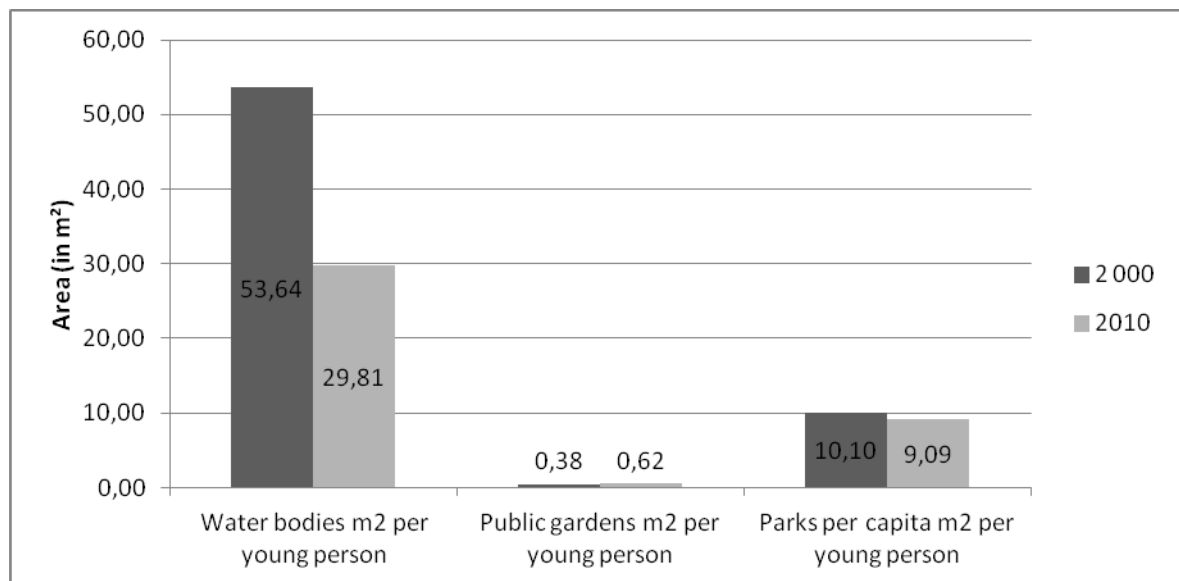
Figure 13: Total area of the three kinds of public space per young person in 2000 and 2010. Source: Authors

The creation of new public gardens and parks has occurred primarily in areas west and south of the city, areas that are currently undergoing significant transformation due to rapid urbanization. Though the total number of bodies of water and their surface area have both diminished since the beginning of 2000, the city has actively sought to improve the immediate area around many lakes. These recent efforts to provide more public space in urbanized areas needs to be recognized and commended. As discussed in the policy review section of this report, the overall increase in the number and total area of public spaces reflects a rising awareness of these issues by policy makers, planners, and local authorities and signals a new-found understanding about the important contributions that these places make towards the modernization and improved liveability of Vietnamese cities.

However, the Vietnamese capital is a long way from reaching the $7m^2$ of "green space outside of residential units" per capita set by the Ministry of Construction for Special-grade cities such as Hanoi (c.f. Vietnam Building Code, 2008, art. 1.4.2). In response to the lack of open spaces for activities, several spaces – sometimes called parks (*công viên*) or ecological areas (*khu sinh thái*) – have been built and managed by the private sector, the most popular ones being Hồ Tây Water Park and Mặt Trời Mới theme park (both on the shore of the West Lake). Other new, privately managed, public spaces have been built over the past few years, such as Vĩnh Hoàng park (in Tân Mai) and the Eco-park area and Vĩnh Hưng ecological area deeper within Long Biên district. The construction of such spaces is very much appreciated by middle-class and affluent families, but they remain unaffordable for many lower-income residents of the city.

b) Accessibility of public spaces in Hanoi

In order to gather exploratory data on the level of accessibility to parks by 18 to 25 year-olds in Hanoi a questionnaire was administered in 4 places: Thành Công park (marked as 1 on figure 10), Nghĩa Đô park (2), Linh Đàm park (3) and Ngọc Lâm public garden (4).

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The four parks were chosen based on the following criteria: similarity in the role that they play in local life, difference in the level of urbanization of the surrounding neighbourhood, and consequently, the characteristics of the surrounding neighbourhood. More specifically, none of the four parks were either regional parks or culturally important parks, that is, parks likely to attract residents beyond the neighbourhood. Regarding the level of urbanization of the surrounding neighbourhood, we based this criterion on the year the area received official urban status. Since our survey was interested in examining youth accessibility, we also sought parks situated near neighbourhoods that were highly residential in nature, near significant employment hubs, and where there was the presence of schools or cultural centres, increasing the potential for a higher presence of young people.

Table 2: Description of the four surveyed spaces. Source: Authors

	Thành Công	Nghĩa Đô	Lình Đàm	Ngọc Lâm
Area (ha)	10 ha	10 ha	5 ha	2.5 ha
District	Đống Đa	Cầu Giấy	Hoàng Mai	Long Biên
Ward	Thành Công	Nghĩa Tân and Dịch Vọng	Đại Kim and Hoàng Liệt	Ngọc Lâm and Gia Thúy
Year awarded urban status	Before 1986	1996	2003	2003
Population density of the ward(s)	35 315	37 264 and 16 773	9 422 and 4 933	26 095 and 8 142

As shown in table 2 and figure 14, the area around Thành Công Park is the most urbanized, having received urban status prior to 1986 (before the period of intensive urbanization in other areas of Hanoi). The area has a density of over 35 000 inhabitants/km^2. Located in close to a village, this park is surrounded by dense residential zones such as KTT[17] Thành Công and Đường Sắt. There are seven important employment hubs and universities around this park: Television of Vietnam, Television of Hanoi, University of Law, University of International Relations, Institute of Youth, The authority of Frequency Management, and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Two important entertainment centres are also close to the park: the National Centre of Cinema, and the Theatre of Music and Dance of Vietnam.

Cầu Giấy district where Nghĩa Đô Park is located gained urban status in 2003. The surrounding area is very dense, with a population density varying from 16,000 to over 37,000 inhabitants per km^2. Residential zones close by include KTT Nghĩa Tân and Thăng Long international village. Five important institutes and universities are found around this park, such as Vietnam Academy of Sciences and Technology, Institute of Sciences and Technology of Defence, College of Teachers of Hanoi, Academy of Journalism and Communication and the National Political Academy. The park is also situated directly across from Hanoi's Museum of Ethnology.

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[17] KTT refers to collective residential zones (*khu tập thể*, in Vietnamese).
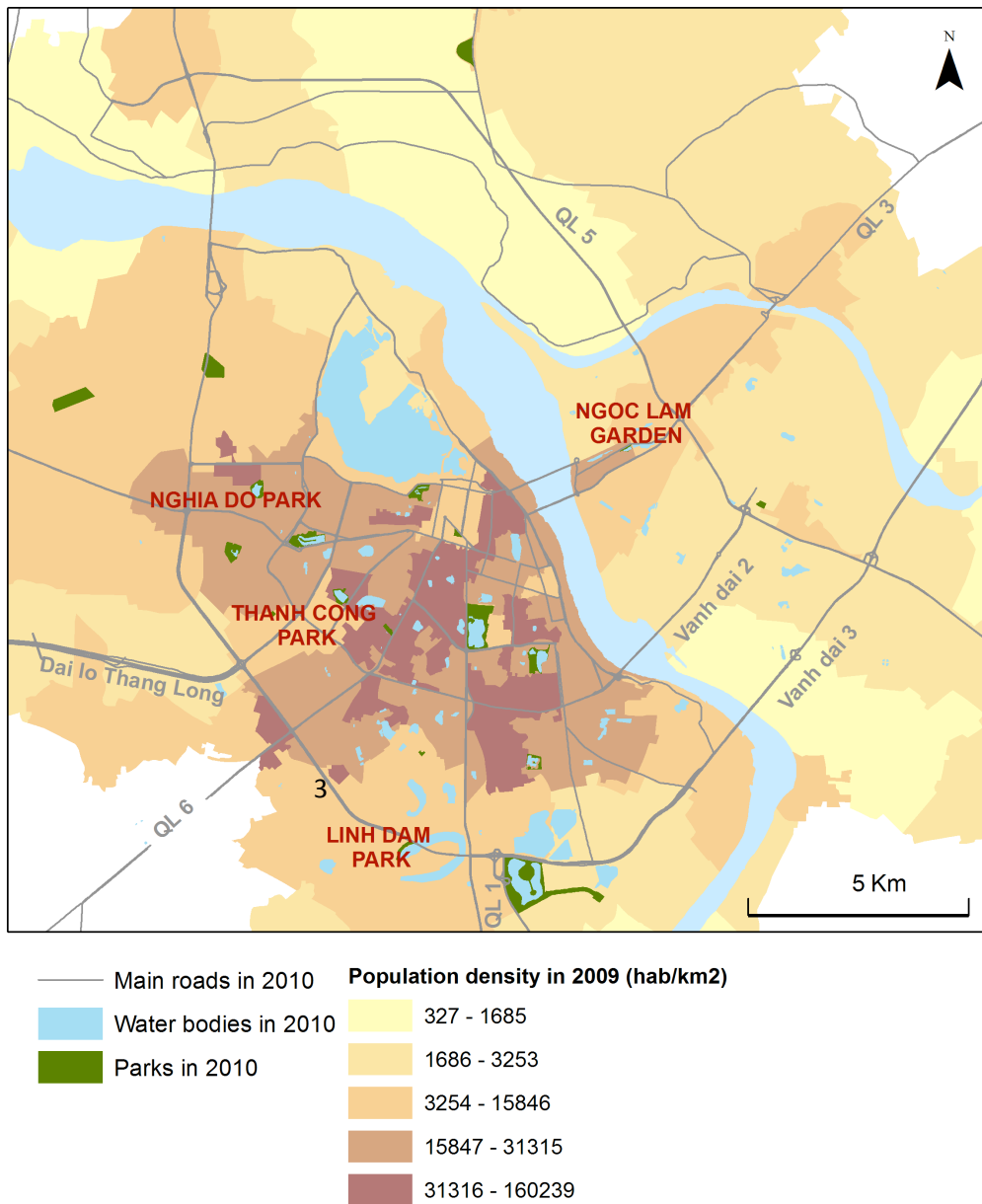
Figure 14: Population density of Hanoi. Source: Authors

Hoàng Mai district where Linh Đàm Park is located, as well as Long Biên where Ngọc Lâm Park is located, both gained urban status in 2003. These two parks are situated further from the city centre. The population density around the public parks is over 9,000 persons/km^2 for Linh Đàm, and over 26,000 persons/km2 for the area surrounding Ngọc Lâm Park. There are also fewer significant residential zones, employment zones and entertainment centres around these spaces. Situated near Lình Đàm are KDTM[18] Linh Đàm and the University of Thăng Long (around Lình Đàm Park) and situated near Ngọc Lâm are KTT Gia Lâm, the Railway Factory, the College of Urban Construction, the College of Railway, and the Hanoi College of Technology (around Ngọc Lâm garden).

Time and budget constraints did not allow us to survey all parks in Hanoi. By using the four above cases as a sample, we hope to capture the diversity of Hanoi's parks and gardens. Detailed maps showing the physical setting of these four parks are found in Appendix 3.

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[18] KDTM refers the new urban zone (khu đô thị mới, in Vietnamese).

Questionnaire and survey design

To ease the presentation and analysis of survey results, we have chosen to use the term 'park' for the four surveyed spaces. The questionnaire aimed to document three aspects of park users experience in relation to the question of accessibility: i) travel behaviour (results presented in sections 3 and 6), ii) reasons for the visit (results presented in section 6), and iii) perception of the space (results presented in section 6). The questions asked of the users concerned, for instance, the transportation mode they used to get to the park, their typical travel time, the typical amount of time spent at the park, obstacles encountered during the trip (traffic, heat, crowded sidewalks, etc.) and likes and dislikes of the park. (For further details, see survey questionnaires in English and Vietnamese at Appendix 3).

Resource and time constraints along with limited information about the population studied made it impossible to constitute a probabilistic or random sample. We therefore opted for a non-probabilistic quota sampling method wherein set numbers of respondents were predetermined so as to assure that the experience of youths was adequately represented while also capturing gendered and temporal differences regarding park accessibility. Here, we were not concerned with having numbers that match the proportions in the population but instead aimed to have enough respondents to be able to discuss the experiences of even smaller groups in the population (e.g. female youth users).

The establishment of the desired quotas followed the three following rules. First, we aimed to administer 100 questionnaires to youth in each of the four parks selected. Second, at each research site, we sought an equal split of male and female respondents (i.e., 50 of each at each site). Third, we administered the questionnaires during the three busiest periods of park usage in Hanoi: early mornings (5:30 to 8:30AM), early evenings (5:30 to 8:30PM) and weekend evenings (4 to 7PM).

Data collection occurred between May and August of 2014. We are aware that the hot weather, typical of the summer season in Hanoi, might have affected the results of our survey, but this has been taken into consideration in the analysis. The administration of the survey questionnaire in the first three research sites was performed by student researchers from the University of Montreal and Đại học xây dựng (University of Civil Engineering) with the support of a volunteer from HealthBridge Vietnam. Data collection at Ngọc Lâm park was conducted by two researchers from Hanoi National University based on instructions from the previous team of student researchers.

All questionnaires were self-administered at the research sites. Recruitment proceeded as follows: researchers approached youth they assumed were 18 to 25 years old, introduced the goal of the research and the objectives of the questionnaire, and then requested their year of birth. If the respondent fell within the required age bracket and agreed to participate in the study, the researcher handed a questionnaire to the respondent and supervised its completion while remaining available for any questions the respondent may have had during his or her filling of the questionnaire.

Description of respondents

Field constraints prevented the constitution of a sample that completely respected the sampling rules just described. The number of respondents at each site varied slightly above

and below the target of 100. 411 people responded to our survey, of which 8 were excluded because of incomplete questionnaires, and one respondent was excluded because the person arrived to the park by car, a form of transportation not representative of typical travel by Hanoian youth. In total, 402 respondents were retained (table 3).

Table 3: Distribution of respondents in the four spaces. Source: Authors

Name of Space	Total Respondents	Male/Female	Respondents per time of day
Nghĩa Đô	99	51 males 48 females	Weekday AM: 33 Weekday PM: 33 Weekend PM: 33
Linh Đàm	99	57 males 42 females	Weekday AM: 7 Weekday PM: 53 Weekend PM: 39
Thành Công	101	55 males 46 females	Weekday AM: 33 Weekday PM: 33 Weekend PM: 35
Ngọc Lâm	103	58 males 45 females	Weekday AM: 30 Weekday PM: 40 Weekend PM: 33

More importantly, we encountered difficulties in reaching female youths in all the research sites. As the section of this report devoted to girls' experience of parks explains in more detail (section 5), this group is less present in parks than their male counterparts. This explains the slight underrepresentation of female respondents in the sample. Variations in the administration of questionnaires at different times of the day and week are negligible except for Linh Đàm Park where we could only administer 7 questionnaires in the morning due to the limited presence of youths at that time of day.

Concerning travel mode, the majority of respondents arrived to the park on foot (52.4%), 28% by motorbike, 13.2% by bicycle, and 6.2% by bus (figure 15).
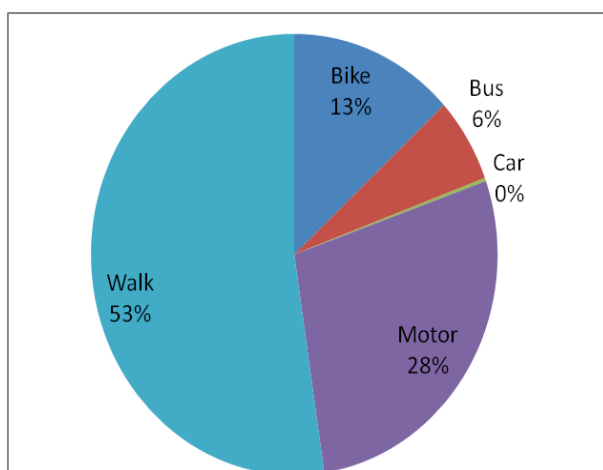
Figure 15: Travel modes of respondents. Source: Authors

Survey results on typical time required to get to parks

On average, the typical travel time to all parks was 14.4 minutes. When breaking down typical travel time into morning and evening visits, morning visits to parks involved shorter travel times (12.5 minutes) when compared to evening visits (15.1 minutes). This is the result of significantly higher levels of traffic and road congestion during the evening period, resulting in slower travel speeds. This difference is statistically significant. When comparing the typical travel time of women and men, we also noticed a slight difference. Women traveled on average a total of 15.2 minutes while men travelled an average of 13.7 minutes, a difference of 1.5 minutes between sexes. When comparing the typical travel time of weekend and weekday visits; the time it took respondents to arrive at the parks is almost identical (14.2 and 14.8 minutes, respectively). There is also no significant difference between travel times during weekday evenings and weekends; there are only minor differences between weekend and weekday visits (15.3 and 14.9 minutes) (figure 16).
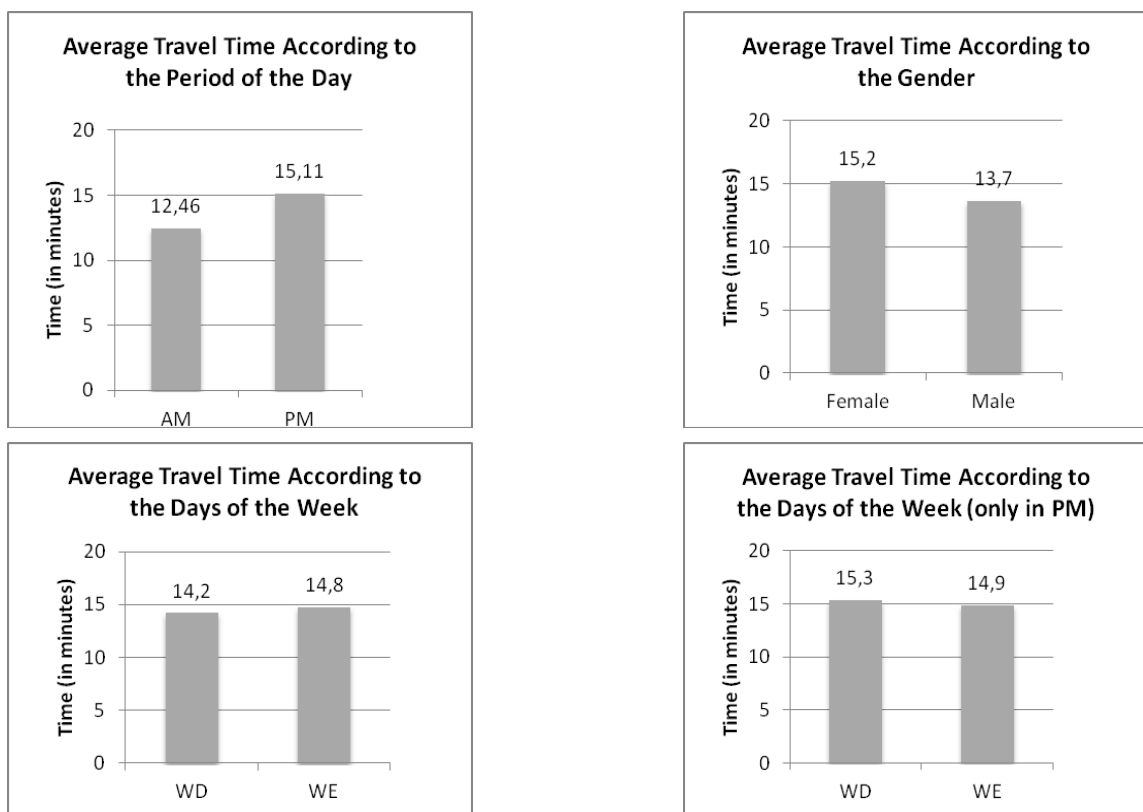
Significant differences in travel times can be noticed when comparing the different travel modes used to access the parks: 33.7 minutes by bus, 16.8 by bicycle, 14.0 by motorbike and 11.7 by foot. When we only look at evening visits (to exclude the time difference in traveling between morning and evening due to the traffic), travel time to the parks also differs very clearly among travel modes: 30.9 minutes by bus, 20 by bicycle, 14.2 by motorbike and 12.5 by foot (figure 17).

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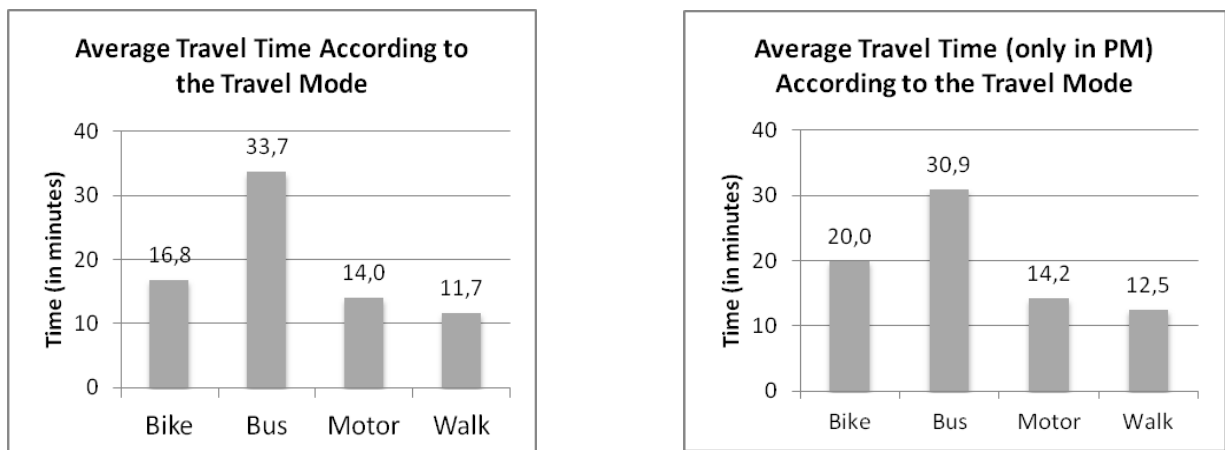
Figure 17: Average travel times by travel mode (anytime) and travel mode (evening only). Source: Authors

In sum, survey results on typical travel time to parks suggests that there is a difference between morning and evening visits (of 2.6 minutes) mostly due to higher traffic volumes during the evening hours. Our results also suggest that travel time to parks differs greatly depending on the travel mode used. As such, the computation and analysis of spatial accessibility of parks in Hanoi needs to take into consideration these different travel modes.

Definition and measures of spatial accessibility

In order to map and measure spatial accessibility of public spaces in Hanoi, we draw on scientific articles recently published about geography, urban transportation and mobility. Accessibility is most easily defined as "the ability to derive benefits from things" (Ribot and Peluso, 2003: 153) or as "the freedom or ability of people to achieve their basic needs in order to sustain their quality of life" (Lau and Chiu, 2003: 197). Researchers in geography and urban planning offer smaller definitions than these more focused on the spatial dimensions of accessibility. For example, Emily Talen (2002: 259), defines accessibility as "the quality of having interaction with or passage to, a particular good, service or facility", while Hanson and Giuliano, authors of *The Geography of Urban Transportation*, claim that "accessibility refers to the number of opportunities, also called 'activity sites', available within a certain distance or travel time" (2004: 4).

Measures of accessibility vary in complexity and often depend on the aims of the researcher and relevant policy questions associated to the research (Lindsey et al., 2001). Since the widespread adoption of information technologies, geographic information systems (GIS) based environments have allowed researchers to develop complex models that measure accessibility using a variety of different variables.

Current measures of accessibility can be divided into four types: (1) service area measures, (2) travel impedance measures (including minimum distance and travel cost), (3) gravity and potential measures, and (4) utility-based measures (Hass, 2009). In this report, we adopted the minimum distance approach of measure spatial accessibility. We measure the distance from an origin to the nearest studied service (a public space in our case) by delineating buffer zones around the services, for example at 500m and 1000m distances. This approach allows for an ease in which local officials can interpret the results, facilitating advocacy and potential future action by the authorities (Lotfi and Koohsari, 2009), which fits well with the main goal of this report. For these same reasons it is a measure used by numerous

researchers interested in the accessibility of parks at a local scale (Lotfi and Koohsari, 2009; Jones et al., 2009; Smoyer-Tomic et al., 2004; Talen, 1998).

In this report, we consider 3 distances around each public space: 500m (recommended distance to local public spaces, by Vietnamese policies), walking distance (computed from our survey) and biking distance (computed from our survey). Although motorbikes are among the most common transport modes of respondents, we decided to consider walking and biking distance because they are transport modes that everyone can use regardless of their income (or health status, for walking). Moreover, they are considered a healthy active transportation mode by public health organizations such as the World Health Organization (Edwards and Tsouros, 2006), and this fits well with the advocacy objectives of HealthBridge, our partner in this research.

In our survey we obtained travel times (but not distances) to parks. In our following analysis, distance to parks is calculated according to average travel speeds by foot and bicycle based on reports on mobility in Asian cities. According to a report of the Asian Development Bank, average speed of walking in Asian cities is estimated to vary from 1.2m to 1.5m per second, or 72m to 90m per minute (Leather et al., 2011). Given that travel time to get to parks by foot in our survey was 12 minutes, travel distance by foot is hence estimated to vary from 864m to 1080m, which is then rounded to 900m for ease of interpretation.

As for biking, average speed in Taipei varies from 10 to 14km/h (Chang et al., 2008). Given that travel time to parks by bicycle in our survey was 17 minutes; travel distance by bicycle is estimated to be from 2800m to 4000m. However, in a city as crowded as Hanoi, we assume that biking speed is even lower than 14km/h, we then rounded the travel distance by bicycle to 3000m. This figure also seems reasonable when compared with average trip duration in other Asian cities, for example under 4000m in Singapore (Barter, 2008), under 5000m in Indian cities (Tiwari and Jain, 2008) and between 4000m and 6000m in Taipei (Chang et al., 2008).

Computing and mapping spatial accessibility

Spatial accessibility was computed in ArcGIS with the Network Analyst extension and using the street network of Hanoi. For each of the three types of public spaces (gardens, parks and bodies of water), we computed the service area at three distances: 500m, 900m (walking distance) and 3000m (biking distance). This allows us to easily identify areas of the city where access to public space is potentially limited (figure 18).
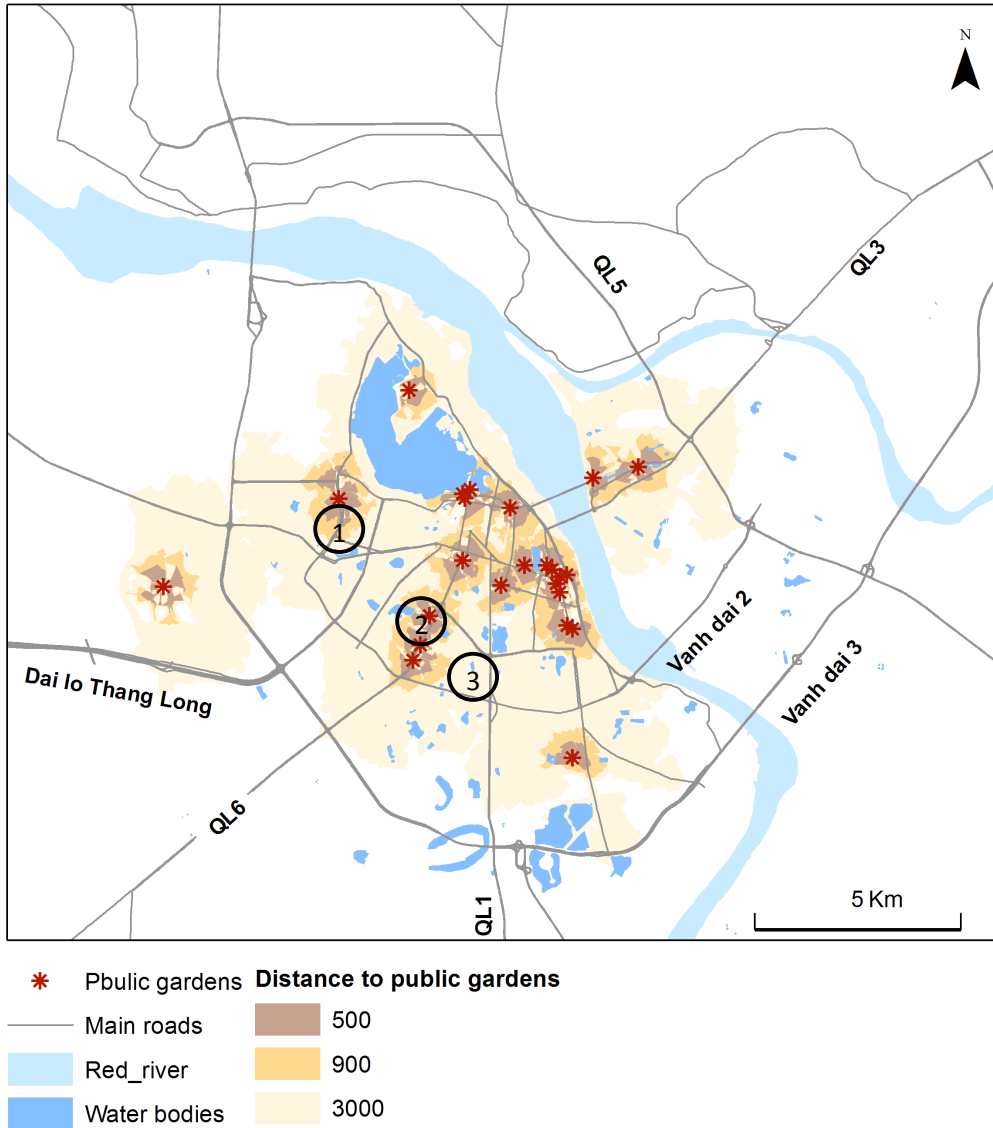
Figure 18: Map of spatial accessibility in 2010: Service areas of 500m, 900m and 3000m around public gardens. Source: Authors

Hanoi's public gardens are predominantly located within the city centre area. Within this area, the distance to public gardens for some residents is between 500 metres and 900 metres, a distance we consider more or less walkable though this also depends on the personal mobility of a given resident. While many may find themselves within a reasonable walking distance from these spaces, there are obvious gaps within the city centre that clearly demonstrate that *a reasonable walking distance to public gardens is not available to many of the city centre's residents* (areas marked as 1, 2 and 3 in figure 19).

Furthermore, due to the limited number of public gardens in Hanoi's periphery, many residents living beyond the immediate city centre do not find themselves within a walkable distance to these types of public spaces. Residents located in Hanoi's peripheral areas have a drastically different level of accessibility to public gardens with many residents faced with traveling distances in excess of 900 metres. Despite the lower number of public gardens in these peripheral areas, most residents do find themselves within 3000 metres of a public

garden, a significant distance that can be covered more or less quickly on motorbike or bicycle depending on the time of day.
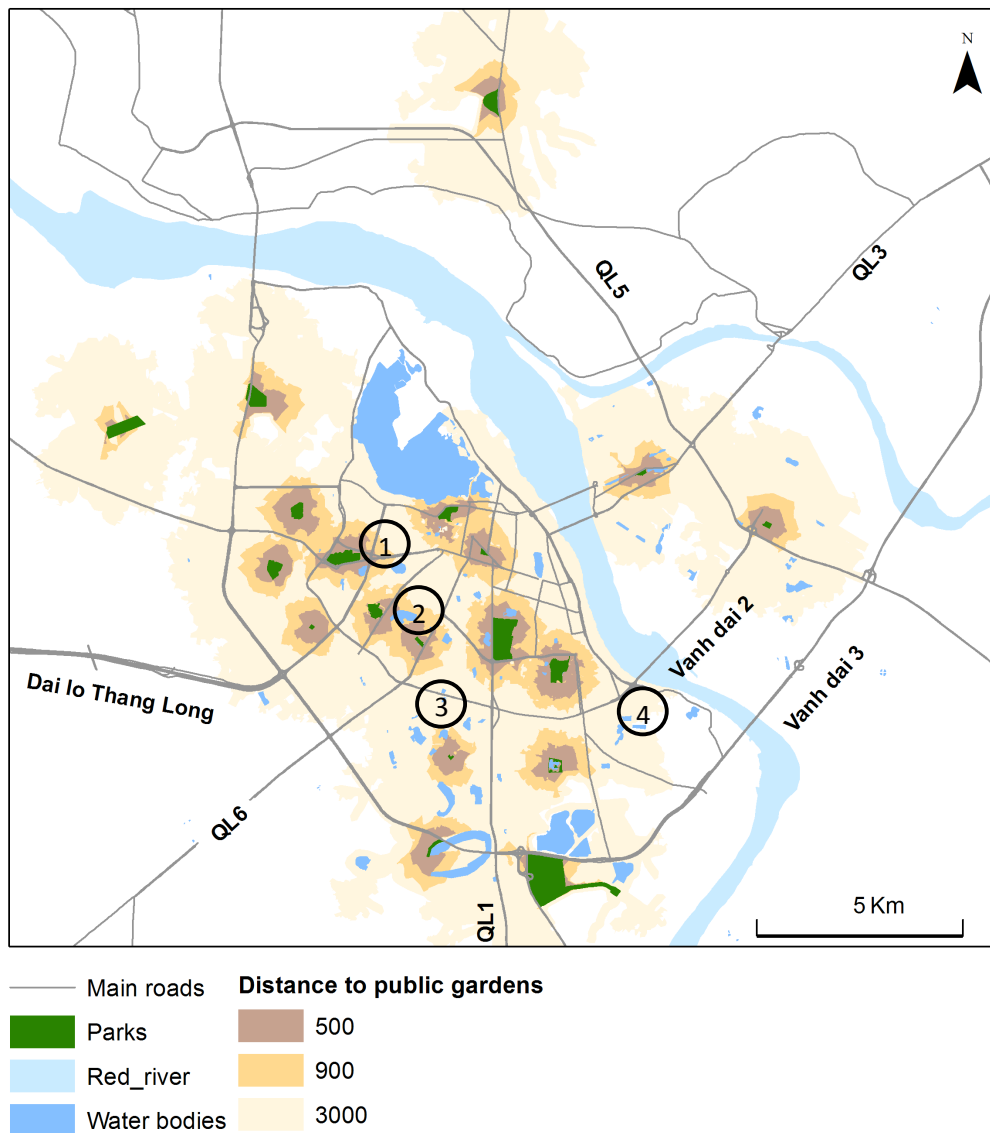
Figure 19: Map of spatial accessibility in 2010: Service areas of 500m, 900m and 3000m around parks. Source: Authors

Similar to Hanoi's public gardens, many of the city's public parks are located in the city's central wards. Despite the higher number of public parks in the city centre, access to a public park within a walking distance of 500 metres, or at most 900 metres is not available even for most residents of the city centre. ***Large portions of the city centre are situated at distances greater than 900 metres to a public park, emphasising the limited access that many face when trying to walk to a park situated nearest to their departure point*** (areas marked as 1, 2, and 3 in figure 20). The whole area between *Vành đai 2* and *Vành đai 3* routes do not have accessible parks within 900m. Furthermore, some areas of Hanoi, for example north of West Lake and areas around Lĩnh Nam (marked as 4), find themselves outside of the 3000-metre threshold that we consider as being more or less accessible by bicycle or motorbike.

Coupled with the already limited amount of Hanoi's urban area that finds itself within 900 metres from a public park, the level of accessibility to public parks appears to be quite low for those without faster modes of transportation. This could be even more problematic when taking into account the possible financial, familial and social constraints youth may face when trying to acquire their first motorbike, making these long distances even more difficult for them and further restraining access to public parks for this age group (more details in section 6).
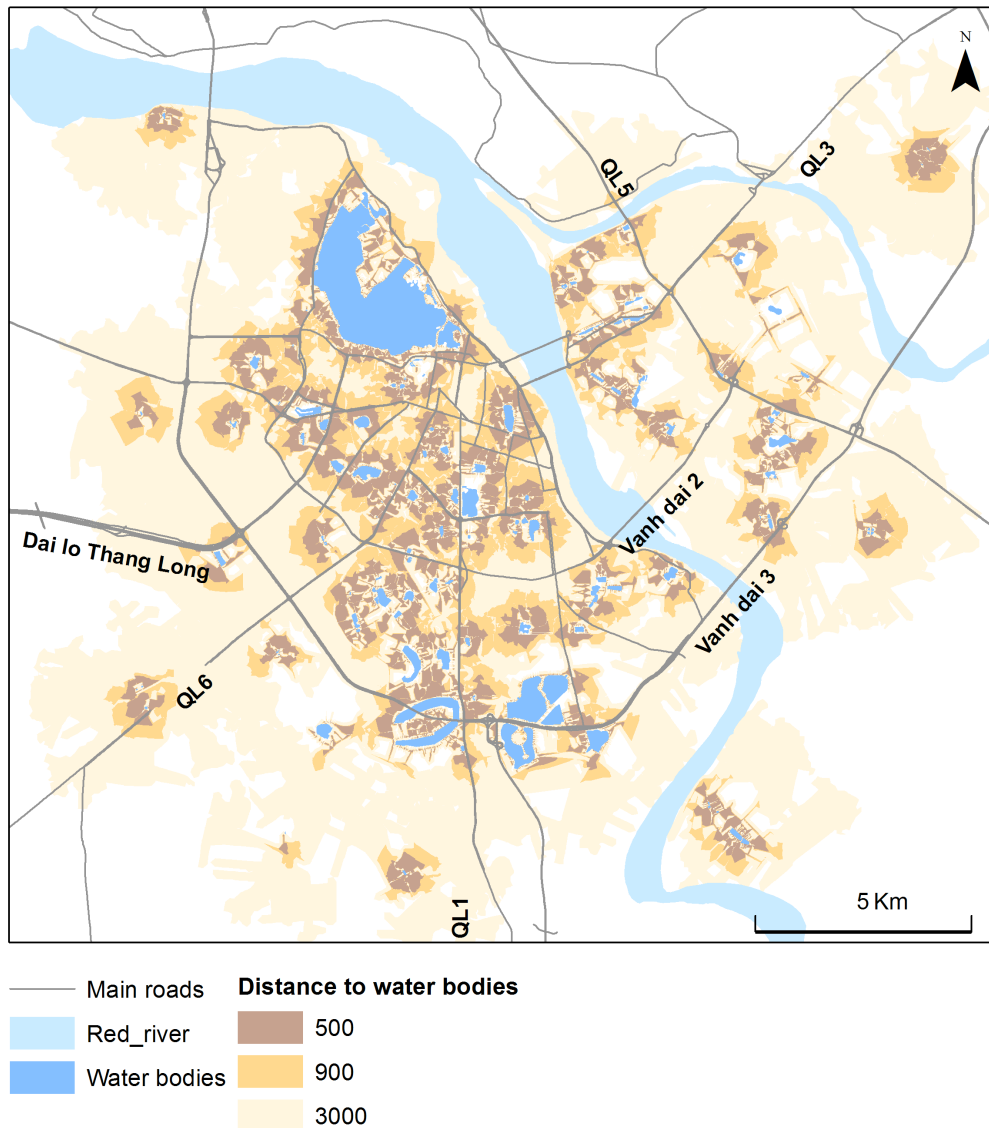
Figure 20: Map of spatial accessibility in 2010: Service areas of 500m, 900m and 3000m around bodies of water. Source: Authors

Sometimes called 'the city of lakes,' Hanoi is characterized by a healthy distribution of bodies of water throughout its territory. As a result, residents have a much higher level of accessibility to lakes in comparison to the previously mentioned accessibility levels of public gardens and parks. From around the West Lake and south towards *Vành đai 3*, many residents have access to lakes within 900 metres, with only a few areas of the city situated at distances greater than 900 metres. This higher level of accessibility to lakes is important

because these lakes offer, in some cases, space for recreation and physical exercise to residents without nearby access to gardens or parks. Paths or promenades surround many of Hanoi's lakes and residents often use these spaces in the mornings and evenings for physical activities such as jogging and aerobics. They are also popular destinations for meeting and socializing with friends.

Though the distribution of lakes throughout Hanoi is far greater than the distribution of public parks and gardens, the western portion of the city that lies between *Vành đai 2* and *Vành đai 3*, has significantly less access to lakes than other parts of the city. With little access to lakes, parks and gardens, this area is severely underserved in terms of public spaces. Access within 900 metres to either of the above-mentioned spaces is very rare, indicating a potentially problematic situation for its residents.

Our survey provides important facts about accessibility and travel behaviours of young people accessing parks and public gardens in Hanoi. The average time required to get to parks is over 10 minutes, suggesting that young people are willing to travel quite far to get to parks. This is understandable in the context of the lack of public spaces in Hanoi (see the previous mapping section). ***However, this result points to the potential of overcrowding and saturation of public spaces, especially in areas where there is no access to parks or gardens within walking or biking distance.*** Furthermore, given the lack of parks and public gardens in many areas of the city (shown in figures 19 and 20), ***we highlight the important role the numerous bodies of water play in the quality of life of Hanoians. Our findings point to the urgent need to protect, preserve and improve bodies of water in Hanoi***.

c) A preliminary assessment of publicness in Hanoi's parks and public gardens

There is a growing public concern, notable in media accounts (Minh Hanh, 2012; Khanh Hoa, 2012; Do Thi, 2012; Van Dung and Nguyen Hoan, 2012), about the "privatization" of public spaces. Privatization is an ambiguous term in the context of Vietnam, as explained in the policy section of this report. The term "encroachment" of public spaces by private or commercial uses may more accurately describe the concerns expressed about the diminishing quality of available public spaces in Hanoi. However, we found this term still insufficiently specific to be able to measure the quality of public spaces. Our analysis builds on Varna and Tiesdell's (2010) notion of "publicness." For these authors, the ideal "public" park has three broad qualities:

- It serves as a forum for political representation, display, and action. It is also a universally neutral territory, free of coercive forces, inclusive, and pluralist (in the sense of acceptance and accommodation of social difference);

- A public space provides users with space for social interaction, intermingling, and communication. Public spaces, in this sense, are sites for sociability, exchanges of information, personal development, social learning, and the development of tolerance;

- A public space symbolizes and represents the collective, and sociability rather than carrying images of individuality and privacy.

These ideal qualities take a specific meaning in a context such as Vietnam. But based on these three ideal qualities of public spaces, Varna and Tiesdell develop an operational model to assess the publicness of public spaces in urban contexts. This model uses five indicators related to: i) the legal status of the space; ii) the rules and practices through which control over users and uses are exercised; iii) the regime of management and physical maintenance; iv) design elements that shape the physical and visual accessibility of a place; and v) the provision of amenities supporting users' ability to engage with the place in multiple ways. Engagement with the place can be understood to break down into two broad categories, passive and active engagement, where passive engagement involves things like being in the space and people watching, and active engagement is, as one would expect, more active and involves things like playing sports, though also socializing. The suitability of a space for these things will entail the appropriate facilities: in the case of passive engagement this means places to sit and things or people to look at, whereas for active engagement it means facilities or space to do more active things even if this only amounts to a walking path.

In this preliminary study we focused on three of the five dimensions of publicness included in Varna and Tiesdell's model. We defined and operationalized these dimensions (table 4).

Table 4: Criteria used to evaluate publicness. Source: Authors

Behavioural control presence	*Presence and role of guards*	
		Complete absence of security guards
		Presence of guards patrolling
		Presence of guards both at the entrance and patrolling
		Presence of guards only at the entrance
Civility	*Physical maintenance*	
	Excellent	little to no trash, good pond or lake water quality; enough waste bins available; well-maintained greenery; no encroachment of private housing or vehicular use
	Good	lacks 1 of these items
	Average	lacks 2 of these items
	Poor	lacks 3 of these items
	Physical facilities	
	Excellent	at least one public toilet available for users; presence of a form of refreshment or food service (tea stall, cafe, restaurant); equipment allowing the practice of at least three types of activities (eg : benches, badminton courts, walking pathways, fitness equipment, etc.)*
	Average	lacks 1 of these items
	Poor	lacks 2 or more of these items
Liveliness	*Passive engagement (people watching)*	
	Excellent	public benches or public seating options and a tea/food stall
	Average	only benches or public seating option are available
	Poor	no public seating opportunities or seating at a tea or food stall is the only option available
	Active engagement (socializing and engaging in sports)	
	Excellent	option to practice at least two different types of physical activities (e.g., fitness training, badminton, jogging, roller-skating, strolling, etc.)
	Average	option to practice at least one physical activity
	Poor	no option of practicing a physical activity

* We used similar criteria to assess the situation in public gardens although we adjusted the scoring to take into consideration the fact that these are smaller places that are not designed for longer stays or multifunctional use. Hence, a public garden was scored as "excellent" if it had a refreshment service along with facilities for two types of activities or for one type of activity plus a strong visual feature (fountain, statue, etc.).

Sampling and Data Collection

This section summarizes the analysis of the degree of publicness in 18 parks (công viên) and 16 public gardens (vườn hoa) in Hanoi, based on the dimensions and scoring methods explained above. The sample used in this preliminary study is a subset of a list of 44 places officially identified as parks and public gardens on the 2010 official cadastral map of Hanoi obtained from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (see also table 1). Ten sites were discarded from this original list. We excluded places which are essentially privately operated commercial spaces (e.g., Hồ Tây Water Park, Bảo Sơn Paradise Park); display an atypical spatial configuration hardly comparable to parks or public gardens (e.g., around Hoàn Kiếm lake); or were inaccessible at the time of our survey (e.g., Cầu Đôi Park and Yên Sở Park).

Generally speaking, and in line with their definition in formal policies, parks are much larger than public gardens and are also more multifunctional in purpose. These differences appear clearly in our sample. On average, the parks of Hanoi cover about 110,000 m^2 while public gardens cover 7,000 m^2. The parks that we surveyed also tend to offer many more facilities than public gardens, especially with regard to recreational activities (e.g., badminton courts, children's playground equipment, etc.). Furthermore, parks are more likely to have a formal café or restaurant on their grounds than public gardens. As discussed above, we took into consideration differences in the nature of each type of public space in the scoring method used for this study.

Data for this survey were collected between December and August 2014 by a team of student researchers from Hanoi's National University and the University of Civil Engineering. Each public space was visited once, generally during a time of day when it is intensively used (e.g., the end of the afternoon, the early morning). Data collection included a photographic and visual survey of amenities, spatial organisation, and activities practiced by users.

Behavioural control presence

The presence of security guards is not a constant in Hanoi's parks. Nearly half of the parks that we surveyed have security guards posted at their entrances (8 of 17) while a similar number of parks (7 of 17) have no guards at all (figure 21). The two remaining parks in our sample had either security guards patrolling their grounds (Hòa Bình Park) or guards posted at their entrances and patrolling their grounds (Đống Đa Park).

Moreover, the presence of behavioural control observed in parks contrasts with that observed in public gardens. The overwhelming majority of these smaller public spaces (14 or 16) were not formally surveilled by security guards when we visited them. Only two public gardens, Thủy Lợi public garden and Hàng Đậu public garden, have security guards.
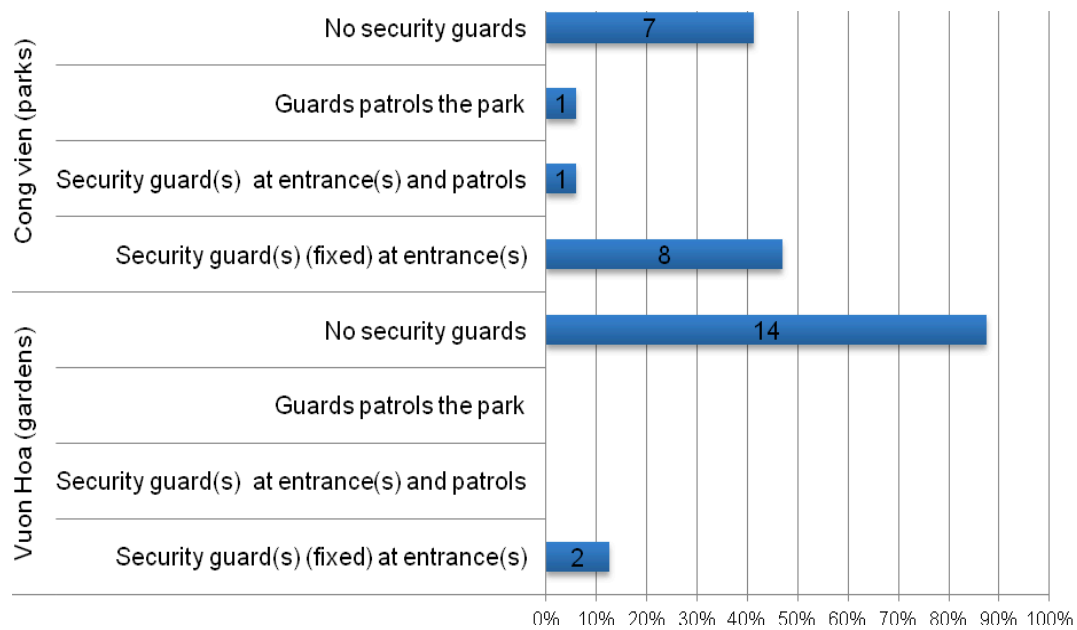
Civility

Physical Maintenance

Our data and analysis indicate that the quality of physical maintenance is highly variable in Hanoi's parks and public gardens. Globally, nearly two-thirds of Hanoi's parks and public gardens (21 of 34) benefit from excellent or good physical maintenance (figure 22). Of the remaining third, most public spaces are average in their level of maintenance (10 of 34) and only a small minority suffer from a poor physical maintenance (3 of 34). According to our data, the most common problem faced in those parks and gardens with poor physical maintenance relates to the management of waste. Illustrating this, in 14 out the 17 public spaces identified as having at least one maintenance issue, the most frequent problem was overflowing waste bins or litter on the ground.

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Provision of facilities

Almost half of Hanoi's parks and public gardens (16 of 34) provide an excellent variety of facilities to their users and about a third of the remaining public places (11 of 34) were given a score of "good" on this aspect (figure 23).

A majority of parks and public gardens provide some food or refreshment service. Nearly three out of four parks (13 of 18) and nearly two-thirds of public gardens (10 of 16) have at least one tea stall (*quán nước*). These are generally very small amenities which allow users to buy a glass of hot or iced green tea and small snacks (e.g., cucumbers, sunflowerseeds) at low cost. In most cases, the operators of these stalls use portable equipment (moveable stools and tables) that they carry in and out of the park on a daily basis. Also, over half of the parks surveyed (10 of 18) have at least one formal café or restaurant.
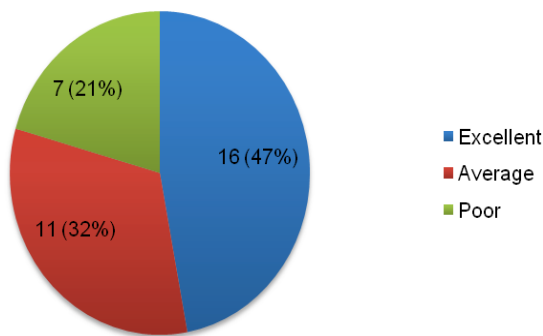
Figure 23: Provision of facilities in Hanoi's parks and public gardens (n=34). Source: Authors

Two-thirds of parks (12 of 18) have toilets. Nearly a third of public gardens (5 of 16) also have toilets despite the fact that they are intended to be used only passively and for short periods of time. The three parks in our sample that lack toilets are among the smaller parks in Hanoi (between 3,000 and 11 000m^2), and more like public gardens than full-fledged parks. Overall we found that parks scored much better than public gardens for their provision of public facilities. The majority of parks (13 of 18) were excellent. Only three parks were found to be poor: Cong Voi Park, Trung Yên Park, and Sài Đồng Park. Among these, Trung Yên Park, a relatively small park (though fairly large within the larger category of all public spaces), located in a newly urbanized zone at the near periphery of the innercity, offers no refreshment services or toilets despite the fact that it is about 10,000 m^2 (see figure 24).

Figure 24: Survey-plan of Trun Yên Park. Source: Pham, Thi Thanh Hien

The situation is a lot more problematic for public gardens. Over half of the public gardens surveyed (9 of 16) were received an "average" score for their facilities and nearly a quarter were scored as "poor." To give only one example, Trần Quang Khải public garden (figure 25) provides nearly no facilities, not even a tea stall. The place is very small but it is also far from being optimally utilized.
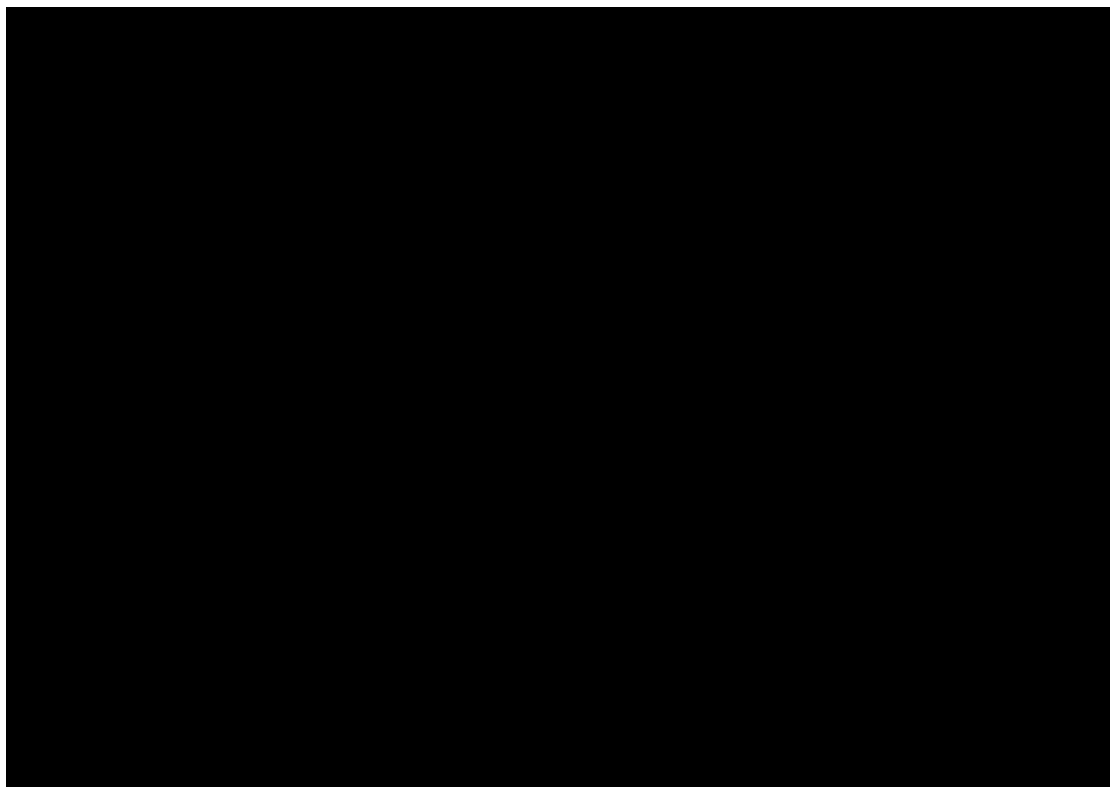
Figure 25: Survey-plan of Trần Quang Khải public garden. Source: Pham, Thi Thanh Hien

The lack of facilities in public gardens should come as no surprise. As discussed earlier, official policies confine these places to a relatively small function in the city. Public gardens are indeed meant to be used for short rests only and are not meant to support recreational activities. ***Considering the dearth of public spaces in Hanoi and the actual recreational use that the population makes of public gardens in practice, it might be worth revising this definition. Encouraging the provision of more facilities in these small public spaces, for instance, could potentially allow them to play a broader role in meeting the growing needs of Hanoi for multifunctional public spaces***.

Liveliness

Over four-fifths of the public spaces surveyed offer either some or many opportunities for passive engagement (such as people or bird watching) (figure 26). Even the public spaces that are considered to have "weak" seating options have at least one tea stall or ledges to sit down. Only one park (Sài Đồng Park) and one public garden (Lý Thái Tổ public garden – see figure 27) offer no seating options, (either public or belonging to a tea stall).
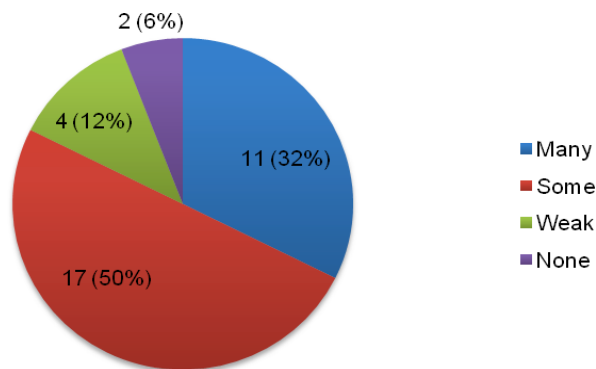
Figure 26: Opportunities for passive engagement (n=34). Source: Authors

Figure 27: Survey-plan of Lý Thái Tổ public garden. Source: Pham, Thi Thanh Hien

Finally, nearly all of Hanoi's parks (17 of 18) offer diverse opportunities for active engagement. Only one park in our sample, Sài Đồng Park, was scored as weak due to the lack of any area dedicated to sports. Echoing the situation observed in our analysis of the provision of facilities, the potential for active engagement in public gardens is a lot lower than in parks. Out of the 16 gardens surveyed for this project, only five offer diverse opportunities for active engagement and six were scored as weak in this respect. It is once again important to mention that public gardens are generally much smaller than parks and tend to be designed to serve more "passive" functions.

Exemplary versus problematic parks and public gardens

Nghĩa Đô Park: An exemplary park

Among the 18 parks analyzed in this study, Nghĩa Đô Park stands out as an exemplary case of publicness (see figure 28). This parks offers numerous and varied facilities to users (food and drink services, sports facilities, a playground area for children, public benches, toilets, etc.) in a very well kept and clean environment.

This park is rather large by the standards of Hanoi (more than 100 000 m^2). Despite the fact that most facilities are concentrated in the southeastern part (near one of the entrances) there are still other facilities (including cafés and toilets) spread out over the rest of the park's area. Trash bins are also found almost everywhere along the park's numerous pathways. It comes as no surprise that this park is both well appreciated and well used by Hanoians. The main weaknesses of this park are: that it charges an entry fee to users, has only two entrances, and is -- like all of Hanoi's parks -- surrounded by a fence which limits accessibility.

Figure 28: Survey-plan of Nghĩa Đô Park. Source: Pham, Thi Thanh Hien

Pasteur public garden: An exemplary public garden

As explained before, because public gardens are generally smaller and do not serve the same purposes, we used slightly less stringent criteria in assessing their publicness than those we used in assessing parks. On the basis of these criteria, Pasteur public garden (figure 29) emerges as an exemplary public garden in Hanoi. This average sized public garden (7,763 m^2) provides its users with an impressive number and variety of facilities which encourage both passive and active engagement with the place. This includes public benches, tea/food stalls, sporting equipment, and toilets. The physical maintenance seems to be good. Very little trash was noticed on the ground of this garden at the time of our visit. There is also plenty of greenery, but the public garden still offers a very good visual permeability.

Figure 29: Survey-plan of Pasteur public garden. Source: Pham, Thi Thanh Hien

Sài Đồng Park: A problematic park

At the other end of the spectrum, Sài Đồng Park provides a good example of what a park should not be (see figure 30). With the exception of pathways for joggers, this park offers little to no facilities. This is true for both passive elements, such as benches, as well as for facilities for active engagement (badminton courts, children's playground, etc.). The only active uses permitted by this park are walking, running, and cycling. This is a fairly limited offering considering the size of this public space (nearly 24,000 m^2). This park has no formal café nor does it have a food or tea stall. The cleaning regime is also questionable. At the time of our visit, there was not much trash littering the park's grounds but garbage bins were overflowing and the water in the pond appeared to be rather polluted.

Figure 30: Survey-plan of Sài Đồng Park. Source: Pham, Thi Thanh Hien

2 tháng 2 Đường Láng public garden: A problematic public garden

We assessed 2 tháng 2 Đường Láng public garden as a really weak public garden (figure 31). There are no facilities at all (except for a few tea stalls, which are almost all located in the same part of the garden). The cleaning regime is also inadequate as indicated by the large amount of trash observed on the grounds of this public space at the time of our visit. The place is mainly used as a parking lot and a motorcycle repair and rental point. It is also home to at least two different clusters of precarious, informal housing. All in all, 2 tháng 2 Đường Láng public garden seems to be more of an "empty lot" used for informal activities than an actual garden.

Figure 31: Survey-plan of 2 tháng 2 Đường Láng public garden. Source: Pham, Thi Thanh Hien

d) Conclusion

In this section, we have given a general overview of the evolution, accessibility, and quality of public spaces in Hanoi in the past decade. We have seen that while Hanoi has gained in the number of public spaces available, the increase in population has not meant a sharp increase in the number of parks, public gardens, or waterfronts per capita. Indeed, Hanoi is still far from reaching the target of 7m^2 of "green space outside of residential units" per capita. Moreover, accessibility to these public spaces varies widely across the city. In the inner city and in peripheral areas, there are still large areas where people do not have reasonable access (walking or biking distance) to a public space. Finally, the quality of these public spaces varies in terms of their level of publicness and their degree of encroachment.

4. What do youth do in public spaces?

This section is based on 60 interviews conducted with young people between the ages of 16 and 25 in our three main research site in Hanoi: Lenin Memorial Park, Hòa Bình Park and 34T Plaza in Trung Hòa Nhân Chính District, that focus on qualitative data. These surveys are complemented with results from surveys in four other parks with 402 respondents that focus on quantitative data (see section 3b for details on this survey).

The aim of this section is to highlight the kinds of activities in which youths engage in public spaces, and their perceived benefits especially as related to their ***health and social well-being***. The interviews asked youths what they do in public spaces, what they think about those activities and their opinions about the public space where the interview took place as well as their general opinion about public spaces in Hanoi. Our sample is composed of 50% young men and 50% young women, practicing diverse activities, coming to the park alone or in groups (with friends, in a formal group, with family members, colleagues, a romantic partner, etc.).

a) Activities practiced by youth in public spaces

Youths engage in a great number of activities in Hanoi's public spaces. Indeed, our survey of 402 respondents in Nghĩa Đô, Linh Đàm, Thành Công, Ngọc Lâm, and Nghĩa Đô show that of all respondents, 303 (54.7%) noted that their reason for visiting the park was for physical activity (playing sports and exercising), which makes clear the important role public parks play for this population as places to exercise. Though physical activity is a popular reason for visiting a nearby park, 180 respondents (32.5%) also said they had come to the park to meet friends and socialize, or to relax individually, ***making it clear that parks are also important places for socializing and individual relaxation*** (figure 32). Some respondents also mentioned coming to the park for reasons other than those explicitly listed on the questionnaire. These activities included people watching, dancing, playing music/singing, enjoying the fresh air and walking (which our respondents considered neither sport nor relaxation). We will further analyze these other activities in our qualitative study of Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park, and the 34T Plaza below.
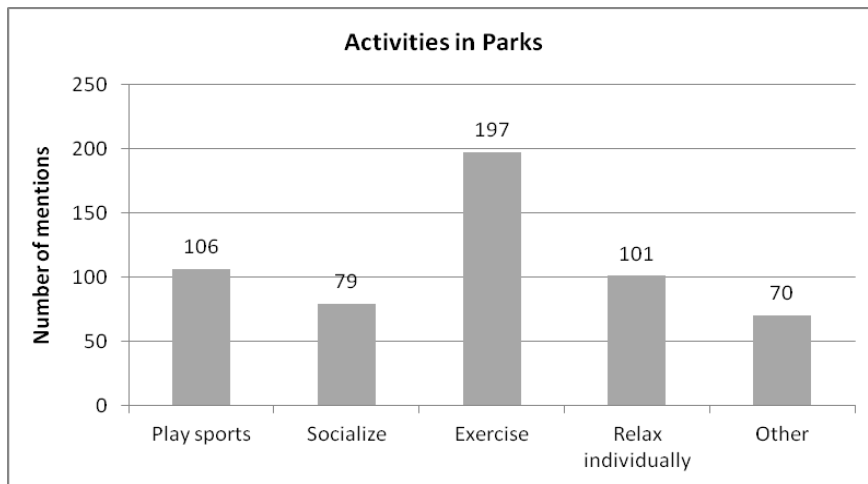
Figure 32: Activities in parks. Source: Authors

When breaking down the activities by gender we noticed a striking similarity between male and female respondents. There is a general perception that there are not that many differences between genders, and that women are free to practice any activities they like. As a young man interviewed at Hòa Bình Park explains: *There are not many differences in this park, but it depends on the sport. If the girl likes some sport, she can practice it without any differences. Women and men get along well with each other[19]"* (interview, HB-5, June 18, 2014).

We are able to gain some clarity about gender roles for park users by focusing on trips to the park by individuals (rather than groups) and the reported purpose of those trips. Among survey respondents, the distribution of males and females visiting the park to socialize, exercise and relax individually are more or less equal, showing that for this non-probabilistic sample, gender did not play a determinative role on the activity of the respondent. It was only with respect to engaging in sports that gender proved determinative. Taking into account data from all four parks in our survey, male respondents were more likely to visit parks in order to participate in organized sports (such as badminton, shuttlecock or soccer, figure 33).

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[19] ở đây gần nhý không có sự phân biệt nhiều. Tùy theo môn thể thao. Có thể có những môn thể thao các bạn nữ thích thì các bạn có thể chõi mà không có sự phân cấp nào. Nam và nữ vẫn chõi hòa đồng với nhau.
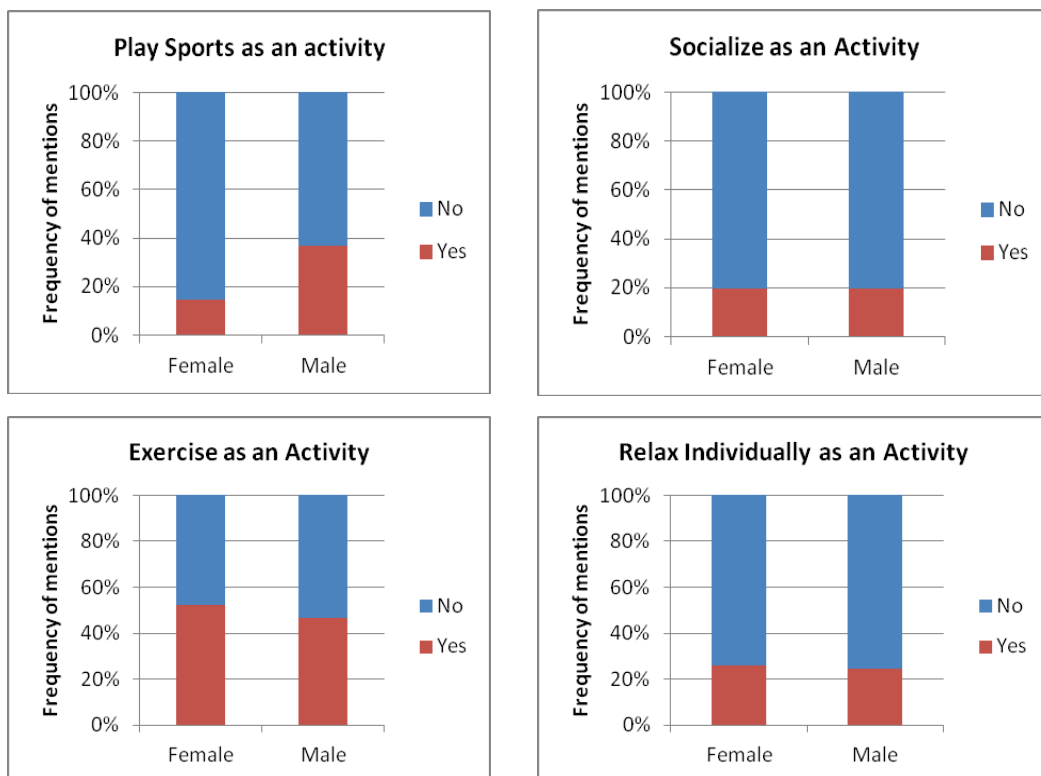
Figure 33: Activities broken down by sex. Source: Authors

Similarly in our three qualitative case study sites, women who practice sports typically practice inline skating, shuttlecock, badminton, or are members of dancing groups (table 5). Only a few female users skateboard, ride fixed gear bicycles or do parkour. Some other sports, such as soccer and martial arts, are done exclusively by boys. A girl at Hòa Bình Park explained how it might have to do with the attitude (insecurity) of young women when it comes to participating in male dominated activities, *"I think there are not many girls practicing because they might want to do so but when they think of joining a group full of strange men, they just feel shy. Nobody forbids girls from participating. She is actually the problem."* (interview, HB-7, June 18, 2014) (details in section 5).

Table 5: Static or sports activities by gender in Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park, and the 34T Plaza (total 60 interviewees). Source: Authors

	Male	Female	Total
Static activity	7	16	23
Sportive activity	25	12	35
Total	32	28	60

Furthermore, going back to our survey of 402 respondents, most of the travel modes used to get to the park did not appear to influence the activity in which the respondents participated. Respondents arriving to the park by foot, bicycle or motorbike, were not more likely to participate in one activity than another. However, those arriving to the park on public transit (bus) were more likely to use the park for non-physical activity, though these results may be heavily skewed by the small number of total respondents using this travel mode (figure 34).
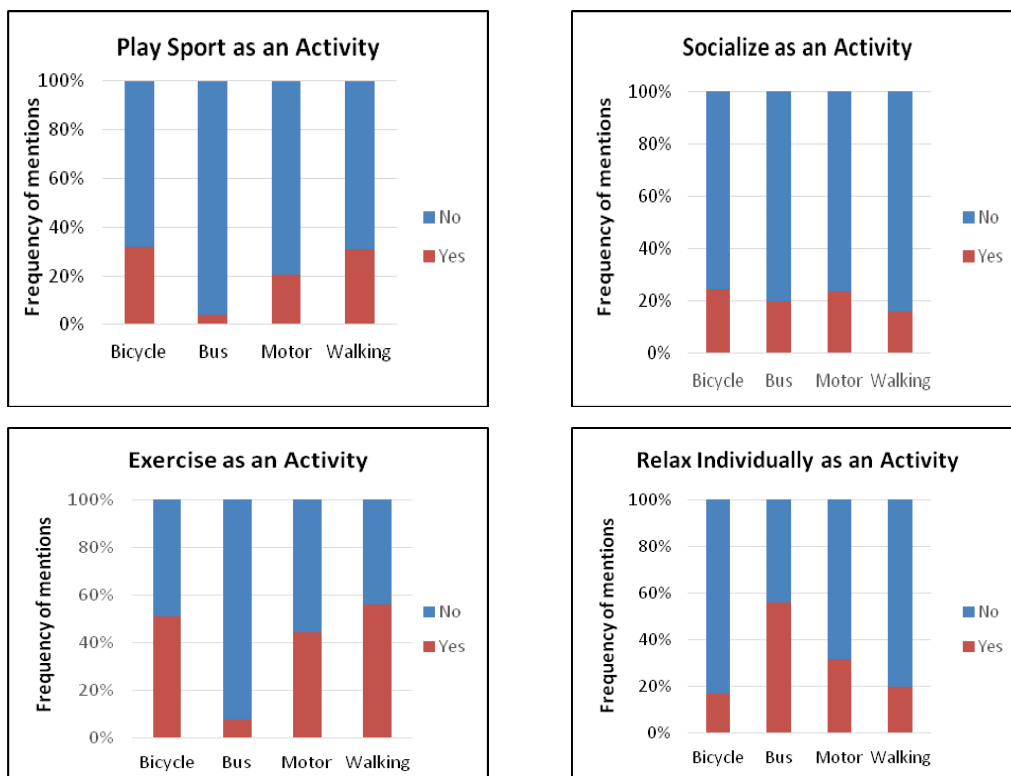
Figure 34: Activities broken down by travel mode.
Source: Authors

Following this gendered distinction between organized sports and other types of activities as it appeared in the large survey with 402 respondents, we decided to further analyze qualitatively the use of the park by youth. We divided their activities in two main types: static activities and sport activities. Static activities include hanging around, chatting, drinking tea or eating at a stall, dog walking, baby-sitting, playing music, reading a book or doing school work. Although these activities are less visible than the sports activities, we believe they are equally important for the quality of public spaces. Table 6 details what our 60 interviewees in Lenin Memorial Park, Hòa Bình Park, and the 34T Plaza do.

Table 6: Static versus sports activities in Lenin Memorial Park, Hòa Bình Park, and the 34T Plaza, 60 respondents. Source: Authors

	Static activity	Sportive activity	Total
Alone	**8**	**7**	15
Couple	3	2	5
With family	**4**	0	4
With a few friends	**6**	4	10
With group of friends	1	**10**	11
With formal group or club	1	**12**	13
With co-worker(s)	0	2	2
Total	23	37	60

Sports activities entail active movement and thus generally require more space than static activities. The sports practiced include conventional ones such as shuttlecock, badminton, soccer, martial arts, aerobics, dancing, working out and running, as well as newer lifestyle sports. Most of the lifestyle sports currently practiced in our three study sites first emerged in Western cities before spreading to the rest of the world, including Asia. These activities are sometimes referred to as "alternative" sports because they are different, but also as lifestyle sports because youths think of them as part of their lifestyle and identity. Examples of lifestyle sports are: skateboarding (figure 35), inline skating, free line skating, street dancing (break dance, house, popping etc.), parkour, freestyle soccer and freestyle bike riding (either BMX or fixed gear bicycle). Skateboarding, inline skating or street dancing (break-dance, hip-hop dance) are well known. In Parkour participants run, jump, vault and do gymnastic moves over and through the city's built environment and obstacles in ways that are intended to be fluid, graceful, efficient and creative (figure 36). Freestyle soccer consists in performing acrobatic moves with a soccer ball. BMX and fixed gear bicycles are specific bicycles used to perform tricks in addition to riding in the city.

Figure 35: Skateboarders practicing at 34T Plaza after school. Source: Authors

Figure 36: Parkour practice at 34T Plaza. Source: Authors

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If these lifestyle sports are more visible because they take up more space and are sometimes more spectacular, our three case study sites also show a wide diversity of uses ranging from working, waiting for someone, babysitting or walking a dog (figure 37). A little more than half of the youths we surveyed were engaged in a sport. Passive "activities" were the next most common: hanging out alone or with friends, sitting and chatting.
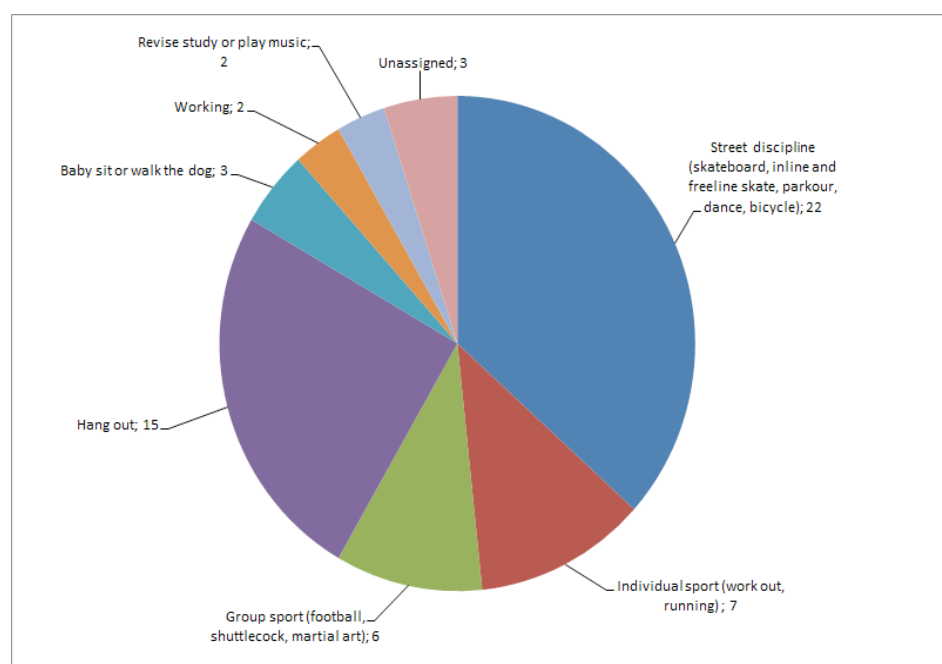
Figure 37: Range of activities in Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park, and the 34T Plaza, total of 60 individual interviewees. Source: Authors

With whom do young users go to public spaces?

Many young people enjoy going to the park alone to relax, read a book or study, walk a dog, or work out. Three quarters of the youths we interviewed went to the park accompanied (figure 38). They went with a few friends, with a girlfriend or boyfriend, with relatives or colleagues. As we saw earlier, a majority of youths go to public spaces to practice a sport, and they mostly do so as part of a group. This can be a formal club (as we found to frequently be the case amongst the following sports: fixed-gear bicycle, freestyle soccer, dance crews, inline and free line skate, parkour, etc.) or an informal group of friends (which was usually the case with those who were skateboarding, or playing soccer or shuttlecock). Formal groups or clubs generally have a name, a leader and structure, as well as fixed practice times and locations. These formal groups vary widely in size, from the very small to, for instance, the fixed-gear bicycle group we encountered that had over 100 members (figure 39). Informal groups of friends are, of course, less structured and regular in their activities. Unlike those engaged in sports those engaged in more static activities were never in large numbers and generally cam to the park either alone, or with just a few family members, or friends (figure 38).
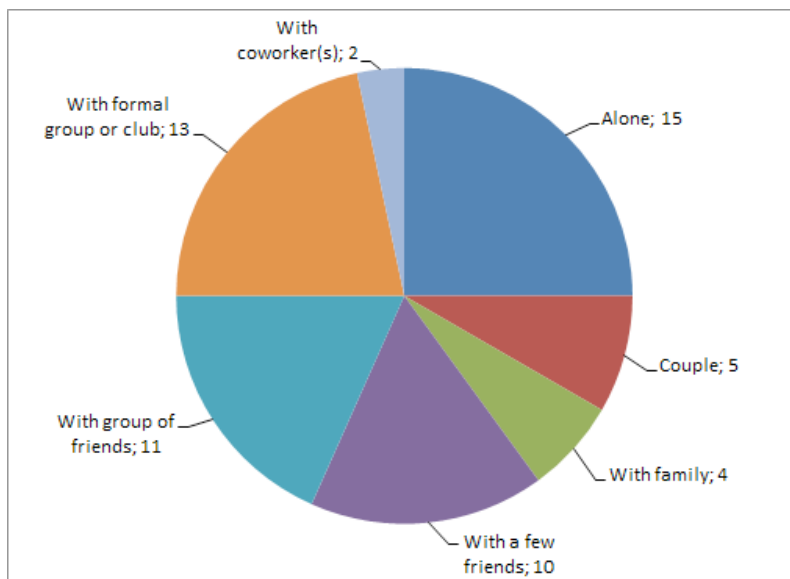
Figure 38: With whom do youth come to Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Square, and the 34T Plaza, total of 60 interviewees. Source: Authors
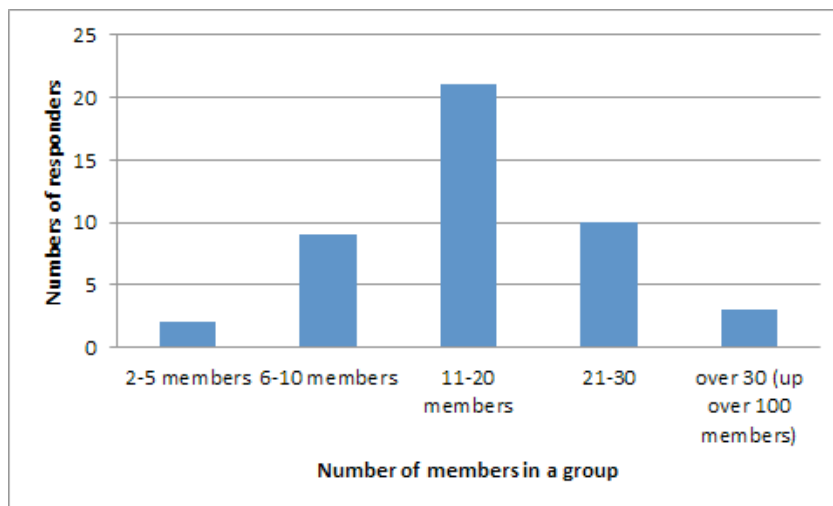
Figure 39: Numbers of members in youth groups (total 60 interviewees). Source: Authors

With what frequency and for how long do young people visit public spaces?

Most of the youths interviewed in Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park, and the 34T Plaza visit the park on a very regular basis (figure 40). Out of 60 respondents, 50 visit the parks where they were interviewed at least once a week. Some of them visit at least a few times a week and sometimes even up to two times per day. ***The high frequency of visits in our three study sites indicates youths' strong demand for these specific types of spaces in the city. It also suggests the importance that these places occupy in their daily lives.*** For instance, a youth explained, "*it's the main purpose when I come here with friends. Of course I come to exercise, to relax and refresh myself, because it is closed in, uncomfortable, and isolated at home*" (interview, HB-15, June 16, 2014).
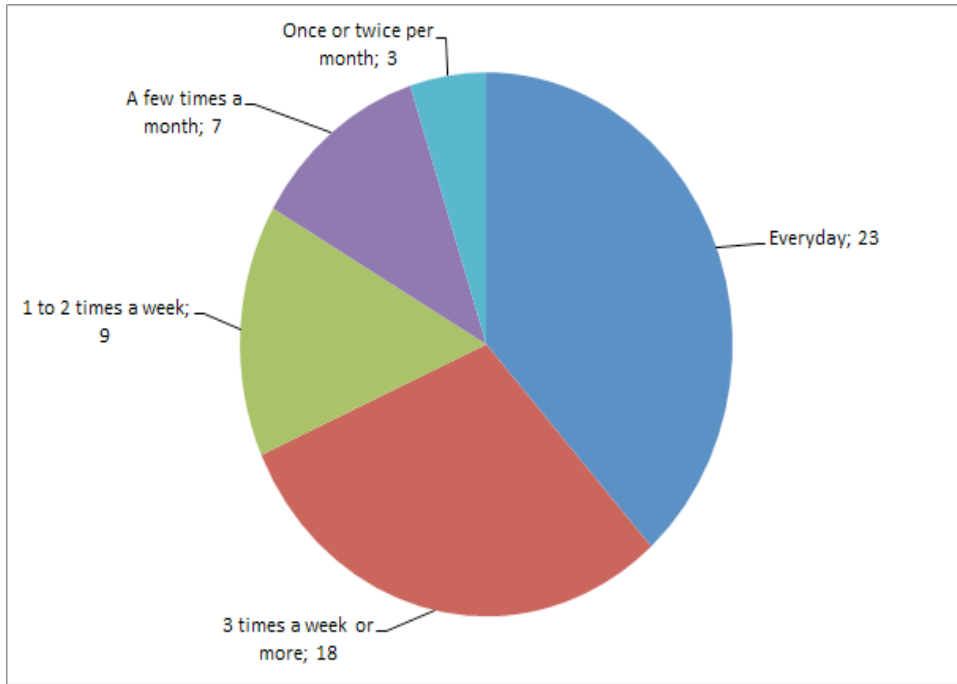
Figure 40: Frequency of visits to Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park, and the 34T Plaza (total 60 interviewees). Source: Authors

A majority of the youths interviewed go to the park for 2 to 3 hours. Some stay in the park for up to 6 hours. Only 8 interviewees out of 60 said that stay in the park less than one hour during any given visit (figure 41). ***These long stays are further indication of the great importance of these public spaces in the lives of the youths interviewed***.
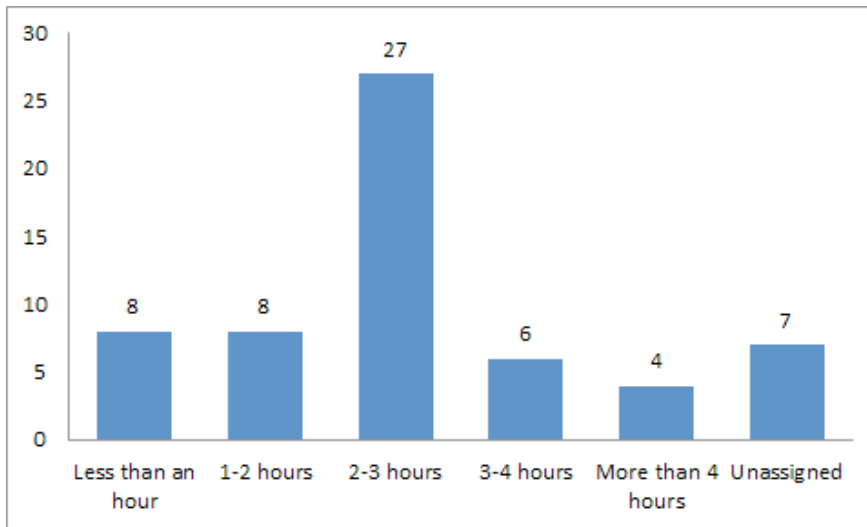
Figure 41: Time spent in Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park and the 34T Plaza (total 60 interviewees). Source: Authors

The specificities of each of the case study sites

As explained earlier, all three of the main study sites have large, flat, hard surfaces. These areas play an important role in the development of specific activities at each of these public spaces. Due to their various physical characteristics and their location in the city, there are some specific differences in the activities taking place in each of the study sites. In Hòa Bình

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Park (Peace Park), specific activities such as study groups or music clubs need quiet spots. For example, a flute player explained, "*it's good to learn how to play in a professional class but […] students are divided into small groups and don't interact with each other to learn. After coming here several times, I saw groups of students playing the flute together and that they get along very well. That's the reason I decided to come here*" (interview, HB-21, June 25, 204). The proximity of many university campuses makes this park very popular among students who often have free time and little money as a place to just hang out, but also as a place to study. The many couples who visit this park also appreciate the quiet, and value this park for its romantic lake scenery and quiet spots (see details in section 5).

The 34T Plaza is a smaller hard surface public space. People going to this place are mostly from the neighbourhood and activities there are less varied than at our two other study sites. There are fewer lifestyle sports practiced than at Lenin Memorial Park. This makes the Lenin Memorial Park the most popular public space for lifestyle sport practitioners, (those we might describe as part of the newly globalized youth culture that has emerged in Hanoi), amongst our three study sites (and indeed, possibly across the entire city). Youth users come from far way to visit the Lenin Memorial Park. There, we observed a mosaic of youth activities and lifestyle sports, including skateboarding, inline skating, different street dancing, BMX or fixed-gear bicycle riding, freestyle soccer, etc. Lenin Memorial Park is densely packed at night. Despite (or perhaps because of) this overcrowding, youth keep coming. This is likely due to the parks great accessibility (visible from the street, accessible from main city axes, no fences). In addition, the park is known as the place where lifestyle sports began in Hanoi, as such it came to be known as a 'youthful' place. For instance, a regular visitor of the park said to us, *"Lenin Park is a kind of meeting point. Every type of sport practitioner can come and do his thing in the park"* (interview, LN-19, 22 October 2013).

b) Diversity is what youth appreciate in Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park, and the 34T Plaza

Diversity of spaces and services within the parks

Confirming that liveliness is a strong criterion of publicness, the youths interviewed showed great appreciation for the diversity of spaces and services inside the parks, and the potential of the park to host a great diversity of activities. Hòa Bình Park, in particular, was given high praise for providing a variety of large flat areas where youths can practice inline skating, skateboarding, free line skating, playing soccer, dancing, etc. In addition, there are smaller areas where students can peacefully study, play music, chat with friends or talk intimately with their romantic partner. Youths also appreciated the services provided by vendors in the parks (figure 42). As a 22-year-old girl involved in sports in Lenin Memorial Park explained, *"when you practice a sport, you also want to relax, drink something, and chat with your friends. [Vendors' stalls] are also a good place to talk and make friends"* (interview, LN-2, August 26, 2013).

Figure 42: Youth resting at a tea stall in the back lanes of Lenin Memorial Park. Source: Source: Sylvain Rodrigue, 2012

Youths particularly appreciate the variety of floor textures, the presence of different types of urban furniture, and landscape design in general. For example, skateboarders, inline and free line skaters or bicycle riders enjoy a hard surface (especially made out of tiles), however, they also want to be challenged, and so they search for parts that are raised up so they can make jumps over them or from them. This is illustrated, for example, by the remark of a 21-year-old woman practicing inline skating at Lenin Memorial Park, who said, *"the surface is not too slippery, not too rough, it is smooth. That is the best thing for a skater"* (interview, LN-18, October 20, 2013). Or in the remark of a 22-year-old young woman walking her dog at Lenin Memorial Park, who said, *"This park also has a grassy area for my dog to run"* (interview, LN-2, August 26, 2013).

Lighting is also appreciated. Visitors to Lenin Memorial Park appreciate the fact that it is well lit at night. This is important for youths as they generally only have free time after 6pm when night falls. The square at this park is lit until 10PM, and although less well lit after that, it is still used until midnight. In the 34T Plaza, for example, a girl explained that the absence of lights is the reason why she does not come at night, saying, "*we're afraid of dark places*" (interview, 34T-15, 14 September 2013).

Diversity at the city scale

On a larger scale, the various public spaces that are free of charge in Hanoi seem to complement one another. In response to the question "Do you visit other public spaces in Hanoi?" interviewees would usually name many places and explain the different reasons why they visit other parks. We found that in general youths mostly visit public spaces that are free of charge. They like to change locations to seek out new challenges, and we witnessed that daily users of 34T Plaza, for example, also go to Lenin Memorial Park during the weekend, or youths who visit Lenin Memorial Park on a daily basis occasionally visit Hòa Bình Park. Youths enjoy discovering new places with different scenery and meeting other groups who share the same passion for sport. As a skateboarder practicing daily in the 34T Plaza explained, "*Sometimes we go to the Lenin statue or the Ly Thai To Statue. There are*

many other groups playing there. We rarely go to the far place because it takes time"
(interview,34T-1, August 2, 2013)

Diversity of activities

Youths place great value on there being a diversity of activities taking place in public spaces. Most of them practice only one activity (sports, socializing, passive engagement, etc.), but they enjoy being surrounded by many people who engage in different activities. They use words such as: 'great atmosphere,' 'happy atmosphere,' 'relaxed atmosphere,' 'sportive spirit,' etc. Lenin Memorial Park provides the greatest diversity of activities and is the most crowded. Youths really like this park. As an example, an 18-year-old fixed gear biker said, "*the atmosphere is fun and joyful, lots of teams practice in this park and watching them practice is quite entertaining*" (interview, LN-17, October 20, 2013). Another 25-year-old young man remarked, "*the atmosphere is very good; it is full of desire to practice and passion*" (interview, LN-19, October 22, 2013).

In Hòa Bình Park, a total of 11 interviewees expressed a positive opinion of the place, 6 explicitly mentioned that they enjoy the activities practiced there. In Lenin Memorial Park 7 interviewees out of 16 said the same. In 34T Plaza, only 2 youths mentioned this point. This is largely because in the 34T Plaza, there are not many different activities taking place, and this is likely due to the design of the plaza. Out of 6 interviewees expressing a negative opinion about the space, half argued that 34T Plaza lacks facilities to enable activities like badminton, table tennis or work out facilities. In the other two parks, however, youths also expressed similar complaints. In Hòa Bình Park, they complained in particular about not being able to play badminton.

Even one of the young women who does not go to public spaces anymore explains why the new activities (skateboarding, hip hop dancing, etc.) are particularly interesting: "*They attract more people to the park, people may come to watch them playing these fun and effervescent activities*" (interview NonUser-26, July 9, 2014). Public spaces in Hanoi offer a wide diversity of things to see that young people enjoy.

Many youths practicing lifestyle sports (such as skateboarding, biking or inline skating) wish they had a dedicated space to practice including rinks, slides and so forth. A 21-year-old student suggests that, "*there should be some facilities for people to do exercises because I see many people engaged in sports here but they have to bring their own equipment*" (interview, 34T-18November 9, 2013). In Lenin Memorial Park, youths also would like to see more supportive design and facilities for their sports. As a skateboarder explained, "*It would have a steel rail over there, so we could skate on it, or a slope for us to skate on and fly higher*" (interview, LN-2, August 26, 2013).

Diversity of users

Youths enjoy the presence of people of all ages in the park. People watching seems to be one of the most common activities among youths (and probably also among other users). Out of our 60 interviewees, 23 said they enjoy watching other people using the park. For example in the 34T Plaza, a 20-year-old girl from the countryside, who had been living in Hanoi for two years, explained that, "*I just come here to release stress and watch people and watch the elderly exercising. (...) I watch the elderly here and they remind me of my parents so I want to come here. I also come here to watch the children as they also remind me of my nieces and nephews, because I have many nieces and nephews*" (interview, 34T-11, August

23, 2013). Another example is a 19-year-old girl at Hòa Bình Park, who explained, "*When I come here regularly, I get to know some old people and can go for a walk with them*" (interview, HB-19, June 19, 2014)

However, the overcrowding of some public spaces is not always appreciated. Youths complain about high density and the problems it creates (see details in sections 6 and 7). Some of the interviewees (mostly girls) asked for separated spaces to allow them to fully practice their activity. For example a 19-year-old girl in the 34T Plaza suggested, "*This area is not comfortable (…) There are so many people today. It's often even more crowded. It's very crowded here*" (interview, 34T-4, August 21, 2013). Similarly in Lenin Memorial Park, a 21-year-old girl explained, "*It's best to play in separate areas. If each area had a different activity it would make the space less messy and people wouldn't bump into each other*" (interview, LN-8, September 8, 2013).

c) Benefits of using public spaces

Health benefits

Considering the high density of the city, green public spaces including trees and other plants are highly appreciated by youths. As an example, the most appreciated features of Hòa Bình Park were: scenery, generous greenery, benches and iced tea stalls on which youth can sit and enjoy the view (figure 43). In Lenin Memorial Park, youths especially enjoyed sitting or practicing their activities under the shade of trees during the hot days of summer. In the 34T Plaza, by contrast, youths dislike the lack of greenery.

As one youth explained, "*Trees produce oxygen to make us feel more comfortable, they make it airy and easy to breathe*" (interview, HB-8, June 19, 2014). Similarly, a young couple in Hòa Bình Park suggested more trees as improvement for the park, "*But we could plant some trees in the area that does not have any. A park needs a lot of trees*" (interview, HB-3, June 17, 2014). Youths also demand more trees in the 34T Plaza: "*Plant some more trees*" (interview, 34T-5, August 21, 2013). Another young visitor at the plaza further emphasized that, "*in Hanoi, there are few beautiful parks to play in. There are only a few parks such as Thống Nhất Park or Hòa Bình Park, other parks are too ugly, we cannot play in them*" (interview, 34T-7, August 21, 2013).

Another important reason for going out in public spaces is to enjoy being in an open space in the really dense city of Hanoi. Different words were used to describe the bio-climatic qualities of the different parks: 'cool,' 'windy,' and 'airy,' Nine out of the 16 girls that we interviewed specifically on gender issues reported 'fresh air' as a reason why they use public spaces. Many girls (8 of 16) listed sightseeing as one of their usual activities in public spaces. For the young women using Hòa Bình Park, the view is particularly prized: "*I go for a walk around the park and stop where the view looks nice*" (interview Gender-15, HB, June 15, 2014). When they talk of views, it has as much to do with the view inside the park as the view of the rest of the city as seen from the park. But it also has to do with the act of watching oneself, that is, having friends take your picture or taking "selfies". And pictures demand good background scenery, which Hòa Bình Park can provide with its lake, trees and flowers. Lenin Memorial Park is also good for these purposes, as an informant explained to us, "*There were one or two times I came here to take some photos during the flower season*" (interview Gender-11, LN, June 11, 2014).

Figure 43: Hòa Bình Park landscape. Source: Authors

Beyond trees to help with breathing and relaxation, public spaces have a positive influence on the health of youths as they support active lifestyles. Flat large surfaces enable them to practice sports (figures 44, 45). Being able to practice in public and being watched by many people gets other youths to join in the activities. We witnessed a correlation between the high frequency of visits to the parks and the practice of a sports activity. Sports users of parks tend to practice more frequently, especially if they belong to a group (table 7). We observe the same correlation with the time spent in the parks, which is higher for those engaged in a sport (with an average of visit of 2-3 hours) than for those coming for a static activity (with an average of 1 hour).

Table 7: Frequency of visits related to static or sportive activity, total 60 interviewees. Source: Authors

How often do interviewees come to the park	Static activity	Sportive activity	Total
Every day	4	19	23
3 times a week or more	7	11	18
1 to 2 times a week	6	3	9
A few times a month	5	2	7
Once or twice per month	2	1	3
Total	24	36	60

Out of 49 interviewees explicitly speaking about the benefits of using public spaces, 16 said that it is good for their health. As the leader of the parkour group at 34T Plaza explained, *"There are many benefits that this sport brings to us. Because it is very active it makes our bodies very flexible. I engage in this kind of sport to improve my health, and this is my passion"* (interview, 34T-19, November 16, 2013).

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Figure 44: Early morning class of martial arts in the 34T Plaza. Source: Authors

Figure 45: Running in Hòa Bình Park. Source: Authors

Socialization and mutual-assistance

Public spaces are great places for socializing, and many of those who go to parks to practice a sport do so in a way that makes of the sport a social activity with friends. In particular, joining a group is often a way for youths to meet new people (as explained in more detail in section 2d). One example is a girl from the city of Thanh Hóa who came to Hanoi to study, she found going to public spaces a great way to make friends in the city, as she explained:

> At first I just bought a pair of rollerskates for 700.000VND and I tried practicing in the park. I felt alone so I looked for places where other people rollerskate so I could join them for fun. (...), I felt bored playing alone in the park so I decided to come here. When I come here, I play with other people and I take part in this club and I've been a member for quite some time now. (interview, 34T-7, August 31, 2013)

Others did not find their new friends directly in the park, but met them on the Internet (in digital public space, as it were). After connecting through the Internet (largely through Facebook), they joined a specific group by coming to the physical public space where they practice. These youths come to public spaces specifically to learn an activity and to be part of a group. This is illustrated by a student in Hòa Bình Park who remarked, "*I come here because I have the idea of becoming skater*" (interview, HB-11, June 20, 2014).

Thus, visiting public spaces enables young people to meet others who share their passion for an activity (and life in general). This develops into new friendships and increases mutual assistance between youths. General young people are very willing to teach others (figure 46), and to participate in each other's activities. This can be seen in the remarks of a 24-year-old girl who visits the 34T Plaza specifically to learn how to inline skate after work. She said, "*People who know already would show me how to do it and then I follow their instructions and skate*" (interview, 34T-8, August 23, 2013).

Figure 46: Young girl teaching a little girl how to skate at 34T Plaza. Source: Authors

If mutual assistance is mostly about learning and improving skills, it can also help with personal problems within a group. We have witnessed how youths listen to each other and provide support to those who need assistance. In this way many students and especially newcomers to Hanoi find assistance in public spaces, for their studies for instance. Hòa Bình Park is a specific example of this. Surrounded by universities, the park hosts numerous study groups. They study together for school, practice English, or music. Out of 20 interviews conducted in Hòa Bình Park, 4 interviewees told us they belong to a study group.

Public spaces are great places to help integrate newcomers to Hanoi by providing them with a place for socialization (figure 47). In this way public spaces help prevent isolation and loneliness, in particular for students coming from far away and living alone in the city. As a 20-year-old boy from the countryside explained, *"Because this was the thing I enjoyed first when I first set foot in Hanoi. To find this place, it took me one week searching around this whole area. When I come here to play, I feel joyful and I can find things that I need"* (interview, 34T-6, August 21, 2013).

For the 16 young women we interviewed specifically on gender issues (section 5), socialization is one of the main reasons for using public spaces. For many young women, meeting with their friends or their boyfriend is the why they visit the park. They do many activities with their friends, chatting, taking pictures, inline skating, having a drink at the tea stall. Some young women also meet their boyfriends in the different public spaces of Hanoi. Most of them come with friends (11 of 16). A girl who walks her friend's dog in 34T plaza thought, *"they should come in a group, it will be more fun"* (interview Gender-13, 34T, June 13, 2014). Many share this opinion. Illustrating this, eleven participants associated the words 'fun' and 'happy' with going to parks 'in a group.'

Beyond being a fun place, public spaces can also provide a suitable space for more private encounters. A girl in Hòa Bình Park explained what she usually does in the park: "*When I feel bad, I usually ask my close friend to come with me to talk*" (interview HB-21, June 26, 2014). *Public spaces thus appear as good places for more intimate activities.* This is a well-known fact in Hanoi, where densities in residential areas make it difficult to find intimate spaces in the home. The density of the city means that many people live in cramped places, and this

contributes to the overcrowding of public space. The situation can be even more intense for students from outside of Hanoi who come to the city to study. Most of them live in rental housing (*nhà trọ*), which is low quality rental housing primarily for students (Nguyễn Hiến, 2013). These houses usually have thin walls, metal roofs, and are between 14 and 18m^2 with minimal facilities. Many students compare their *nhà trọ* during summer to an oven. The heat is trapped inside and does not go away all day, so during the summer students stay outside all day and only go home at night to sleep.

Most residents search for more space outdoors. A 24-year-old dancer in Hòa Bình Park explained why there are so many kids in the parks, he said, "*we don't have much space at home for kids*" (interview, HB-20, June 24, 2014). Or, a young woman, living in university accommodations, justifies her regular visits in 34T plaza: "*Because it's crowed here, and I come to play shuttlecock as well, to know more new friends.*" (interview Gender-19, 34T, June 26, 2014).

Figure 47: Friends in Hòa Bình Park. Source: Authors

Relaxation: A space to release daily stress

Because of the greenery, the scenery and the variety of users and activities that can be watched, public spaces offer a show to young people who prefer to rest and observe rather than doing something more active. Many of our interviewees said they come to parks to release stress or sadness and refresh their minds. Out of 60 interviews, 10 informants mentioned either 'stress,' 'bad mood,' or 'sadness' as a reason to visit the park. An 18-year-old girl in the 34T Plaza explained that, "*previously, I often got stressed because of studying, so I came here to refresh my mind then I met people rollerskating here, and they asked me to join in*" (interview, 34T-20, November 16, 2013). Or a 19-year-old girl in Hòa Bình Park explained that, "*three years ago, I came here in a very bad mood. I had a serious problem with my studies and decided to come here*" (interview, HB-21, June 24, 2014). Young working adults also mention this, illustrated by the explanation of a 24-year-old woman in the 34T

Plaza who said, *"I am very busy with my work on weekends, so I often take time during the week, whenever I have free time, to go out and relieve stress from my work"* (interview, 34T-16, October 10, 2013).

In our interviews with 16 young women about gender issues in the three case study sites, we found the same results. The feeling of releasing stress is the main reason invoked by young women for using public spaces. Nine participants used the expression 'to relax' to explain why they choose to spend time in parks. One girl explained her reason for going to Hòa Bình Park almost every day as follows: *"The name of the park means 'peace.' I don't know why but I felt very peaceful the first time I came here. I come here to go for a walk to release stress. Each day I have to take a different seat in the park and feel very new and fresh"* (interview Gender-17, HB, June 15, 2014). As we can see this feeling of relaxation is not associated with one activity in particular. For some informants just being there makes them feel better. A young woman who had just arrived in Hanoi to find a job tells us why she enjoys going to Lenin Memorial Park: *"I don't come to the square to exercise but I feel relaxed being here"* (interview Gender-9, LN, June 9, 2014).

d) Conclusion

Both our quantitative survey and our qualitative interviews show that youths engage in two types of activities in public spaces: static "activities" and sports. Young men tend to be more sports oriented than young women, although some women do practice a sport. Those who engage in physical activities are willing to come from farther away, they come more often, stay longer, and are more likely to come in groups. Whether they practice a sport or not, public spaces seem to be important for all youths and they spend sizeable amounts of their free time there.

Youths appreciate the diversity of activities, landscapes, and users and like it when the spaces are lively. While some youths did call for a more structured separation of activities in the park (mostly young women), most enjoy the diversity (see also section 7).

Youths enjoy health benefits from using public spaces. They appreciate trees and greenery, and are physically active in public spaces. They also appreciate the benefits of peer support and socialization. Particularly for migrant youths, public spaces are a means to counter isolation and loneliness. Finally, youths enjoy relaxing in public spaces; it has a beneficial effect on their mood and may even keep them away from more risky ways of releasing stress through drugs and alcohol.

5. Being a girl in public spaces

As in most societies the use of public spaces in Vietnam is highly gendered. What does being a young woman in public spaces in Hanoi mean? To explore this question we will show how gender norms affect the way young women in Hanoi use public spaces. Younger women are poorly represented in both Women and Youth studies, the specificity of their reality being embedded in broader contexts (Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007). This leaves young women few opportunities to express their concerns. This section seeks to let this particular group of youths speak of and for themselves. The objective here is to shed light on their specific experience of public spaces in Hanoi.

This analysis is based on 20 additional interviews with young women of which 16 are users of public spaces and four do not use public spaces anymore. The content of the other 60 interviews conducted for this project was also used to develop the analysis presented in the subsection entitled: "Young women in new activities".

We found the public space users we interviewed in Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park, and the 34T plaza in Trung Hòa Nhân Chính. The non-users were found through personal connections and snowball sampling. The 20 young women interviewed are between 16 and 25 years of age with the average being 21. None of them was married at the time of the interview. Eight still lived with their parents, while the rest of the informants lived in rental accommodations. Most participants were students with only 7 of them working, all of them in the service sector. In the group of users, 2 out of 16 were born in Hanoi, while the 14 others came from different provinces of Vietnam. In the non-user group, 3 out of 4 were from Hanoi. We identify four broad types of park users in the group of young women studied (table 8).

Table 8: Four types of female park users. Source: Authors

Regular users (7 of 16) who go to the park 4-7 times a week, mostly in the evening for 2 hours	Weekly users **(4 of 16) who go to the park 1-3 times a week and stay there for 1- 6 hours, at various times of the day**
Casual users (3 of 16) who go to the park 1.5 times a month, generally in the evening for a period of time of about 1.5 hour	**New users** (2 of 16) who at the time of interview were on their second or third visit, with each visit lasting about 0.5 hour

a) How important are park visits to the everyday lives of young women?

The twenty participants seem to be in a crucial period of their lifetime; some of them are studying hard to get into university, while others have just finished college and are looking for a job, or have just started a new one. Despite being close in age and facing similar life circumstances, these young women enjoy a range of different leisure activities.

Their favourite activities include watching television and movies, listening to music, surfing the internet, and hanging out with friends. For most of them, going to the park is just another activity among the list enumerated above. Yet, some young women indicated that going to the park is their preferred way of enjoying their free time. A 24-year-old who lives with her brother explained that, "*it's more comfortable to go out rather than being at home*" (interview Gender18, 34T, June 26, 2014). For two friends using the 34T Plaza at Trung Hòa Nhân Chính, inline skating is their favourite activity (interview Gender-12, 34T, June 13, 2014; and interview Gender-14, 34T, June 13, 2014).

There are also informants for whom park visits are unsatisfactory experiences. One girl who lives near the Bách Thảo Park explained that she does not go there anymore: "*[I] don't like to go there any longer […] because exercising there every day got boring*" (interview NonUser-29, August 12, 2014). Some of this relates to wanting to do different kinds of things than are typical of park settings, such as going to cafés to hang out with their friends and socialize. One girl who did not go to parks preferred to go to the gym. (interview, NonUser-26, July 9, 2014).

Parental approval

Young women told us that their parents mostly see park visits as a good thing because of the various ways it benefits their child. For example, one young woman who had been in Hanoi for only a month said that her parents know that she goes to Lenin Memorial Park: "*Generally speaking, my parents approve of me coming to the park because it makes me know more play areas in Hanoi*" (interview Gender-9, LN, June 9, 2014). A girl in Hòa Bình Park explained what her parents, both working in the agricultural sector outside of Hanoi, think of her going to this park regularly: "*I come here to relax. My parents understand that I don't do anything bad here so they approve of it*" (interview Gender-22, HB, July 5, 2014). On the other hand, there are also young women who do not tell their parents of their park visits because they feel that they would not care much about it. Finally, some parents do not approve of their child going to parks. One young woman who was newly arrived in Hanoi had to convince her parents to let her visit Lenin Memorial Park: "*because they think young girls should not be allowed to go out at night*" (interview Gender-8, LN, June 9, 2014). We only encountered this opinion about girls going out at night once.

b) Limitations girls face in public spaces

Young women visiting public spaces in Hanoi do not feel that they are transgressing rules by being there because there are many women like them using those spaces. Some of the participants (6 of 20) feel that there are as many women as men using Hanoi's public spaces. Others think it varies from one public space to another or, that it depends on the time of day: "*I see that more men than women come to Lenin Memorial Park while more women than men come to Thống Nhất Park*" (interview Gender-9, LN, June 9, 2014); "*at this time in the evening, more women than men are in the park*" (interview Gender-22, HB, July 5, 2014). Two participants said there might be fewer women. The perceptions of women's presence thus varies a lot, but mostly they do not think that there is anything limiting women's use of publics spaces: "*Nowadays, boys and girls come to parks equally, there is no discrimination at all*" (interview Gender-13, 34T, June 13, 2014).

However, some of the informants think women do face some restrictions on their use of public spaces. An accountant who is a frequent user of 34T plaza points out that **household chores** are one of these limitations: *"Married women are less [present in parks], because they tend to be at home to do housework, and take care of their children in the afternoon. After their work time men are more free"* (interview Gender-18, 34T, June 26, 2014). Housework can impact the lives of younger women as well; two of the participants explained that they can go out only after they have completed their housework. Also, the reduction of free time in general can affect them. Three of the 20 participants stated that they do not have enough free time to visit parks anymore. A casual user of Hòa Bình Park explained: *"I used to come here on the weekends with my boyfriend. Now I come less than before. About once or twice a month, because after work I get home late and feel very tired, and I just want to sleep and don't want to go out"* (interview Gender-21, HB, July 5, 2014).

Furthermore, none of the female park users interviewed for this project thinks that other users of public spaces are judging them. But one of the non-users, a 16-year-old pupil, thinks otherwise, affirming that young women who go to public parks are "*not lady-like, and might have questionable mores*" (interview NonUser-29, August 12, 2014).

Perception of safety

Half of the female park users interviewed indicated that they generally feel safe when they are in a park. Informants, however, mentioned that they do occasionally feel in certain situations. One such situation is when there are few people around or when they are alone. For instance, one young woman who always meets her friends at the 34T Plaza said that, "*If young women come alone, they are properly flirted with or even harassed; it's not safe for them*" (interview Gender-12, 34T, June 13, 2014). Another young woman interviewed at Hòa Bình Park explained that, "*I do not feel very safe if I come here alone. But I am always here with my friends, so I am not worried at all*" (interview Gender-22, HB, July 5, 2014).

Another situation that young women said made them feel insecure was being out at night, in the dark. Five young women told us that it is less safe in the evening or at night. For one informant in Hòa Bình Park, "*Young women should beware when coming to park late at night*" (interview Gender-21, HB, July 5, 2014).

Surprisingly, considering how important this theme is in the official discourse on safety in the city, social evils were not identified as a concern by the women we interviewed. The presence of security guards was, however, mentioned as a reassuring factor by six participants. A 24-year-old regular user of the 34T Plaza remarked: "*Yes, I feel really safe because there are the many security guards of the buildings around here*" (interview Gender-18, 34T, June 26, 2014). Moreover, for some of our informants their feeling of insecurity is driven less by their experiences in the park than it is by **how they get to the park and back home again**. A student who goes to Hòa Bình Park almost every day explained: "*It's not safe to go home from here late. […] If I have to go home late from here I will follow a crowd or a group*" (interview Gender-17, HB, June 15, 2014).

Harassment

Even though many female users think that parks are not always safe, when we questioned them, they did not recall having experienced seriously unpleasant incidents themselves, or at least not many. In fact, most of them said that they had never had a genuinely negative experience in a park. One student said, "*men and boys coming to this park are nice and*

funny" (interview Gender-17, HB, June 15, 2014). However five out of our 20 interviewees had a story of harassment to tell. In four of these they had witnessed guys trying to flirt with a girl who clearly was not interested. It happened to one of the informants who goes to the 34T Plaza to inline skate with her friends almost every evening. She emphasized that it was a minor incident, and said, "it was just that a guy blocked my way [once in the park], and then teased me a bit." (interview Gender-12, 34T, June 13, 2014). Within the group of women we interviewed, concerns about harassment seemed mostly based on perceptions rather than actual seeing, or personal experiencing, harassment.

Safety strategies

It is important to contrast these few events of harassment reported in interviews with the many strategies girls deploy to feel safe in Hanoi's public spaces. The first safety strategy mentioned is to come in a group. Most of the young women (11 of 20) say it is safer for them to go to parks with friends. Only one girl indicated that being accompanied by a man is a good safety strategy: "*They should come with a man to feel safer*" (interview Gender-21, HB, July 5, 2014). Thus, the idea that it is more appropriate for a girl to come to a park with a male protector emerged as a marginal viewpoint in the group that we interviewed.

In addition to coming with friends, interviewees also mentioned going to crowded places as a strategy they used to feel safer: "*I just don't like going alone to a deserted park in the evening. But it's very crowded here in the square, so I don't mind*" (interview Gender-14, 34T, June 13, 2014). But overcrowding has to be tempered by the type of people you find. In this sense, some participants specified that they feel comfortable when other users are polite, well educated, and old.

The lighting of the space also has a direct influence on the perception of safety. One woman explains that this shapes the way she uses the space of the park: "*I usually take a seat near the lights*" (interview Gender-9, LN, June 9, 2014). Lenin Memorial Park is well lit and this explains partly why fewer informants think the park is unsafe.

A last important point mentioned by interviewees in relation to safety is the idea that the way you are dressed impacts your sense of safety. A student who is a new user of 34T Plaza told a story of harassment: "*Some young girls who wore sexy clothes were seriously harassed*" (interview Gender-13, 34T, June 13, 2014). This idea is reinforced by the opinion of a young migrant who enjoys Hòa Bình Park: "*I do not dare to wear a short skirt or dress if I come to a public space alone. I don't want to make myself conspicuous, it's to avoid being harassed*" (interview Gender-21, HB, July 5, 2014).

c) Limitations on female activities in public spaces

Although our informants did not emphasize many differences between men and women when it comes to accessing public spaces, this view becomes more nuanced when we examine their activities in greater detail. Most of the participants (13 of 20) indicated that women use public spaces for different purposes than men. These gendered differences are easily described: 10 young women out of 20 thought that men do what they referred to as "stronger" activities, while women do "lighter" or "softer" activities. This is further confirmed by the results of our quantitative survey of 402 respondents (section 4a). When they spoke of men's stronger physical activities, our interviewees referred most often to

jogging and soccer. Women, our informants indicated, engage in a greater variety of activities than men, but they are also quieter activities: they lounge on a seat or take a walk, take photos, and chat with their friends. In the words of a casual user in Hòa Bình Park: *"Girls usually come here and just take a seat and chat with each other, while boys take part in vigorous physical activities. Boys come here for sports and exercise more than girls do"* (interview Gender-15, HB, June 15, 2014).

Participants gave different reasons for theses disparities. On one hand, they think that boys are naturally better at the vigorous activities: *"There are fewer girls than boys in these activities, because boys do strong movements better"* (interview Gender-13, 34T, June 13, 2014). On the other hand, we were told that women are not strong enough: *"Generally, girl's physical strength is not as good as boy's"* (Interview Gender-19, 34T, June 26, 2014).

Informants also spoke of limitations associated with the social norms regarding how young women are supposed to behave in public spaces and beyond. A college girl living in Bac Từ Liêm remarked: *"Because, in society, girls are supposed to be gentle and charming, so they just take a walk or wander in the park. […] Women hesitate to do strong physical activities like men do, they are afraid of standing out in a public space because others may judge them"* (interview Gender-17, HB, June 15, 2014).

This view is closely related to the idea that women's time in parks should be devoted to taking care of their children: *"I do not think women come less than men, many of them take their children to the square in the evening"* (interview Gender-11, LN, June 11, 2014); *"Many women come here to exercise, and take their children for a walk"* (interview Gender-19, 34T, June 26, 2014). In short, what is expected of women, both in terms of behaviour and responsibilities, is less a limitation on their presence in public spaces than it is on the ways they think they should use these spaces.

Young women in new activities

Somewhat contrasting with the views discussed above, young women who are taking part in new activities like hip hop dancing, skateboarding, etc. are thought of as "stylish," but also as having embraced a way of life that situates them partly outside of the social norms discussed so far. The expression "stylish" was used by five participants to describe these young women. With regard to ways of life, one informant remarked: "*I feel they have a special way of thinking and lifestyle*" (interview Gender-13, 34T, June 13, 2014). Another girl mentioned the idea of breaking with social norms more explicitly: "*Normally girls act feminine. But those girls who engage in such strong activities manage to combine their femininity with a strong personality. They are very active and energetic*" (interview NonUser-20, July 4, 2014).

Figure 50: Video produced by Alice Miquet, available at http://vimeo.com/89526672

Many of the groups interviewed said they had fewer women members than men even though women are welcome. Young women also seem to practice their sport less often than young men. Of the 20 interviewees, three were taking part in a new activity. Seven wished that they could also engage in such sports but that they couldn't because the lacked free time, didn't know how to get started, or were afraid of getting hurt.
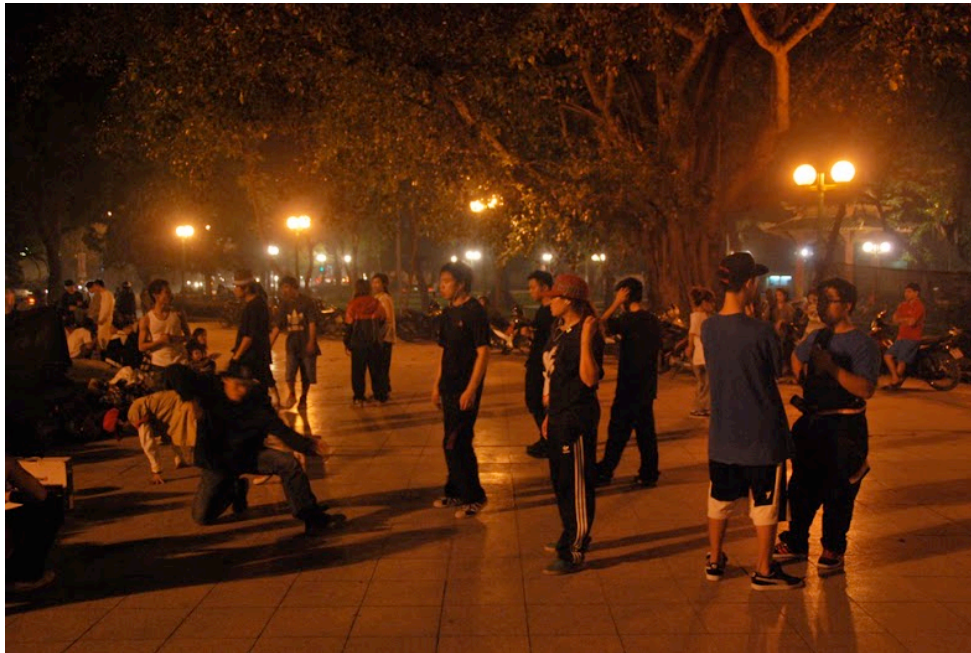
Figure 51: Hip hop dancers in Lenin Memorial Park. Source: Authors

d) The wishes of young women

Finally, it is important to know what young women want when they choose to spend time in Hanoi's public spaces. To get a sense of what they want and need we asked them what changes they would make to the parks they visit if they could.

The most popular suggestion was to **have larger parks**. Half of the informants wished there was more space because they felt it was too crowded. Informants mentioned, in particular, that there is not enough space to accomodate new activities like skateboarding and roller-skating. A young woman who goes to Hòa Bình Park almost every day to relax explained: "*Those activities use up a large amount of space, there should be a particular playground for those activities. Imagine how annoying it is when they skate right in front of where we are walking*" (interview Gender-17, HB, June 15, 2014). This informant and three other young women mentioned the idea of more spatial segregation for different activities. For them, it would be better to have a specifically designed space for youths'activities. According to some users of Lenin Memorial Park and the 34T Plaza this segregation strategy should be expanded to vendors. This stands in contrast with how young men see their ideal park (section 7).

In line with their special relationship to the natural environment of the parks, some young women would like to see more trees and green spaces, as well as more lakes. For them these elements would help to have a beautiful view and an interesting background to take pictures. Two informants would also like to have more animals in the park because it would be an interesting activity for youths. This is also closely tied to the assessment, common among our informants, that parks do not offer enough organized activities, with a strong emphasis on the lack of amenities for small kids.

Finally, some interviewees also appreciate the fact that some parks are free of charge. It has a direct influence on their choice of park. For example, a young saleswoman in a small company explained that she chose to come to this park *"because there is no entrance fee to access the park"* (interview Gender-21, HB, July 5, 2014).

One of the informants who did not go to parks anymore described her ideal park. It is a perfect summary of all these ideas:

> *I care a great deal about the space of the park. Because it's very crowded, noisy and polluted on roads and streets, I want large spaces in parks for us to exercise and hang out with friends. It should be a large space and have few vendors or stalls. Of course, it's very good to have a lake inside the park and some amusements for kids like slides for example. And I want the park to be well-designed with beautiful views for the young people what want to take photos* (interview NonUser-20, July 4, 2014).

e) Conclusion

For the young women interviewed, going to public spaces is their preferred leisure activity. However, they face constraints in using the space compared with young men, because they lack free time, fear for their safety, and don't like being harassed. They develop a number of safety strategies to counter these limits, such as going to parks in groups, choosing more crowded places with good lighting, and dressing 'properly.'

Parents generally approve of their daughters going to public spaces, and they generally perceive that there are no gender inequalities. However, they insist on gender differences in the types of activities women do in public spaces, qualified as "softer" and often times related to taking care of children and younger siblings. The women interviewed, however, see the young women who practice lifestyle sports as 'stylish' and speak of their 'socially transgressive' activity in positive terms.

Young women want larger parks that do not have entrance fees and that have a clearer separation of activity spaces.

6. Constraining and enabling youth use of public spaces

Youths in Hanoi are enabled or constrained in their access to, and use of, public spaces; this section provides an overview of these issues. We begin by presenting the quantitative survey conducted in four parks, in order to give an overview of general constraints expressed across the city. We then delve into the qualitative interviews conducted with 60 youths at the three case study sites (Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park and the 34T Plaza). We also conducted a shorter survey in our three case study sites with 150 respondents to provide general background specifically for our case studies. The following analysis further builds on systematic observations in the three sites and interviews conducted with 20 urban and built environment professionals.

The section is structured in five subsections. We begin by, a) presenting the general constraints on accessibility to public spaces in Hanoi, based on a survey of 402 respondents. Then we, b) explore issues of overcrowding and competition for public space. We go on to consider the impact that, c) management authorities, rules, and their implementation have on youths as constraints on their activities. We then turn to, d) a consideration of the views of young people concerning privatization processes, and encroachment on public space. Finally we, e) explore societal controls on youth lifestyle sports and on the use of parks by romantic couples.

a) Travel obstacles, Mode of Travel, and Park Selection

In order to examine the possible obstacles that could be encountered during a typical visit to a public park, we asked 402 respondents in Nghĩa Đô, Linh Đàm, Thành Công, Ngọc Lâm, and Nghĩa Đô to mark down on the questionnaire the obstacles they encountered on a typical trip to the public park (figure 52). Somewhat unsurprisingly and undoubtedly influenced by the collection of questionnaires in the hotter summer months, over 35% of respondents cited heat as the major obstacle they faced during a typical trip. Hanoi's hot summers can make even the shortest of walks difficult, and these hot days heavily influence the times of day that park-goers visit their neighbourhood park, often opting for the cooler mornings and evenings.
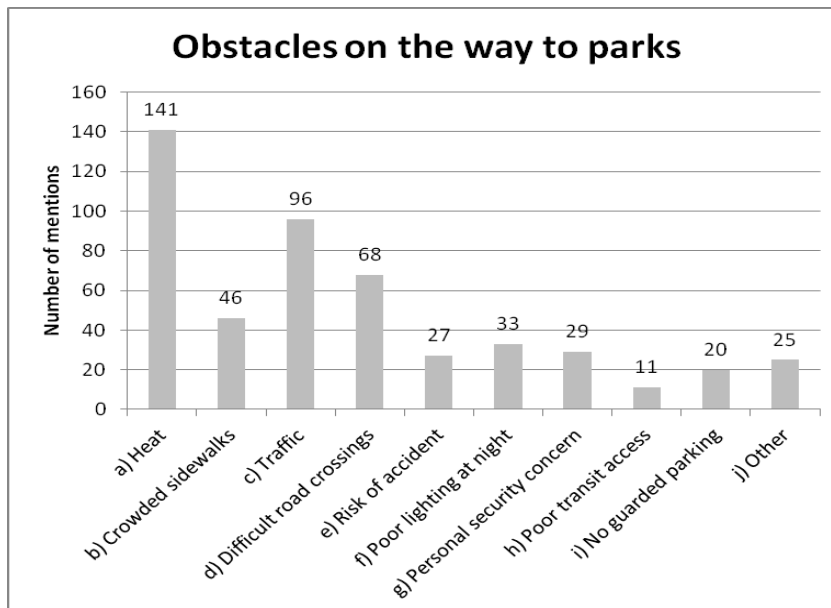
Figure 52: Travel obstacles on the way to parks (interviewees were permitted to cite more than one obstacle). Source: Authors

The overall quality of the road network was also an obstacle that affected the accessibility of parks for many respondents, while others found traffic, difficult road crossings and crowded sidewalks to pose problems. Obstacles such as these can have a direct negative impact on both the overall quality and enjoyment of walking and the speed at which one can move through urban space whether by walking or by using another form of transportation. Risk of accidents, while mentioned as an obstacle by just over 5% of respondents, also points toward the often-chaotic traffic environment that some respondents face during the trip to a public park.

When breaking down the number of times either traffic or difficult road crossings are mentioned by respondents as obstacles according to the travel mode used, we can see that these obstacles are of equal concern for all respondents regardless of the travel mode (see figure 53). ***This underlines the significant impact a poor road network can have not only for those on motorbike, but also for those walking or taking a bicycle to a public park***.
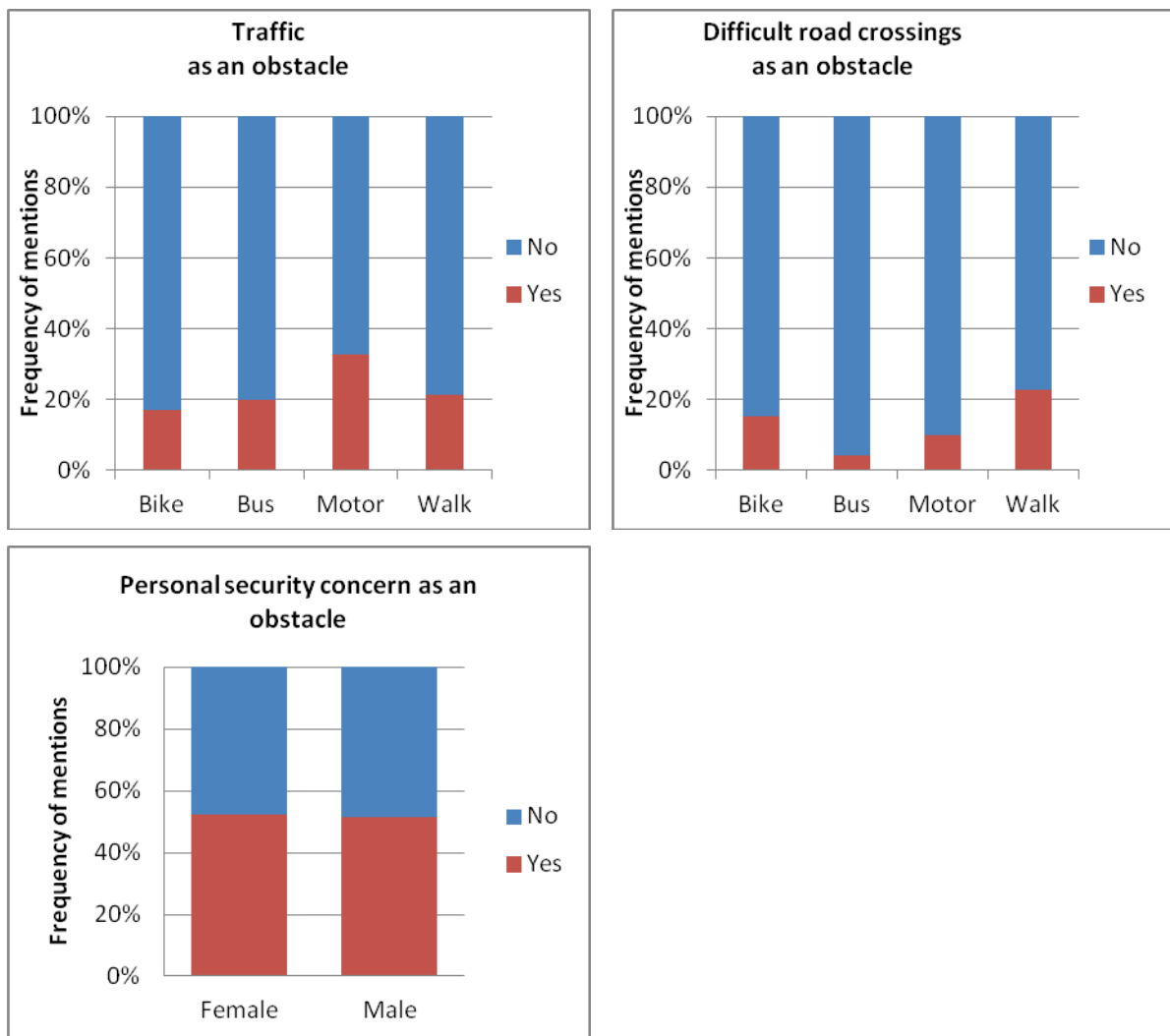
Figure 53: Three main obstacles broken down by travel mode and sex. Source: Authors

In all of the 402 questionnaires only a few respondents mentioned encountering obstacles directly pertaining to the use of the park itself. A poor sense of personal security, and lack of lighting at night (whether at the park or along the way to the park) were cited as obstacles by less than 10% of respondents, revealing that most users feel comfortable and safe when frequenting the studied parks. The lack of guarded parking was only a minor concern for a small number of respondents at Linh Đàm Park, where no guarded parking is available. Looking more closely on the percentage of female and male respondents that mentioned security, we do not find any major difference between the two sexes (figure 53). This confirms what we have seen in our qualitative interviews about gendered use of parks. Furthermore, due to the very limited number of respondents that used public transit to access the studied parks, very few mentioned poor transit access as a significant obstacle during their trips to the park.

These results show that, apart from heat, youths responding to our questionnaire were most likely to face obstacles associated with the quality of Hanoi's road network. In all cases, the vast majority of obstacles faced by the respondents are directly experienced during a trip to the park and are related to the perceived level of mobility, security and comfort of the respondent during the trip to the public park.

Our questionnaire also sought to examine why respondents chose to come to a particular park rather than visit another. In all four spaces surveyed for this large questionnaire (Thành Công Park, Nghĩa Đô Park, Linh Đàm Park, and Ngọc Lâm public garden), respondents generally noted proximity to their home as a significant reason for choosing the park they had chosen. This highlights two significant realities: (1) the youths surveyed for our study choose which park to visit based on its proximity to their home, and (2) respondents travel to the park from their homes more than from any other location. (In response to the question, "where are you coming from?" almost 29% of the respondents said they had come from home). Many respondents also mentioned that the presence of friends in the park also acts as a significant reason for their visit, showing once again the important role of the park as a space for socialization and interaction amongst youth (section 4). ***Coupled with the close proximity to home, these public parks often become important spaces for youth to meet outside of their homes and where groups of youth can participate in activities together rather than individually*** (figure 54).

With the exception of going to a particular park because it offers a specific activity desired by the respondent, there were very few gender differences for reasons for park choice (figure 55). Respondents rarely mentioned that a park's size or physical attributes (beauty, landscaping or crowding) influenced their decision to go to a particular park. However, in our qualitative interviews with 60 youths in Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park, and the 34T Plaza scenery and beauty were mentioned as important features for park selection.
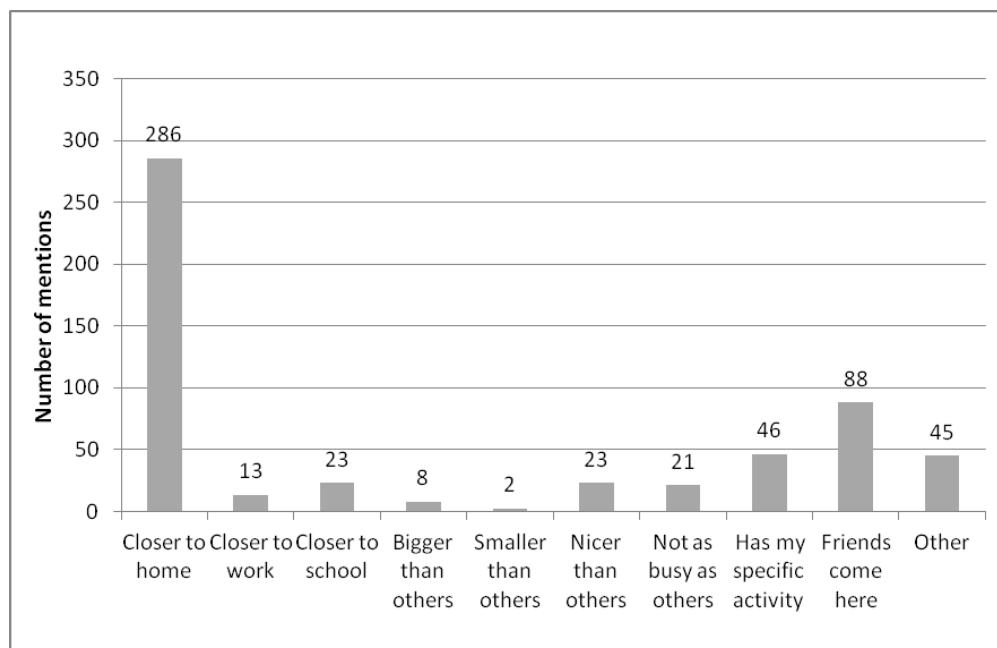
Figure 54: Reasons for picking a particular park (park selection). Source: Authors
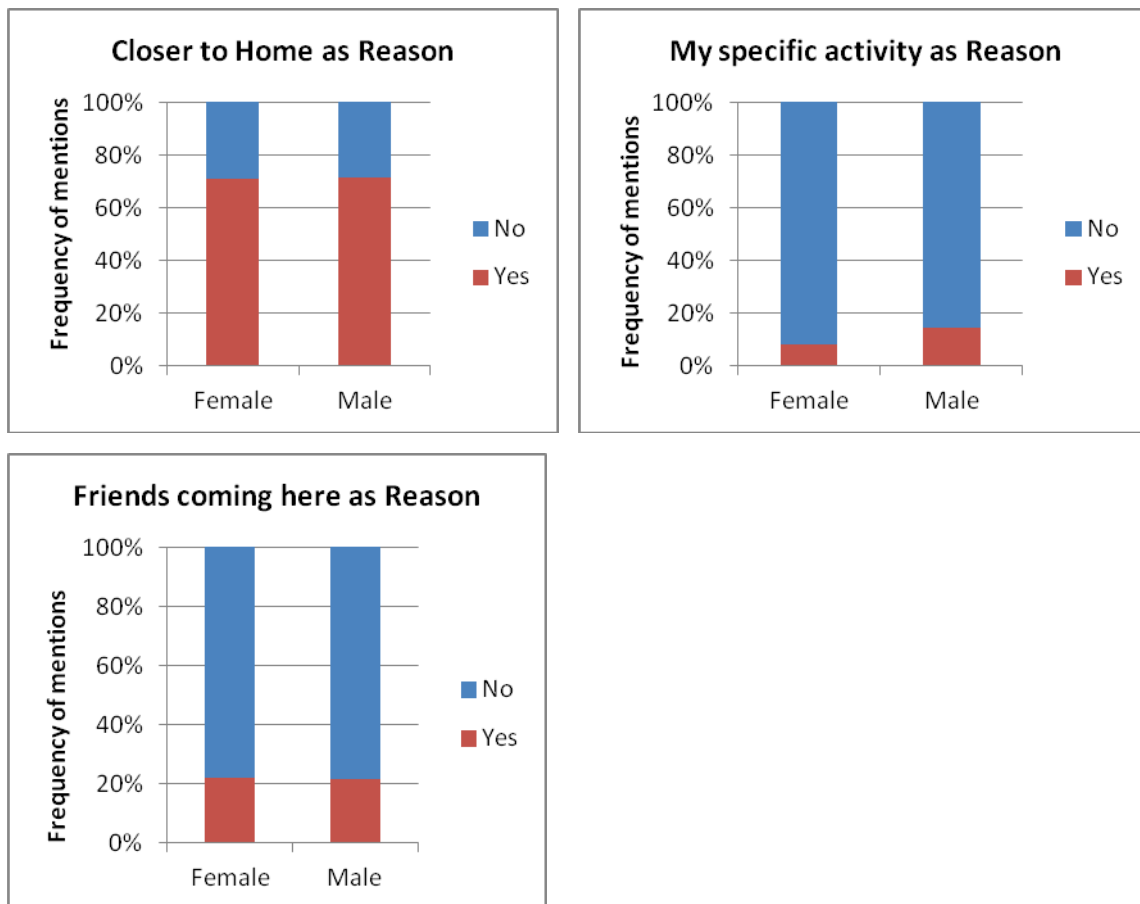
Figure 55: Main reasons for park selection, by gender.
Source: Authors

When we correlate reasons for visiting a park with travel modes (figure 56), two interesting things emerge. First, respondents citing the close proximity of the park to their home were more likely to walk or to take their bicycle to the park, emphasizing that *youth often travel to public parks from their home and do so using forms of active and low-cost transportation when proximity enables them to do so*. Second, when the reason for their visit is for a specific activity, these respondents were more likely to use a motorbike to access the park in question. Due to the greater travel speed of the motorbike, this may point to a *certain willingness amongst respondents to travel a greater distance to a park that offers their desired activity*. While further research may be necessary to confirm these hypotheses, they help to explain the importance of proximity and personal motives in the travel behaviour of youths going to public parks.
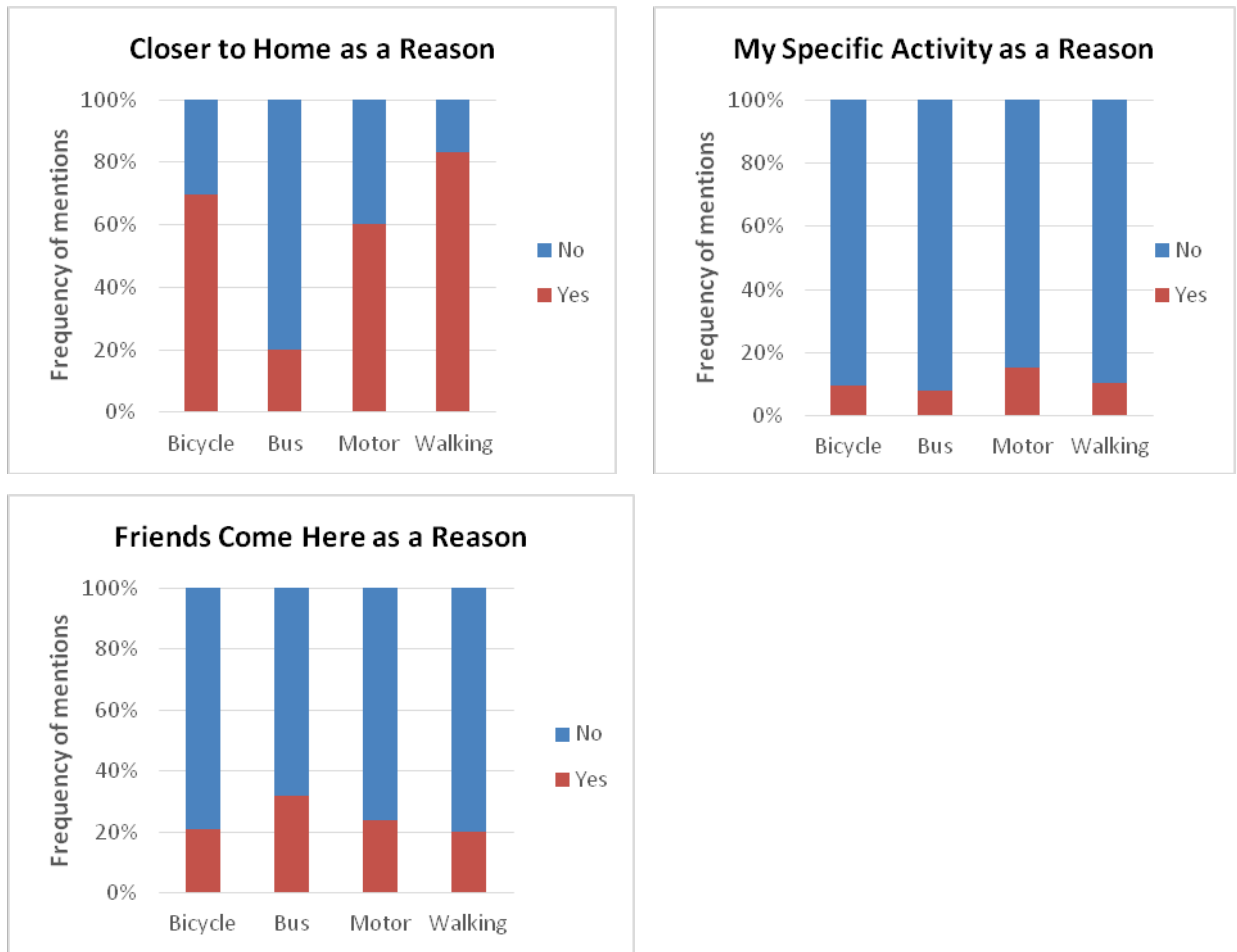
Figure 56: Main reasons to go to parks, broken down by travel mode. Source: Authors

In our survey questionnaire we also asked respondents to speak about what their likes and dislikes were for the park they were visiting. This was asked as an open-ended question with no set answers to choose from, which allowed the respondent to mention or discuss many aspects. From their responses, we have coded their comments into different categories. For the likes, we delineated four overall categories: environment (fresh air, water, and greenery), social interaction (friends and level of liveliness), pleasantness (fun, big space, beautiful space, etc.) and convenient access (proximity to home or to the home of a friends).

When mentioning what they liked about the park, the large majority of respondents were quick to mention the quality of the environment as the main positive characteristic of the public space (figure 57). This is further corroborated by our 60 qualitative interviews in Lenin Memorial Park, Hòa Bình Park, and the 34T Plaza. Respondents frequently thought of the green space of the park as a place where they could find fresh air, beat the heat of the city, and enjoy the presence of trees and lakes. Many respondents also enjoyed having space available for socializing with their friends, space where they could relax on their own, and space where they could exercise and find gym equipment to do so.
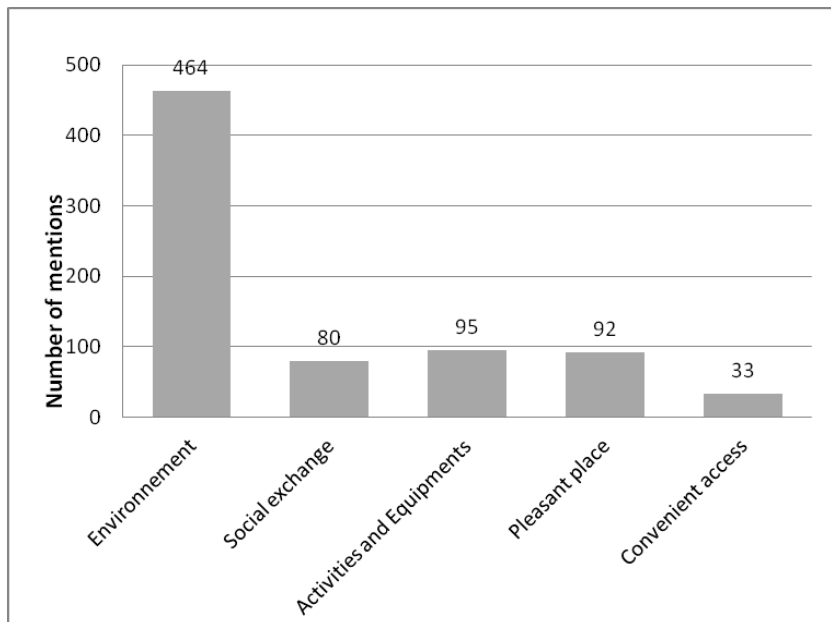
Figure 57: What youth like in parks. Source: Authors

Only a few users mentioned convenient access as a positive characteristic of the park, clearly denoting the limited access that many have to park space in Hanoi. While some may live close enough to consider this to be a positive attribute of the park, the very small number of respondents that mentioned this makes it apparent that it is not a commonly shared trait.

When studying the dislikes mentioned by park users, there are also five general categories that can be clearly defined: environmental quality (odour, cleanliness, physical upkeep, bugs, etc.), saturation of the space (overcrowding, small space, dogs off leash, etc.), physical and budgetary constraints (entrance fees, high price of food and drink), and, security and transgressive behaviours (poor lighting, people go fishing, bad people or unfriendly people) (figure 58). We should mention that respondents had a more difficult time clearly listing their dislikes of the public park, and as such there are fewer answers to this part of our questionnaire.

Many park-goers mentioned the lacklustre quality of the park space as a significant downside to their overall enjoyment of the park. Respondents often took issue with overflowing garbage cans, trash strewn about pathways, and the overall poor quality of the water in many of the parks. Oftentimes, respondents would point to floating garbage on the lake surface and mention the odour coming from the lake as being very unpleasant. Furthermore, when at the park during peak hours, users would mention the large crowds and lack of space as negative characteristics of the park. With many users in the park at once, some youths often had to wait to play shuttlecock or, in the instance of Thành Công Park, play badminton in front of the park's entrance. In some instances, respondents also took issue with entrance fees (Nghĩa Đô Park), the cost of parking their motorbike, and the above average cost of food and drink inside the park. As youths, their more limited budgets could explain why some of the respondents may take issue with these constraints.
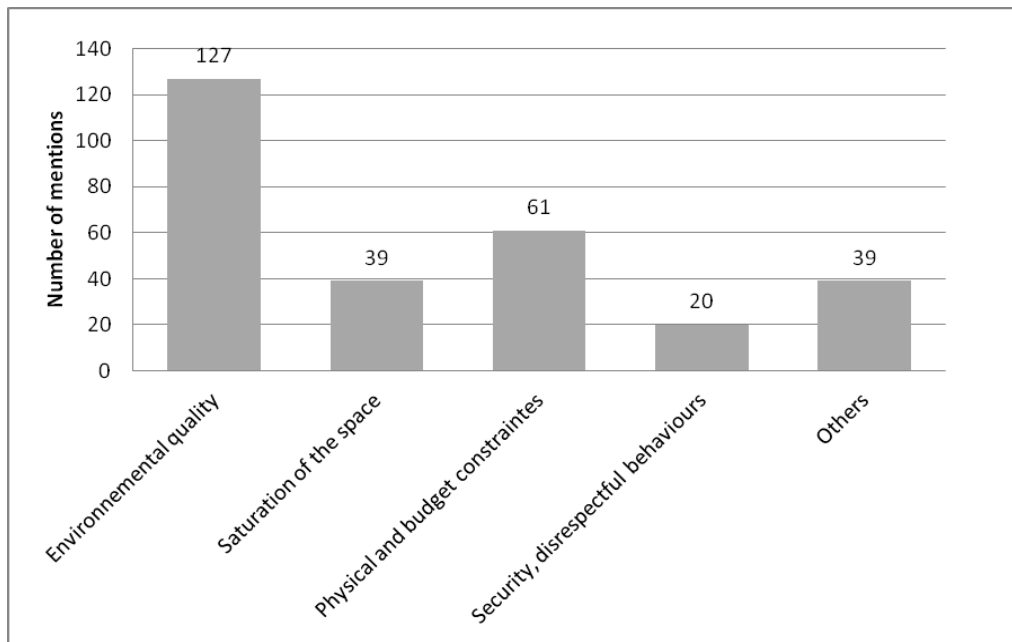
Figure 58: What youth dislike in parks. Source: Authors

It is interesting to see this somewhat paradoxical relationship between the likes and dislikes of the park users. On one hand, respondents were both very positive about the quality of the environment, appreciating the availability of fresh air and the pleasant scenery, while on the other hand, respondents frequently mentioned that the parks were often dirty and that the lake water was smelly and polluted. These often-divergent opinions might point to some disagreement amongst respondents, but it does not mean that they cancel each other out. For instance, a park may offer fresh air and beautiful scenery while still having overflowing trash bins.

Our survey reveals a rich portrait of obstacles to getting to parks, as well as reasons youths make the effort to overcome these obstacles. Apart from the playing of sports, there is little divergence between genders with respect to both reasons for travelling to a park, or obstacles faced in doing so, though young women do use public transit somewhat more and so have complaints related to it that the boys generally do not. Our results also provide insight into the role that public spaces play for youths (such as offering environmental amenities, and space to socialize and engage in physical activities, see section 4). ***Finally we want to highlight that proximity to parks is the most important factor that encourages park use. Combined with results of previous sections, we call for the creation of more public spaces with a better distribution throughout the city so that everyone has a park within reasonable proximity of their home in order to improve the quality of life of young people and all Hanoians***.

Let us now delve into the results of our qualitative analysis of Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park, and the 34T Plaza, in order to explore in more detail some of the obstacles and enabling factors related to youth access to, and use of, public spaces. In our interviews and observations, youths faced four major challenges: overcrowding and competition for space, sanctions by guards, encroachment and "privatization", and societal control.

b) Overcrowding and competition for public space[20]

As mentioned in the general survey just described, the saturation of the park at certain hours is part of what youths dislike about the parks they use (section 7). To give a brief overview of the situation in the three case study sites, Lenin Memorial Park and T34 Plaza are formally considered large, neighbourhood parks. However due to their success, they attract users from all over the city (particularly in Lenin Memorial Park). Conversely, Hòa Bình Park is considered a citywide park, but it is mostly used as a neighbourhood park (table 9). The fact that youths come from far away to the two neighbourhood parks in the city centre greatly contributes to their overcrowding. They were not designed for such intense use. This also indicates an underprovision of suitable[21] public spaces for youth throughout the city.

Table 9: Overview of travel time to the three case study sites (Survey of 132 users). Source: Authors

	Lenin Memorial Park (n=40)	34T Plaza (n=48)	Hòa Bình Park (n=44)
Respondents walking for more than 20 min.	2	1	2
Respondents using public transit for more than 20 min.	7	3	2
Respondents using a motorbike for more than 20 min.	11	5	0
Respondents cycling for more than 20 min.	4	4	0
% of respondents with more than 20 min. travel time	60%	27%	1%

This density of use means that youths need to compete with hundreds of other users who also seek to engage in outdoor activities. In Lenin Memorial Park, the 34T Plaza and in Hòa Bình Park, this includes a mix of small children coming to play with their parents, the elderly who come for daily exercise (walking, tai chi), groups of middle-aged ladies practicing aerobics, badminton players who have marked up their courts on the pavement, vendors who sell drinks and snacks at stalls that are delineated with stools and carpets, and rental services of miniature electric cars and inline skates for children (see section 7 for a more detailed discussion of these territorialization practices).

Compared with other users, the ability of youth to claim legitimacy for their use of the park is very limited. To give only a few examples, vendors generally make arrangements with the local police and security guards to use parts of the space for their commercial activities, the elderly and middle-aged women are backed by the neighbourhood organizations that coordinate their group activities, and children are protected by their parents. As mentioned earlier, the Confucian influence on Vietnamese society means that it is divided hierarchically according to age. This leaves very little legitimacy to youth.

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[20] Part of this section will be published as Geertman et.al. (forthcoming) "Youth Culture and the Negotiation of Public Space in Vietnam: The Rise of Street Disciplines in Hanoi", *Urban Studies*.
[21] We will elaborate more on what a suitable public space for youth entails further below.

The youth interviewed and observed in these three parks adopt a variety of tactics to cope with overcrowding and competition for space. Most strikingly, they **compromise, adjust and avoid conflict** with other users. We will explore this in detail in the section on territorialization and conflict (section 7). But, to offer a quick example, many youth groups (dancers, skateboarders, etc.) move their practice sessions to different times of the day than what would usually be convenient for them. Some of them come late at night when most people have left, while others choose to come earlier in the afternoon. This off-hour use is a significant compromise for these youth groups given 40+ degree Celsius afternoons in the summer time, and darkness after 10pm when the lights are turned off at the park.

Others adopt **avoidance strategies** while doing their thing among the crowd. Groups of youths who do come to the square during peak hours dance around the many parents who sit near their usual practice site and the countless children running around. During observation sessions we saw skateboarders move without a word when parents and kids, or other youth groups, pushed them away from their favourite jumping location, the base of the Lenin statue. When we asked a young skateboarder we met during an observation session why he and his friends moved when asked to do so by another youth group, he sums it up simply: "*We always move for them.*" This was constant in the three parks we observed. In addition, the reaction of other users was generally quiet and positive when a young person would accidentally fall close to a child, or other such small incidents would occur.

On the other hand, though they do it politely, youths do claim the territory they want to use. As the leader of the break dancing group at Lenin Memorial Park explained, "*when another group tries to use our practice space, we just tell them to go away gently*," (focus group discussion, FGD-1, LN, November 4, 2013). Youths accept and adjust to overcrowding because they have nowhere else to go. As one member of the freestyle soccer group remarked, "*public spaces are very scarce in Hanoi. It is very rare to find one [where one can practice]*" (focus group discussion, FGD-4, LN, November 22, 2013).

c) Management authorities, rules and their implementation

Management is not something we explored in the large survey of 402 respondents, but it frequently came up as a significant concern in our interviews. This subsection explains the three different management systems in Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park, and the 34T Plaza, followed by an exploration of how these management systems constrain or enable youth activities.

Two of our cases, Hòa Bình Park and Lenin Memorial Park, are classified as cultural parks. As a municipal planner told us referring to Lenin Memorial Park and other similar cultural parks in the inner city, "*those parks do not function as places [for youth] to play*" (interview Ex-17, October 9, 2013). In order to preserve the reverential character of cultural parks, city authorities limit recreational activities within them or, at times, proscribe them altogether. However, our two cases differ from one another. Hòa Bình Park is not only a cultural park, it formally combines its cultural function (symbolized through the statues in the park) with other large areas in the park that provide space for recreational needs. However, because the park functions as a place symbolizing the 1000 years of Hanoi and the modern communist State, these recreational activities are under stricter surveillance than in other recreational parks.

Hòa Bình Park and Lenin Memorial Park are managed differently. Lenin Park is a neighbourhood park and as such is under the management of the Điện Biên ward. Order and security is directly under the responsibility of the ward police. Hòa Bình Park is a city park, and the city has hired the Thu Le Zoo Company to manage it, who in turn employ guards to patrol the park. This means that there is an important difference in management authority between these two cultural parks. Firstly, the ward police in Lenin Memorial Park have the right to arrest people, while the guards in Hòa Bình Park do not have such authority, but can only giving warnings. Secondly, the ward police have other responsibilities in the ward and so are not present 24 hours a day. In contrast, the guards in Hòa Bình Park are present 24 hours a day, even if they are very discrete.

The 34T Plaza is managed differently as it is located in a mixed-use development of the private company Vinasinco, a subsidiary of Vinaconex. Vinasinco is charged, among other things, with managing all public spaces in the new urban area (KDTM). As such, it hires security guards who patrol the plaza. Because the salary of these security guards comes from the management fees Vinasinco levies monthly from residents of the new urban area Trung Hòa Nhân Chính, the occupants of the towers surrounding the 34T Plaza consider that these guards work for them and that they should police the space according to their needs and demands. Again as in Hòa Bình Park, these guards can only warn people for their misbehaviours.

These three different management systems have different rules and means of implementation, from strict resident control in 34T, to selective control by guards in Hòa Bình Park, to the looseness of the ward police in Lenin Memorial Park.

Resident control on youth activities in the 34T Plaza

At 34T, when youth want to access the plaza for their activities, they face tight surveillance not only by Vinasinco security guards, but also by local residents who regularly ask the guards to forbid, or control activities they find too noisy, dangerous for the elderly or children, which they perceive as damaging the urban setting, or which they simply find inappropriate. The Plaza security guards act as an extension of the power of the residents. As a skateboarder explained, "*security [guards] follow their boss' orders. I think the security [guards] told us [to move] because the residents complained to them, but we don't cause any problem*" (interview, 34T-1, August 2, 2013). This close surveillance and control on the activities of youths also plays out in a fluid set of changing rules that are pushed by residents and implemented by the developer-manager. Residents who consider themselves owners also regularly attempt to take power in their own hands and impose their rules directly on the youth. Illustrating this, in the fall of 2013, local residents hung posters in the Plaza prohibiting inline skating on the pavement (figure 59). The guards did not follow the residents' request to ban this activity, but they did not take the posters down either. Instead, they would ask the inline skaters to be more careful with residents.

Figure 59: Sign banning inline skating posted by residents in the 34T Plaza. Source: Authors

In another incident residents asked the Vinasinco guards to ban the group of parkour aficionados or traceurs from the plaza. The parkour group leader explained: "*there are conflicts with people around, because they see us jumping like this and they are worried that we can damage their wall, they don't like it, and then they ask us to move out*" (interview, 34T-1, November 16, 2013). The traceurs at the 34T Plaza feel that their access to this public space is precarious, as both residents and security guards keep complaining about their presence. One of them told us that the group is searching for other spaces so they can leave the plaza because he feels they are on the verge of "*being chased out*" for good (ibid).

We also witnessed in the 34T Plaza that youths do not feel protected by the guards when it comes to security. There is a guard 24 hours a day, but they are still afraid during the evening, in particular because the Plaza is not very well lit, and it can be very dark.

Guards selectively implementing park rules on youth activities at Hòa Bình Park

As in the 34T Plaza, Hòa Bình Park is surveilled 24 hour by on-site guards. However in Hòa Bình Park, they are not controlled by residents, which makes the guards more independent in how they choose to enforce the rules or not. As mentioned earlier, youth recreational activities are allowed, but are under more control than elsewhere in the city. For example, in comparison with some other parks of this size such as Thống Nhất Park, Hòa Bình Park has signs prohibiting many things: 'no littering,' 'no swimming,' 'no sitting on the grass,' 'no picking flowers,' though the implementation of these rules by the guards is fuzzy, sometimes they are enforced and sometimes not, and sometimes the guards create rules not written on any sign. For example, despite the lack of signage indicating so, our informants told us that soccer and volleyball are forbidden activities in this park. Guards chase the youth practicing these sports out of the park. At the same time the security guards in many cases close their eyes when youths do not obey the rules written on the boards. For example, although 'no sitting on the grass' signs are visible, youths in Hòa Bình Park sit comfortably on the grass, without interference from the guards. A 25-year-old business owner visiting the park explained this as follows: "*Nobody comes to dismiss people sitting on the grass. As you can see, people still sit on the grass*" (interview, HB-5, June 18, 2014).

In general the youths we interviewed in Hòa Bình Park did not perceive the guards as placing significant constraints on their activities. For example, a student visiting the park explained,

"*The management of the park is not strict. When people come to the park, it is simply more comfortable for them to sit on the grass instead of the bench*" (interview, HB-14, June 21, 2014). Because vendors, as we will see below, occupy benches, it leaves little room for users to sit on them. This may explain why users are allowed to sit on the grass.

Although there are 24 hour security guards in this park, as in the 34T Plaza, youths do not always feel safe in this park, especially at night. As in other city parks in Hanoi this park is perceived as dangerous in the dark, given that it has no fences, and has been known to be frequented by prostitutes and their customers at night, the park is perceived as dangerous at late hours.

Loose police control on youth activities in Lenin Memorial Park

A municipal planner we interviewed said that sports activities by youths are not supposed to take place in cultural parks. He also indicated as well that local authorities are compelled to bend the rules in locations such as Lenin Memorial Park, because youths "*don't have enough space [elsewhere in the city] to play*" (interview, Ex-17, October 9, 2013). During the period between 2001 and 2005, the ward police still used their power to arrest youths at this square when involved in a perceived improper activity (such as skateboarding). Since around 2005, however, youth activities are largely tolerated. Youths informed us that the police do not arrest anyone anymore, and skaters believe that they have gained their trust. As a result the park developed into a popular centre for youths involved in lifestyle sports (hip-hop, skateboarding, inline skating, freestyle soccer, etc.).

In Lenin Memorial Park, youths experience the least interference from authorities, compared to our other two study sites. During daytime there are usually no police, they only start patrolling after 4pm. They will come and go during the late afternoon and evening. And the police will ask everyone to leave at 11pm (with exceptions of the skateboarders), and after that the police usually will not return until the next day. After the police leave there will be one guard, hired by the ward, to patrol overnight. Youths are well aware of the patrolling schedule and use this to their advantage to avoid authorities when involved in practices not allowed at the square. For example, as in the other two parks, soccer is not allowed. But given that the police only come late in the afternoon, soccer players changed their practicing sessions to earlier times of the day. They don't hide from the police, they continue to play until the police come, and then they are forced to leave. They will return to play after four o'clock in the afternoon when the police leave the square. As one of them explained: "*when they chase us out, we go back home to eat, take a bath and then come here again to have a drink [and check if they can play again]*" (interview, LN-14, September 9, 2013).

Although the police are not present all the time, the park is perceived as a safe place. We witnessed how parents drop of their young kids and come back later to pick them up. The overcrowding and the presence of vendors watching the users all the time is perceived as something that keeps unwanted people out. The visibility from the road also contributes to the feeling of safety in the park: people are watched all the time by the dense traffic surrounding the park.

d) Youth views on privatization processes and encroachment on public space

Since Vietnam's integration into the global economy and culture, cities like Hanoi witness a rapid process of privatization and commercialization. Small and large actors occupy parts of public spaces for private and commercial use. For example, the shores of many of the lakes in Hanoi have seen the appearance of new restaurants and cafés. This process has contributed to the decline of public urban spaces that are easily accessible for all. This has led to the presence of a great diversity of users competing for space in the city's public places. The intensity of the competition for space is illustrated in the physical demarcations of specific areas, through which some users safeguard a specific section for their own activities (section 7). For example, people in parks, on sidewalks and squares clamp badminton nets to trees; vendors set out small plastic stools to claim a part of the space for their shop; or small parking lots are renting space in public spaces for their business (they mark areas with ropes, iron fences or other means). All these actions take up a great deal of space that would otherwise be available for park users including youths. In addition to this encroachment, many other public spaces in the city are now charging entrance fees.

Ambivalence of young people regarding the encroachment of vendors on public spaces in our three case studies

Although constraints on access in our three study sites are relatively low in comparison with many other public spaces in Hanoi, youths still have to deal with encroachment inside the parks. These are the "rules" set for them by other users claiming parts of the spaces for commercial and private use. Due to their easier access[22], these spaces are beneficial to vendors. In contrast, city parks with fences and fees do have restrictions for vendors and hawkers are not allowed to access them. As a student in Hoa Binh explained, "*it is hard to dismiss hawkers since the park is free of charge. They can get in anytime they want*" (interview, HB-17, June 24, 2013). Access for users who are seeking commercial opportunities constrains the use of the space by youths. For example, park users are forced to park their bicycles in a dedicated paid parking space, or some vendors only allow youths (and others) to sit or use a part of the park if they purchase foods or drinks from them. This frequently leads to conflicts that limit the use of space by youths in particular given their smaller purchasing power.

Vendors take up much space and youths complain about that. However, they also see many benefits to their presence. On the negative side, youths report **conflicts** between vendors for customers or space, and between vendors and youths or children who damage their material. For example, a 25-year-old BMX cyclist practicing regularly with his group in Lenin Memorial park gives an indication of the situation there:

> Actually, they are all bullies. If you accidentally crash into their cars there will be trouble, so you better avoid it. It's so dangerous for children, it is very crowded, but they just drive through. The children are quite vulnerable but the vendors just drive very fast. It's very dangerous if children crash into these things. […] Other teams have [fights with vendors], but we don't. Because they know our team has been playing here for a long time so they avoid us, and we're smart so we know that we should avoid them. In short, two teams try to avoid each other. The inline

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[22] With exception of 34T Plaza where guards have more control on vendors.

skating team already had a fight and they got beaten. […] The [police] came here but the fight was already finished, so it didn't help. (interview, LN-5, August 28, 2013).

In such situations, youths are powerless given the strict age structure in Vietnam. Vendors are usually older than most youths, and often have a relationship with management authorities. As is a common practice in Hanoi, in Hòa Bình Park guards charge some of the groups a fee. The martial arts group in the park informed us they have to pay a fee to be able to use the park. Although the group would like to oppose this decision, they say they cannot, and the only way for them to use the park is to pay the security guards a fee: "*It is uncomfortable but it is also an unwritten rule. They said straightforward that no matter where we go to ask for permission, we still have to follow their rules and pay them since this is their area*" (interview HB-16, June 21, 2013). It is also more openly known that vendors pay a fee to the guards. Because they have paid youths know that the vendors are given privileges in how they use the park, as a student explained: "*Those people are allowed to drive in the park because when they sell anything in this park, they have to pay a fee to the managers*" (interview, HB-15, 21 June 2014). The vendors informed us they are allowed to sell at the park, as long as they keep it tidy (interview, HB-15, 17 June 2014).

Another common complaint about vendors concerns the **space they take**. For example, a 19-year-old girl at 34T Plaza argued that, "*we shouldn't let them sell like that because they take our playing space. When they sell products, they display everything on the place so we don't have much space to play. I think the space is already very limited*" (interview, 34T-4, August 21, 2013). Or again, a 25-year-old boy practicing BMX cycling at Lenin Memorial Park explained that, "*there are too many vendors, so it gets full. It makes the park smaller and smaller*" (interview, LN-19, October 22, 2013). In Lenin Memorial Park, vendors claim almost all the benches and turn them into little stalls to eat and drink. Other spots suitable for sitting are also largely claimed by vendors, like the stairs at the base of the Lenin statue. Some of the interviewed youths complained about the lack of places to sit.

Another common complaint is that vendors make a filthy mess. As explained by a 20-year-old boy cycling in Lenin Memorial Park, "*[Vendors] pour water, throw garbage, and eat and throw [the shells of sunflower and pumpkin] seeds around. Generally, it's very dirty, sometimes it gets so dirty that we have to tidy up before starting to practice*" (interview, LN-5, August 28, 2013).

Finally, some of the youths interviewed find that vendors are **ruining the image** of the public spaces. At 34T Plaza some youths see the Plaza as part of the new urban area which is presenting a new image symbolizing a new modern Hanoi, and they believe vendors do not fit in with this image. At Lenin Memorial Park, most of the interviewed youths are concerned about vendors destroying the culturally symbolic image of the park. As a 22-year-old dancer said, "*many tourist groups pass by, the [presence of vendors] presents a very bad image for our city*" (interview, LN-3, August 29, 2013). She explained further how she feels ashamed when foreign delegates pass by the square and they witness the authorities struggling with illegal vendors: "*Can you imagine that you are in the car of a government official with a lot of high class foreign officials, and when you looking out the window you see police chasing and vendors are running. Do you feel ashamed? Of course you do*" (idem). She also explained that the members of the dancing group bring their own water bottles primarily "*because we do not want to run with our drinks when the police show up to chase them [the vendors] away, it is shameful*" (idem). At Hòa Bình Park some interviewed youths as well believe vendors disturb the image of the park, while in this park there is more space than in the other two study sites, an inline skater suggested that the vendors should be concentrated in one section of the park. He remarked, "*the park should have some designated areas for*

vendors to protect the scenes of the park" (interview, HB-14, June 24, 2014).

Despite these negative comments, youths also **show empathy towards the vendors**. As a 19-year-old inline skater at Lenin Memorial Park explained, "*I think in Vietnam, the standard of living is still quite low, so they have to do that to earn their living*" (interview, LN-1, August 26, 2013). Similarly in Hòa Bình Park, a student said, "*they have to engage in business to earn a living*" (interview, HB-14, June 21, 2014).

In addition to empathy, youths also appreciate the services offered by vendorsr. First, they see this as **a comfortable and cheaper way to buy a drink**. For example, a student in Hòa Bình Park remarked, "*sometimes, when we feel tired, we can have a drink or some food without going too far from the park*" (interview, HB-14, June 21, 2014). In the 34T Plaza, youths complained that, "*there is nothing to eat. Yeah, if they would sell some kind of street food so we can eat, it would be good […] we are students so we can't afford to go to expensive restaurants*" (interview, 34T-15, September 14, 2013). Although there are many cafés close to the Plaza, youths prefer to cross the road to sit at the cheaper iced tea shops there, as a 21-year-old female dancer remarked, "*iced tea stalls are on the other side of the street over there, we often go there to sit*" (interview, 34T-17, November 9, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, in the 34T Plaza the management board is very strict with vendors, and they are not very present on the plaza. However, the board will rent out parts of the Plaza for commercial purposes during specific days. When we interviewed youths there, there was a large stand of the *Kinh Do* company right in the middle of the Plaza selling moon cakes for the lunar festival. Youths informed us that they were bothered by the stand taking up space, but they could not do anything. As a 23-year-old inline skater explained, "*In general it takes a lot of space but because Kinh Do company has a deal with the manager I can't complain. So we just let it be*" (interview, 34T-7, August 21, 2013). Although the youths at 34T Plaza mentioned that they just needed to accept the situation of commercial practices invading their playing space, most of them do not really agree with this, as a 24-year-old remarked:

> *this place is for playing. It's public space so we can do anything we want, we can do exercises or do this, do that depending on one's hobby. The image of vendors is not very good. If they want to sell stuff, they should set up in a separate place, when we need to buy something, we can go there. It would be more organized like that. It's very messy like this*"(interview, 34T-12, August 29, 2013).

To come back to the positive arguments youths put forward in defense of vendors, they very much appreciate vendors **renting out sporting equipment** such as inline skates. As explained by a 24-year-old student at Hòa Bình Park, "*A lot of people want to come to skate but could not afford to buy a pair of skates*" (interview, HB-20, June 24, 2014).

Another benefit mentioned by youths is the **social function the vendors provide**: they are perceived as places to communicate and meet new people, as explained by a 22-year-old girl at Lenin Memorial Park who said, "for example, *when you play a sport, you also want to relax, drink something, and chat with your friends. This is also a good place to talk and make friends*" (interview, LN-2, August 26, 2013). Another remark of an 18-year-old student at the 34T Plaza is also illustrative, "*It's ok [the presence of vendors] because people can sit in those stalls and gossip*" (interview, 34T-10, August 23, 2013).

Youth perception of public spaces with an entrance fee
Many city parks charge a fee. Although generally used to finance maintenance, it also serves

to keep control on who uses the park. We asked youth what they think about this process in Thống Nhất Park. Most of them had not visited the park, or they visit it only rarely. They tend to perceive the fee as a major constraint, however for various different reasons.

First, many students consider entrance fees the main reason to avoid the park as it is **unaffordable** to them. Illustrative of this is a 22-year-old student at 34T Plaza who remarked, "*We are students so we don't have much money, if we want to hang out somewhere else [as the city parks with fees], we'll need money, that's why we have to come here and talk*" (interview, 34T-15, September 14, 2013). Some of the working youths also said the fee itself was a reason not to go to Thống Nhất Park, as the leader of the break dance group in Lenin Memorial Park, who gave this as main reason not to visit this park: "*We must pay money to enter this park*" (focus group interview, FGD-1, LN, November 4, 2013).

Others explained that it was not the payment of the fee itself that constrained them from visiting such parks, but the **surveillance** it entailed at the gate. A 25-year-old skateboarder remarked, "*we are lazy we have to walk all the way in [to the park], we have to park the bicycle*" (interview with pioneer skateboarder, PS-3, LN, June 13, 2013). A building environment professional explained to us that the process of buying a ticket makes people feel uneasy:

> [A]*ctually, the fee is not the financial barrier but [the constraint is] the administrative barrier for people to use the park. People may feel that they own the park so they can use the park anytime they want, but actually they have to buy the ticket to use it, have to queue to buy ticket, have to show the ticket to the guards, each of these procedures makes them uncomfortable.* (interview, EX-4, September 30, 2013).

Some youths also mention that entrance fees are **arbitrary** and depend on who wants to enter the park. Parks that charge a fee generally do not charge the fee to residents in the immediate area who come for daily exercise. However, it is difficult to know who is resident or not. In reality, it depends on personal relationships with the guards. This gives the guards the power to decide who they find appropriate to enter the park and who is not. Some of the youths we interviewed feel uncomfortable with this situation, as explained by a student in Hòa Bình Park, "*The way that the park [Thống Nhất] charges its entrance fee is not clear and obvious. Some people are not charged any fee, but some have to pay two times for the entrance fee and the parking fee*" (interview HB-17, June 24, 2014). Another student in the same park explained why she believed city parks charging a fee is constraining for her. She said, "*There are some comfortable places, but there are also some restricted places like Thống Nhất Park. It is a park but it is only free of charge during exercise time. I think the parks are for the public and shouldn't have any fee except for the parking fee. We still have to pay an entrance fee in Thống Nhất Park*" (interview, HB-11, June 20, 2014).

In our interviews with urban professionals (planners and others), many experts mentioned that they perceive a decline in the number of public spaces that are free of charge in the city. A highly positioned official at the Ministry of Construction explained that, "*in Vietnam, if you think about public spaces as places that you can enter without payment, you may end up with a list that only includes places like bridges, the shoulders of roads, or markets. Even parks, you still have to pay money to get in*" (interview EX-3, October 2, 2013). Using a personal example she further explained how citizens in Hanoi today deal with this situation:

> In my brother's living area, children usually use the roof of the building to organize festivals like the Full Moon festival or New Years' Eve, because there is no place for them on the ground. Even in [small neighbourhood

parks], you have to pay some money to use the place […] In the past nobody used roofs, but [people] are starting to use them now. They don't want to spend money on paying for a place. Once before I saw people who had reorganized the top of their building by bringing trees and putting them in that area to make it green and better. (idem)

A recently graduated built environment professional shared with us his personal experience to illustrate how youths [like himself] are faced with payments for public spaces: "*I wonder myself because when I was in school, I used to play basketball at the Medical University and I thought that it was free because it is in the University area but I had to pay for it. So, I just wonder why…even students of that university also have to pay at their own university to play basketball there. It is really ridiculous. It's kind of a secret to us, it's like the university let someone hire the place and they try get a benefit from it*" (interview EX-8, September 29, 2013). He further explained that in general it has become very difficult to find spaces elsewhere in the city for youths to play sports that are free of charge: "*If we want to play basketball, we have to pay money to hire the courts. In here, we have to pay a lot of money to play tennis, and I think that tennis has become a sport for rich people or some working people. They have to have a lot of money because they have to pay twenty dollars/hour and they have to pay in advance for 4 months. But they are always sold out because there are a lot of people playing that sport. I don't think young people can afford that*" (idem).

e) Societal controls on youth uses of public spaces: Lifestyle sports and romantic couples

In this subsection, we discuss some of the adverse reactions youths receive when they 1) practice lifestyle sports, and 2) when they search for intimacy with their romantic partner in public spaces.

Why are lifestyle sports sometimes difficult to accept?[23]

Public authorities, older users, and many parents remain relatively averse to youth-driven, self-directed activities such as lifestyle sports in public spaces. Some youth groups have claimed space for their lifestyle sport, and the positive promotion of their activities provide them with acceptance. In general, if management authorities accept them they feel secure. One of Hanoi's first skaters remarked that today, "*we have the trust [of the police] here, they don't say anything*" (interview with pioneer skateboarder, PS-3, LN, June 13, 2014). Trust is central to youths. The leader of the Joy-Funk dancing group at 34T Plaza also said that, "*security [guards] like us a lot*" (focus group discussion, FGD-6, 34T, November 24, 2013). Others, however, have not achieved acceptance. For example, the traceurs (parkour aficionados) at 34T Plaza think that much work remains to be done to "normalize" their activity and gain easier access to public spaces in Hanoi: "*We don't have many places to practice,*" one informant concludeed, "*because people don't support us. It's simply because they misunderstand. They think this is a dangerous and restless sport so we don't have the right to practice it*" (interview, 34T-19, November 16, 2013).

Lifestyle sports in Hanoi developed as alternatives to more conventional recreational activities controlled by the State and its institutions, such as schools or State-backed mass

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[23] Part of this section will be published as Geertman et.al. (forthcoming) "Youth Culture and the Negotiation of Public Space in Vietnam: The Rise of Street Disciplines in Hanoi", *Urban Studies.*

organizations (e.g., the Youth Union and Ho Chi Minh Young Pioneers). In contrast to the numerous sports teams and clubs set up by these formal institutions, lifestyle sports are organized from the bottom up, by youths themselves. These activities do not fit in with the more regulated activities which authorities, older users, and parents expect youths to engage in. Furthermore, there is a perception that these new young urban practices are essentially "Western" and alien to the Vietnamese culture and traditions, which makes the public and officials reluctant to let them develop in the capital city's public spaces (Choé, 2010).

Many of the youths interviewed mentioned that their parents do not really support their activities. The leader of the break dance group explained this friction to us. He said, "*our families and us often have different opinions about same thing*"(focus group discussion, FGD-1, LN, November 4, 2013). However, effective parental restrictions are limited to the younger members of these lifestyle groups (mostly still in school). The leader of the break dance group commented on this issue. He said, "*at our age [around 23 years and older], we are all grown up, our parents do not say anything*" (focus group discussion, FGD-1, LN, November 4, 2013). The younger ones complained more to us about negative parental pressure. As a young cyclist at Lenin Square explained: "*my parents saw me doing nothing, just riding the bike all day, they can't understand me and ask me to do something more useful*" (interview, LN-19, October 22, 2013). A younger member of the break-dance group at Lenin Memorial Park explained: "*[my folks] do scold me sometimes when I do not go to work or have my own life. They worry that dancing might affect my health or that I might get hurt*" (focus group discussion, FGD-1, LN, November 4, 2013).

In public spaces, these social adversities are translated into conflicts over space (see more details in section 7). For example, the various women's groups who claim space for their daily aerobics and *tai chi* sessions in each of the study sites regularly get into small arguments with youth groups. A shuttlecock practitioner in Hoa Binh explained: "*There are people practicing aerobics in the park. Sometimes, our shuttlecock flies into their practice area. In general, all of them are middle aged, so whenever we come to take the shuttlecock, they look at us angrily and complain*" (interview, HB-7, June 18, 2014). As in almost all cases we witnessed in the parks, youths deal with these situations gently. The same shuttlecock player explained that: "*We are all young and easy going. It is also our fault so we just smile or say sorry and then step back. We do not answer back or anything*" (idem).

Young romantic couples searching for intimacy

The second use of public spaces by youth that raise social concerns is the search for intimacy for unmarried couples. In Vietnam, gestures of affection between members of a couple do not easily occur in public. Trinh Thi Trung Hoa, a psychologist (cited by Huong Giang Bao Hang, 2012) emphasizes that: "*In Vietnamese traditional culture, love needs to be soft, delicate, discreet, but passionnate. So over expression of loving behaviour (kissing, etc.) in public space is out of line with Vietnamese standards of correct behaviour. Most people think that loving behaviour should be kept private*."

In recent years, however, newspapers have reported an increase in explicit love behaviour in public, especially among younger couples (Hoai Nam, 2009). Almost everyone has, at least once, witnessed or participated in it. It is no longer uncommon to see young couples hug, squeeze or smooch in public spaces in Hanoi. While some couples are still coy about anything beyond holding hands in public areas, others are less fearful of expressing their affection for each other in a more explicit manner. Young people are expressing their love in parks at any time of the day using benches as dating places (Tin Moi News, 2012). Bridges

and roads are also key sites. Long Biên and Chương Dương bridges and the new road around the Westlake are very popular among young people. They stop their motorbikes, sit on them, and make out as if they were at home.

In a recent newspaper article (Hang Huong Giang, 2012), an interviewee said that "*lovers' behaviour such as kissing in public space affects people around and affects the public space itself. They express that they take these actions without caring about other people around.*" Some adults using the park see these as disturbing activities. Parents think it is not appropriate as there are many children playing in these parks. Some people also express their disagreement toward the activities of motorbike lovers as they are dangerous to traffic and they "destroy" the good view of the river and the lake. In sum, while most articles underline the natural character of expressing emotion (Hang Huong Giang, 2012; Hoai Nam, 2012), they also mention the negative consequences of such behaviour for the surrounding people and public space itself.

This behaviour is often associated with the immaturity of youth ("*This is an alert for the lack of awareness and too open minded thinking in the majority of young people today",* Hoai Nam, 2009*)*. But some people and experts alike attribut this to the lack of education given to young people by parents and schools. Lam Anh Thi Quyen, a sociologist (quoted by Hang Huong Giang, 2012) said: *"This problem comes from the lack of basic education from the family and the school. The behaviour in public space should be an important subject to be taught in schools for students to raise their awareness."* (see also N/A, 2013*)*.

Collective responsibility is also mentioned in an article about love messages left on the statue of Lenin (Viet Bao News, 2013), which for its author is the proof of irresponsibilty from young people, and also a failing of management in such an important public space: "*It is an act that shows a lack of civilization […] No respect for the cultural spaces means no respect for the nation. They should be ashamed*" (Viet Bao News, 2013). Thus, some people associate public displays of affection with deviance: "*In Vietnamese cities, there is an obvious lack of places where romantic partners can express their love. This half-private, half-public behaviour is very dangerous as it has a risk of deviancy*" (quoted by Hang Huong Giang, 2012).

Western negative influence is also often mentioned to explain these public displays of affection: *"In foreign countries, romantic partners have many private places to hang out, chit chat and* to dance […] *A majority of young people today are strongly influenced by Western culture, thinking that they are ahead of the times. But in fact, these actions are a lack of respect towards people around them and towards themselves.*" (quoted by Hang Huong Giang, 2012). Viet Bao News (2013) published an opinion about public displays of affection by a young blogger who explained: "*The tradition in Eastern culture is different from Western culture, sex education is not popularized. Everybody thinks that it is something very scary, and doesn't want young people to discover it too early. That's why now they are discovering it on their own*". Some also declare that this behaviour should not be widely discussed in the media as it encourages young teenagers to be even more expressive. Others propose to impose an "*adequate penalty for public sex and love behaviour*" (Viet Bao News, 2013).

Because of such adversity, focusing on public displays of affection is a good indicator to assess the weight of social norms and their internalization as manifest in the daily social practices of youth. These practices are historically, culturally and socially constructed. They participate in 'body techniques' (Mauss, 1935) and the discipline of physical practices (Elias, 1969; Foucault, 1976). These practices in public spaces are therefore an indicator of what is

socially feasible, or not, and what is publicly presentable, or not. They also help capture changes affecting society.

What follows is based on the analysis of 22 interviews conducted in June 2014 in Hòa Bình Park. These interviews did not specifically focus on romantic couples, but touched on this because of the large number of couples in the park (figure 60). In parallel, 7 romantic couples were met in Hòa Bình Park. These extra interviews were intended to gather supplementary information on the formation of couples in particular, the reasons for their presence in Hòa Bình Park, and their expectations as a couple.

Couples in Hòa Bình Park

Figure 60: Couples observed in Hòa Bình Park from 5-7 pm on a Sunday in June 2014. Source: Authors

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All the youths interviewed mentioned the numerous couples in Hòa Bình Park. A 23-year-old, for instance, said, "*I see a lot. This is a park for couples*" (interview, HB-2, June 17, 2014). Most of the couples are students who attend one of many universities close to the park, and live in rental housing near the park. Given the small size of these rooms, most students regularly use public places like parks or lakes and libraries. But beyond these elements of discomfort, the reasons given by young people for coming to Hòa Bình Park are the proximity of the park to their university, the size and the beauty of it, and the fresh air found later in the day due to the presence of the lake in the centre of the park. A young female student explained:

> First, I think that there are a lot of universities nearby. The second reason is that the park is large so it has enough space for all the couples. Thirdly, I think that it is because of the nice view. I've never been here before but I've thought that the park looks very nice. Today, when I came here, I saw it looked even better than before. (…) Maybe this park is so peaceful that they want to come here to enjoy the atmosphere. (…) They are students who do not have much space at universities, so they come here and show their love (interview, HB-1, June 17, 2014).

According to a youth we met in Hòa Bình Park, park users say nothing to romantic couples, even if they are not comfortable with their behaviour. As a 17-year-old student said: "*People don't say anything*" (interview, HB-12, June 20, 2014). Or again, a young woman mentioned that, "*People in this park are understanding and sympathetic, so they keep silent even though they feel uncomfortable*" (interview, HB-5, June 18, 2014).

The activities romantic couples are most frequently engaged in are talking, walking, playing sports, sitting on a bench, lying down next to each other, cuddling or kissing. These activities do not seem to be things of which most young people interviewed disapprove. For instance, a 19-year-old woman explained: "*They just sit and chat together, there is no overheated action or inappropriate behaviour in public spaces*" (interview, HB-7, June 18, 2014). A 15-year-old boy said that, "*Just like other couples, they show their love. For example: kissing on Valentine's day. Normally, they show love by sitting or lying down next to each other on the grass to chat*" (interview, HB-5, June 18, 2014).

Some young people, however, emphasize their discomfort when gestures of affection go beyond that of joining hands. The French kiss seems particularly annoying to some youths. A 19-year-old woman and a 19-year-old man both explained:

> *They just put their hands on each other's shoulders which is very normal. But there are some people who French kiss. I think it is a kind of trend now and it is becoming so popular in this park. Most of the time, they sit near the main house and the road around the park. I see them because I often go for a walk around the park. (…) It is not too much nowadays. I am not old-fashioned like my parents or grandparents in the past, but somehow their activities still make some people who come here to exercise feel uncomfortable. It also has some effect on other's feelings, for example, the feeling of a lonely person* (interview, HB-19, June 19, 2014).

> *They can sit, chat together or show their love, for example, kissing, cuddling, or holding hands. I think it is not something done by people who are raised properly. This is a public space and those activities are not suitable. (…) I*

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think they can hold hands or even cuddle. But I think that kissing deeply or more than that is too much. (…) It is really annoying. The park is a place for people from different age groups, so those activities are not acceptable. (…) I do not feel annoyed or upset. I just think that the awareness of youth in public spaces is not good (interview, HB-6, June 18, 2014).

Despite the discomfort reported by some young people in the face of public displays of affection, few disputes were mentioned in the park for this reason. The few conflicts identified by youth make reference to lovers' quarrels (section 7). A young woman said: *"There are also couples who quarrel with each other"* (interview, HB-10, June 19, 2014).

Most young people interviewed in Hòa Bình Park say they find it normal to see romantic couples in public places in Vietnam. Although at first they were surprised to see demonstrations of affection in public (most young people come from rural areas before coming to study in Hanoi), for them, romantic couples are now part of the normal landscape of public spaces.

> *I felt uncomfortable at first but it has become normal since I saw them so many times. I was not used to it before. But then, I just got familiar with them and think that it is normal after seeing them so many times.* (Female, 18-year-old, student, interview, HB-8, June 19, 2014)

> *I think it is normal (…) I think it is normal and not a big problem. (…) it is normal. They can show their love to each other nowadays. Even friends can hug each other.* (Male, 18 years old, worker in service oriented food, interview, HB-13, June 21, 2014)

For some young people, it is normal for romantic couples to express their affection in parks, as it is done elsewhere in the world. For instance, a 23-year-old man explained that, *"It is normal. We have fallen in line with the world and those activities became very normal"* (interview, HB-11, June 20, 2014). On the other hand, for other young people these public displays of affection deviate from traditional Vietnamese values and they emphasize their inappropriateness. Consider what this young female student and then this young 15-year-old boy expressed:

> *Young Vietnamese seem to be very spontaneous and don't respect public spaces. Actually, cuddling, kissing or touching… My boyfriend and I, we would never be like that. [It is] shameful. I don't like it. I don't like to see a couple doing such things (…) There are a lot of kids and old people in this park, so I think that their behaviour is not suitable. (…) There are a lot of couples kissing. This is a public space, when I come here to exercise I don't want to see those things because it is ridiculous and indelicate.* (interview, HB-1, June 17, 2014)

> *Personally, I think it is normal but in general I think a lot of people, such as my friends, do not like it, they told me that they feel uncomfortable with those couples (…) I think those kinds of activities are not suitable in Vietnam; it excites the curiousity of the youngsters. Kids might see them and feel curious. Parks are public spaces so I think couples should not be like that. I would never do that.* (interview, HB-5, June 18, 2014)

Most young people interviewed find it normal for couples to meet in public spaces, however, their romantic behaviour must be measured, and not exceed certain limits, and they should especially avoid French kissing, and groping. These things make some young people

uncomfortable, and they say these behaviours are not appropriate in areas with other groups of people (the elderly, families, etc.).

Although couples in Hòa Bình Park never present themselves as precursors of new practices in Vietnam, their behaviour puts them in this situation, since they appear to be deliberately courting in a public space. The couples we met in Hòa Bình Park were met and gotten together in various ways. Some are from the same town (*"we are from the same hometown"* couple 7) and had begun a romantic relationship before coming to study in Hanoi (1 couple). Others met at the university (*"we met at class",* couple 1), or resided in the same building (1), and met through mutual friends (4) (*"our friends introduced us to each other",* couple 4); *"we often came to different parks with a group of friends"* (couple 2); *"she was a friend of my friend"* (male, couple 5). One young man explained that when he met his girlfriend in Hòa Bình Park, seeing her in the park's "natural scene" made a very positive impression: *"I met her in a natural scene so she was so vigorous and always talked to others in a good manner. That was my impression"* (Male, 22 years old, student, couple 7, June 19, 2014). Another young woman explained how she met her boyfriend in a park: *"When we went to parks like this, he held some tiny show for his friends to sing and he was the host"* (Female, 22 years old, student, married, couple 2, June 19, 2014).

Courting couples find themselves in Hòa Bình Park before or after class, with a frequency that ranges from once a week to almost every day of the week. While in the park they study, talk, walk, play sports, lie on the grass, join hands and hug and/or kiss. They meet in this park, because it is close to their university and/or residence, because the park has fresh breezes, is big, has a good atmosphere and is free. The couples interviewed felt it was normal for romantic partners to be out together in public spaces, holding hands and hugging. Most of them also said that it is normal for couples to kiss in the park.

The families of the seven couples we interviewed all live outside Hanoi. All the men said their families were aware of their relationship, but only five out of seven women said they had spoken with their families (of the remaining two women, one had been married for 4 days and the second one knew her boyfriend and his parents before coming to study in Hanoi as they come from the same village). The attitude of parents regarding their sons' relationships are rather open, even if they almost always advise their sons to focus primarily on studies and to be aware of and respect certain 'limits' in their relationships. It is likely that these limitations are considered as 'problems' that could compromise their studies (pregnancy of their partner, reprimanded behaviour, etc.). As a 22-year-old man said: *"Actually, my parents are quite open about this. I am an adult now, so they are more easy-going about this issue. We just need to know that everything has a limit and we are students, we need to know when to stop. They just said that"* (Male, 22 years old, student, couple 5, June 2014).

f) Conclusion

From this exploratory study of young people's opinions on romantic couples in public spaces and romantic couples attending Hòa Bình Park, we have shown that the expression of one's love in public is well accepted by youth, provided they remain within a certain limit, like walking together, holding hands, light touching. More pronounced manifestations such as kissing puts young people in an uncomfortable position. Just as for lifestyle sports, young people who express affectionate behaviour towards their partner in public spaces deviate from the traditional values of Vietnamese culture, and adopt a more individualist and socially transgressive behaviour. While it is not claimed as such by the young couples we

interviewed, the ambiguity expressed by youths towards public displays of affection show that doing so is a form of social transgression.

We began this section by surveying general obstacles to access to public spaces in Hanoi. A poor road network, and not having a park close to home are major obstacles. Then we explored more qualitatively some of the constraints expressed by youths. We saw that overcrowding makes use difficult, but that social pressures (and a strict age hierarchy) leave youths without much legitimacy to claim space. Instead, they compromise, adjust and avoid stepping into other users space (more details in section 7). Another constraint is the role of management and guards in tolerating or constraining youth activities in public spaces. We also illustrated how youths have ambivalent views towards encroachment of their play space by vendors, but a clear negative view of entrance fees, which they see as unaffordable, a hassle, and arbitrary. We ended with a detailed discussion of social control which makes lifestyle sports and unmarried romantic couples more difficult to accept in public spaces. While unease exists towards these two types of activities, younger people are much more tolerant than previous generations.

7. Conflict between users and processes of territorialization

Scarcity of public spaces, resulting in overcrowded squares and plazas, raises questions about *conflicts* and *territorialization* amongst young users. How do young people make up for the lack of space, while maintaining what appears to be harmonious relations with other users? This section is based on systematic observations in our three case locations, and from 60 interviews conducted with youths in Hòa Bình Park, Lenin Memorial Park and the 34T Plaza in Trung Hòa Nhân Chính. It also delves into nine focus group sessions carried out with lifestyle sports practitioners (e.g. street dancing, inline skating, freestyle soccer, skateboarding) in these same sites.

Interviewees were asked if they witnessed, or were involved in any forms of conflict on the square, plaza or park. The answers cover a wide array of situations of potential conflict, from simple issues of the diverging mindsets between generations, to actions by security personnel, and all the way up to actual crimes committed, such as robberies and acts of violence. To maintain the focus on territorialization, the results were narrowed down to focus only on situations of conflict that had a spatial impact on users, enhancing or weakening their capacity to engage with the public space freely. In this section, we therefore willingly exclude instances of individual conflicts with parents, security, or personal anecdotes that do not affect the way the space is shared.

A few cautionary notes with respect to the interview process are in order before we move forward with this discussion. First, it is important to note that, mostly for cultural reasons, young people sometimes seem to feel intimidated, or are not very keen to think critically about situations of conflict or social dysfunction, or at least seem to be reluctant to share those thoughts. Moreover, most of the interviews on which this sections analysis builds were carried out in the presence of foreign researchers, and the youths interviewed may have been reluctant to discuss social problems of Vietnamese society, such as situations of conflict that they either experienced or witnessed in the public space under study. To this, we may add that the sampling of interviewees for this study did not seek to include individuals or groups who display aggressive or socially disruptive behaviours in public spaces. For all these reason, it is reasonable to think that the data collected in this study might underrepresent the presence or gravity of conflicts in Hanoi's public spaces. However, we should also mention that we witnessed very few -- if any -- conflicts during the 100 hours of systematic observation that we carried out in Lenin Memorial Park, 34T Plaza, and Hòa Bình Park, nor at any other time during the data collection process in the seven public spaces that we studied.

The first part of this section explores the fluid and subtle ways that potential conflicts in these overcrowded spaces are avoided or dissipated. The vast majority of interviewees insist on the absence of conflict in public spaces. However, what the interview process makes clear is that there is a whole array of strategies deployed by the users of public spaces, and especially by young people, to avoid conflict, which include spatial negotiation strategies, behaviours of avoidance, mediation, patience and conciliation amongst users. The deployment of these multifarious strategies in the context of overcrowded public spaces results in an intricate spatio-temporal choreography, or what we call territorialization, which is mostly built upon unspoken agreements, habits and routines. Though security personnel

are frequently patrolling these spaces they seldomly become involved in resolving (potential) spatial disputes, though we do give their role consideration in this first section.

The second part of this section will then highlight the main conflicts mentioned by interviewees. Some territorial issues are endemic to one or two particular public spaces studied, but there are certain kinds of conflict that are brought up by users of all three sites. 'Overcrowding' is the underlying cause of most conflicts, but it is useful to break these conflicts down into different categories, which we have done as follows: conflicts caused by the most space-consuming activities, conflicts caused by space-consuming individuals, and conflicts that are caused by inappropriate behaviour that creates zones of discomfort. These different sources of conflict are discussed in the second half of this section in subsections related to the groups of persons who are the source of particular types of conflict: children, vendors, romantic couples, motorbike owners.

"Vietnam is too crowded"[24]

Overcrowded public spaces host an exceptionally high density and variety of users. Amongst these, youths have to compete, (often the hardest), against other users to be able to secure the space for a few of their highly space-consuming activities (e.g., soccer, skateboarding, inline skating, etc.). The scarcity of public space has already been thoroughly discussed in the present report. Nonetheless, 'overcrowding' was often mentioned in interviews when youths expressed their concerns about conflicts arising from the lack of sufficient playable space in squares and parks. One freestyle soccer player mentioned, for example, that a group of skateboarders had to build a skate park by themselves in the suburbs of Hanoi to play their sport. He recalled his impression that the situation had gotten worst with time: "*Yes, it has become more serious. I predict that in the next 5 years, there will be no space for any street art at all.* (group interview-04, LN, November 21, 2013). One 23-year-old parkour practitioner highlighted one possible conflict that can emerge from the scarcity of space, as youths are often the first to be kicked out of the public spaces, mostly as their activities represent cultural and intergenerational challenges: "*There used to be many kinds of terrain, now I feel that it is getting smaller and people have also started to ask us to leave*" (interview, 34T-19, November 16, 2013).

One of the reasons we asked youths about conflicts was to investigate whether different groups could avoid overstepping the bounds of each other's territory in such a limited amount of public space. For instance, the various lifestyle sports practitioners indicated to us that the most general source of conflict for them emerged from the risk of crashing with other sports players or with regular users. Having to deal with the multitude of users, especially in the evenings, one skater remarked: "*at night there is no way we can skate here*" (interview, LN-PS-02, 13 June 2014). A 23-year-old female skateboarder practicing at Lenin Memorial Park informed us, in relation to the issue of avoiding the space of other users when the park is crowded, that, "*In the summer, sometimes we have to wait for hours to have space for practicing. Because in the summer, families bring their children to this park a lot, so we have to wait until the kids go home to practice*" (interview, LN-18, October 20, 2013). This shows a genuine effort from youths to respect everyone's access to the public space. A young 18-year-old skateboarder aptly sums up the situation: "*In foreign countries, there are specialized areas for playing these sports but not in Vietnam. Maybe because of high land costs, no one is willing to invest in venues for street disciplines. I play here [in 34T Plaza] or in Lenin Statue because we don't have much choice. We don't want others to tell us*

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[24] From an interview with a 21-year-old female user in Hòa Bình Park, November 9, 2013.

to do this or that, but we don't have any other place to play so we play here" (interview, 34T-01, August 2, 2013).

We observed at our three study sites similar patterns of use on all days, which is similar to many other public spaces in Hanoi. There is a first peak of users early in the morning, between 5 and 7am. People come to exercise and play games (like soccer and badminton) while enjoying the fresh air before going to school or work. During the day, there are not many users since people are at school and work, and since the midday sun is often very hot. Most users present during this time of day are children or youths who are not in school, and elderly people. At the end of the afternoon, youths and children with their families become more and more prevalent in public spaces. There are two more peak times during the day: one is early evening, before dinnertime (around 5 to 6pm), and the other one is after dinnertime (around 8 to 9pm). During these times there is a great variety of users, still dominated by young families with children, and youths hanging out with their friends, doing activities or not. Then, after 10pm, the number of users sharply decreases and youths are often the only users who stay in the square until midnight or later.

Here is a graph representing number of users of Lenin Memorial Park for the time of day from noon to midnight (based on frequent observations). During the afternoon there are fewer than 50 users on the open surface of the square (especially during the heat of summer). There is a similarly low number at night, and there are two peaks in the early and late evening reaching up to 400 or more users on the square (figures 61 and 62):
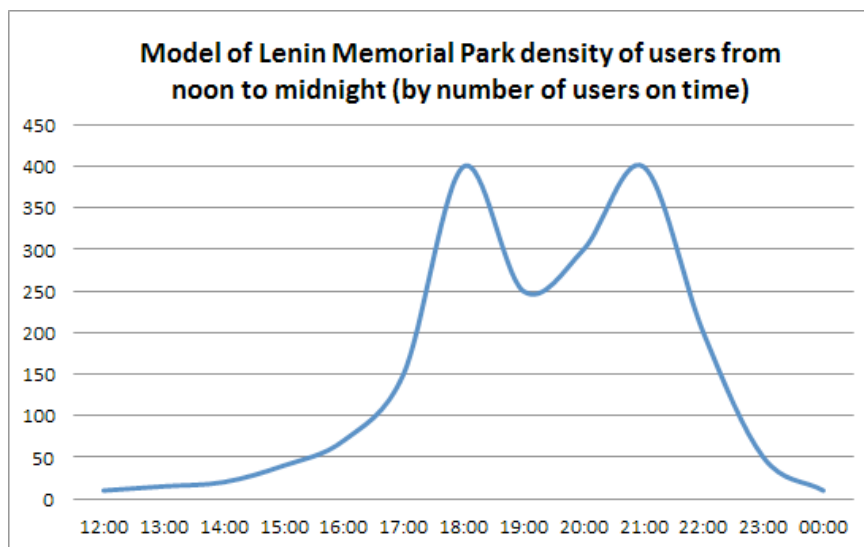
Figure 61: Graph of the number of Lenin Memorial Park users/ time of day (noon to midnight)

Activities displayed by number of people in Lenin Memorial Park
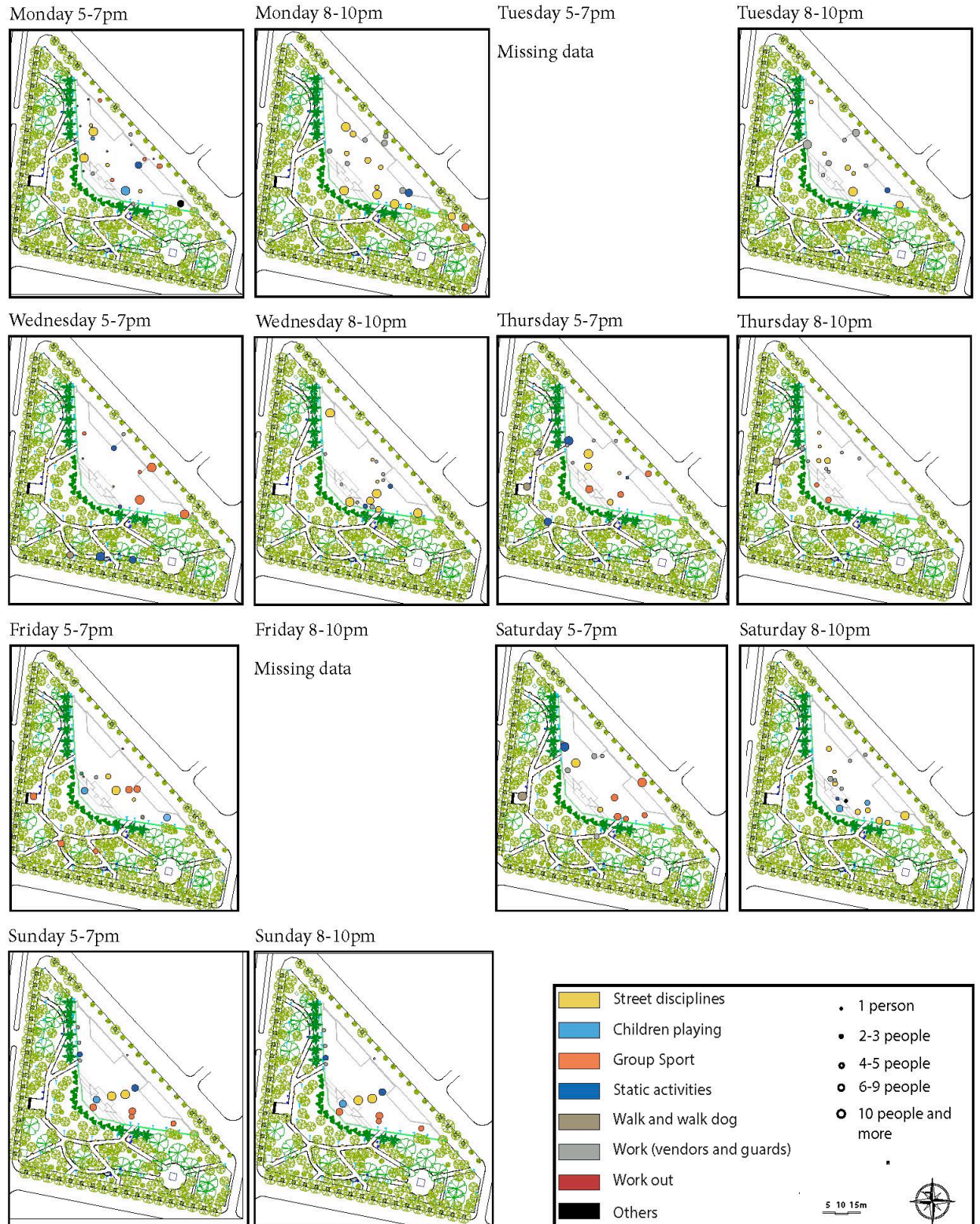
Figure 62: Number of people, activities, and locations, by time of day in Lenin Memorial Park, June 2014

a) No conflicts: Spatial choreographies and negotiation strategies

Skateboarders mingle with inline skaters, both of them winding between flocks of children playing. There are vendors, soccer players, aerobics groups, and people randomly walking or standing for a chat. Despite the high potential of collisions or overstepping one's informal 'territory', most of the youths interviewed insisted on the absence of conflict. It is indeed worth mentioning that roughly two thirds (41 out of 62) of youths interviewed mentioned they were usually not involved in situations of conflict, nor did they witness obvious sources of conflict. Quite a few youths also said that they had never directly witnessed conflicts, but had only heard rumours about them. There is a general acceptance that the limited space is to be shared amongst all users, and even that groups will be forced to use only a small corner of the space to practice various street disciplines. One 21-year-old walking girl sensibly accommodates herself to the situation: "*I am not bothered, even though sometimes I feel that the space that is left is small when my dog needs to run around […]. But in general, it's ok because it is difficult to demand better*" (interview, 34T-18, November 9, 2013).

Most users say they avoid conflict when it arises by stepping away or leaving altogether. This is true even for teenagers being teased. After complaining about the presence of bullies in Hòa Bình Park, a young 23-year-old male skateboarder mentioned that his group would "*just move away from them not to strain the conflict, […] even when they swear at us*" (interview, HB-11, June 20, 2014). Another 17-year-old female dancer said, "*I reacted like nothing had ever happened. […] I just let them go*" (interview, HB-20, June 24, 2014). This matches preliminary conclusions we obtained based on research that targeted parkour practitioners and skateboarders in Hanoi; these two groups used avoidance behaviour as a way to maintain the approbation of other users towards their activities: "In response to what they feel is a very fragile situation, which could result in them being pushed out of the public space at any moment, the youths have avoided conflict through diplomacy and adaptation tactics" (Geertman et al, forthcoming, see also section 6). This highly respectful and deferential behaviour is not oriented only towards the official authorities, but also toward other users. We learned that "[t]he watchword among street discipline practitioners is to avoid any forms of conflict, adapting their practice, as much as possible, to the needs and demands of other users" (Geertman et. al., forthcoming).

"We practice together"
In our many observation sessions we saw that users are quite regular in their visitation habits, always coming to the same park at the same time of day. This is valid for all users doing a special activity, from the elderly doing tai chi, women doing aerobics, to young people skateboarding and children playing with electric cars (figures 62, 63 and 64).

Activities displayed by number of people in 34T Plaza

Monday 5-7pm
Missing data
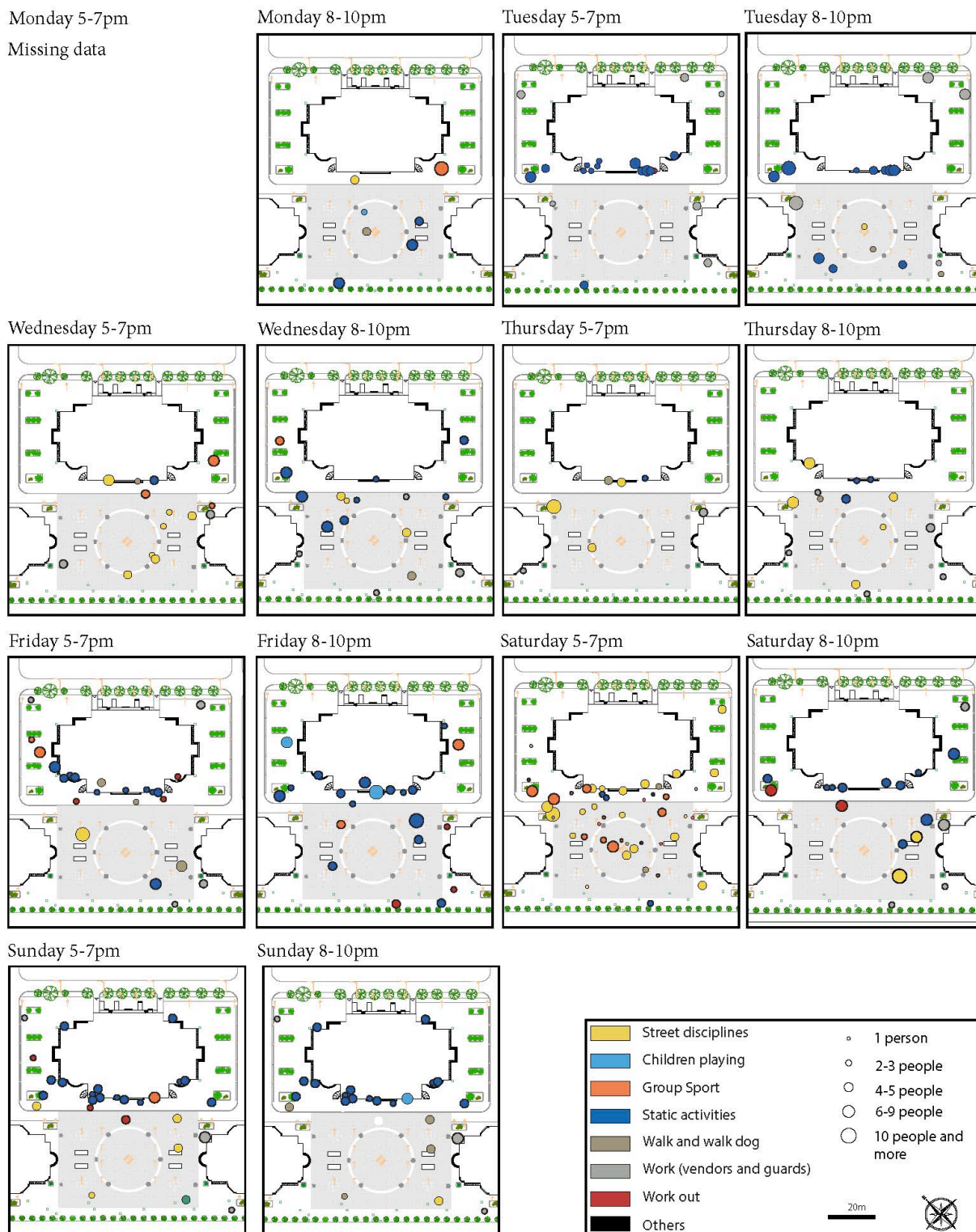
Figure 63: Number of people, activities, and locations, by time of day in 34T Plaza, June 2014

Activities displayed by number of people in Hòa Bình Park

Monday 5-7pm

Missing data
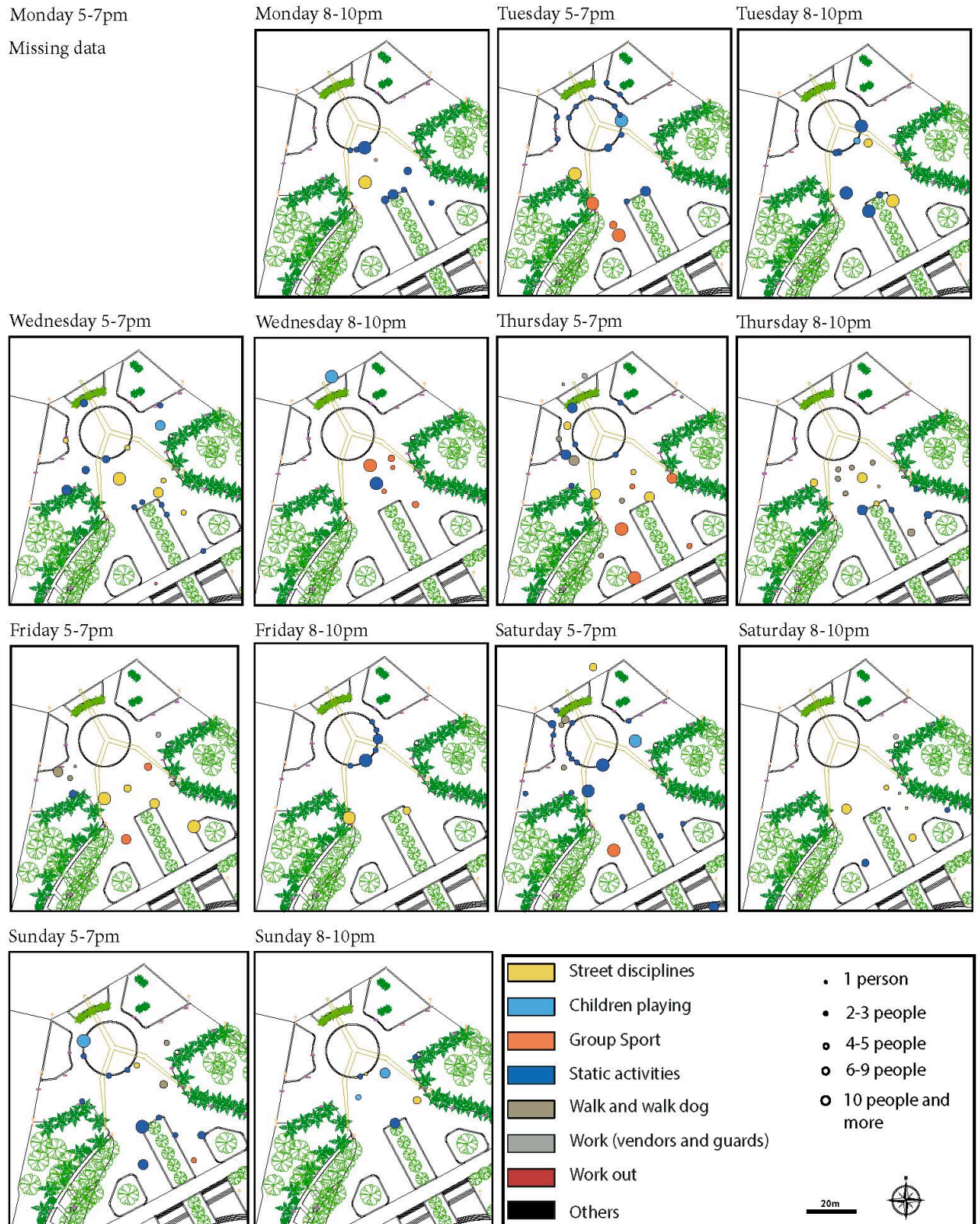
Figure 64: Number of people, activities, and locations, by time of day in Hòa Bình Park, June 2014

Many interviewees shared their favourite negotiation strategies for occupying space, creating what we like to describe as an intricate spatio-temporal choreography of uses in the public space. For example, skateboarders and inline skaters will simply "*have [their own] separate area*". They will "*find such a place like that and respect each other*" (interview, HB-20, June 24, 2014). Others also confirm that they would "*move a little bit far away from them when sometimes, they come to our area to practice*" (interview, HB-02, June 17, 2014). The general word is that people understand the needs of others since the space is public. A few users insisted that these forms of arrangements and displacements come as informal initiatives: "*It's random at first, then it gradually becomes a habit,*" said a 23-year-old hip-hop dancer at Lenin Memorial Park (interview, LN-13, October 20, 2013). A young female skateboarder detailed further the logistics of such negotiations based on habits and routine, which her group had been building and maintaining for 5 to 6 years: "*I don't know, but I think they have an agreement with each other, for example dancers do not need a large space or obstacles, while we [skateboarders] need a lot of space to practice here. So, we respect each other and each team has their own corner to practice in, no one takes the place of the others*" (interview, LN-18, Oct 20, 2013). **This repeated use of a certain space during a certain amount of time is what we called territorialization**.

These mutual forms of respect even morph into an air of unity, friendship and bonding. One freestyle soccer player at Lenin Memorial Park shared his thoughts about the park's positive energy: "*Actually, people in this park are quite close to each other; we practice together and are careful to avoid conflict. People here are all very happy, friendly and social with each other*" (interview, LN-16, October 20, 2013). **Such testimony gives rise to a sense that the public space gives rise to a thoroughly beneficial environment for the youth to learn, open their minds, and ultimately share such elation**: "*We almost know all of the dancers [at Lenin Memorial Park]. Other types of dancers have similar attitudes. We have changed our view and become more open-minded as we wanted to know more about their culture*" (group interview, FGD-01, LN, November 4, 2013).

Even when users do overstep their bounds, the encroachments are treated with respect. In some occurrences when skateboarders mentioned losing control of their board resulting in it hitting other users, the word is that it usually does not build up into any serious conflicts: "*We just said sorry and left them. Actually, it is not a serious problem*." When asked if they would pick a quarrel in a similar situation with other skateboarders, the same skateboarder disapproved of the idea: "*No, we don't. We both say sorry and make up with smile*" (interview, HB-17, June 24, 2013). A young skateboarder in 34T Plaza spoke in similar terms, further asserting the importance of informal territorialization strategies to stay away from conflict:

> [W]e apologize immediately. Because in such a place that has so many people, it is inevitable to hit each other. […] Each group has separated areas. For example if one group is already playing in this area, others will automatically move to another place. […] We think it's better because we don't cause trouble for residents. The less impact the better. We don't like trouble, we prefer peace (interview, 34T-01, August 2, 2013).

The respectful habits of the groups and their routines help them agree on each other's own defined territory, which is then valued and recognized by other users, both in terms of time and space. The relative consensus suggests that these informal agreements are of great value for negotiating and avoiding conflicts. But it is also possible to question the ability of these arrangements to be flexible enough to accommodate spontaneous uses and new users. As one female hip-hop dancer pointed out: "*They divided it into separated areas. Our area always belongs to us, even though we do not come to practice, it is still our area; others*

do not use it. It is the Hip-hop culture: we always respect each other" (interview, LN-03, Aug 26, 2013). The apparent flexibility of the arrangements stand in contrast to the demand the various territories be strictly respected: "*Every different group, such as the shuttlecock group, the skating group … they are all conscious of which area is suitable for them. I do not like users who invade the space where we are playing*" (group interview-FGD-24, HB, July 2014).

Users implicitly claim the right to use 'their' spot, which other users then recognize as "belonging" to a group or a certain activity for a period of time. Different users base this negotiation on habits and mutual observation. In addition, youths sometimes use accessories and objects that are placed on the space and represent the possession of space by a group. What is put forward here as an idea of mutual respect can easily cover for layers of rigid and established spatial hierarchies. The previous quotes speak of the youths' ability to negotiate space amongst other young users. But how do they cope with other groups of users? For example, are older users more likely to impose their rights over the space?

As mentioned above, we gathered from our research on skateboarders and parkour practitioners that, compared to other users, youths are often at the end of the social chain in their ability to claim legitimacy in public spaces. Traditional Vietnamese neo-Confucian sets of hierarchies push young people to the bottom of the social hierarchy. So far we have seen that public spaces are a relatively peaceful environment, often referred to in interviews as being mostly devoid of spatial conflicts. Nonetheless, the existence of these hierarchical structures comes out when the residue of conflicts comes up during interviews. We will further consider below the more difficult relationship youths have with children, vendors, romantic couples and the presence of motorbikes in public spaces.

b) Conflicts: rubbing shoulders for space

Some of the situations of conflict alluded to during interviews appear to be more prevalent in some public spaces than others. For instance, due to its size and central location, Lenin Memorial Park's crowds are denser and more problematic. There are more users generally, more vendors to serve them, more children, more activities, more fights, more motorbikes on the plaza, and motorbike thefts. The same holds true for the 34T Plaza, where avoid overstepping one's bound into the territory of other users requires careful attention.

Still, as mentioned earlier, Lenin Memorial Park, situated near embassies and diplomatic offices, and Hòa Bình Park also fall into the category of "cultural parks" (*công viên văn hóa*), which means that they have a symbolic function, and are protected by a stronger police presence. A 20-year-old girl hanging at the square asked about the police presence said, "*They are here all the time,*" (interview, LN-15, September 12ʹ 2013). In principle, the park's 'cultural' label would mean that recreational and commercial activities are forbidden. In practice, however, they are tolerated and are only seldomly and randomly sanctioned by the police. Interviewees describe soccer and vending (and skateboarding in earlier years) as the activities police choose to restrict the most zealously. This raises a few territorialization conflicts, such as vendors having to flee momentarily when the police choose to enforce their prohibition from the park. Some fights have also been hinted at during interviews in Lenin Park and Hòa Bình Park, a majority of them involving vendors clashing with each other over territory.

Being larger and more scenic, Hòa Bình Park is more famous for couples taking romantic strolls. Their presence is an accepted part of the common understanding of what this park is about, but for those who judge their behaviour to be unsuitable for public space it also creates conflict. Finally, a few worries have also been expressed about the presence of many carefree children playing around Lenin Memorial Park. This situation is true as well for 34T Plaza, where most conflicts revolve around kids' safety. We will now see what the presence of children implies in terms of space negotiation.

Children

A lot of parents bring their children to play in the parks and plazas. This has a significant impact on the ability of youths to secure space for their activities, especially in the evenings at Lenin Memorial Park and Trung Hòa Nhân Chính's 34T Plaza, where the kids will run around, or rent toy cars as their parents wander around and chat together. Some parents or elderly people will sometimes take care of many children at once. It was mentioned earlier that some youths have to wait for the later hours of the evening for the kids to leave the square, only then being able to skateboard or play soccer. In the late hours of the evening the squares are used mostly by teenagers who are trying to avoid swarms of children, and want to be able to engage in their sports more freely. Those who do stay late to have space to play can have conflicts with their families who forbid them from staying out too late.

The kids often occupy central stage (figures 62, 63, 64), at times being the users who occupy the greatest amount of space because they are not limited by the territorial concerns of the youths: "*[C]hildren just focus on playing and don't care about other things, so sometimes they hit other people by accident and they get screamed at*" said a young man at 34T Plaza (interview, 34T-07, August 21, 2013). We were informed of a few situations that truly got out of hand: parents fighting, vendors screaming, and one lost tooth after a collision. One user chose to dramatize the situation and said ironically: "*They are very dangerous. They move so fast. […] If you come here and don't pay attention, they will hit you sooner or later. It's even more dangerous than Vietnamese traffic*" (interview, 34T-09, Aug 24, 2013).

Parents are apprehensive about the safety of their kids when teenagers are playing in the area, as mentioned by some users interviewed, even at Hòa Bình Park: "*[K]ids keep running around us and their parents complain to us. […] They just keep saying different things. They worry that we might crash into their kids*" said an inline skater (interview, HB-02, June 17, 2014). These worries from parents can also stir strong reactions that risk becoming real conflicts: "*My friend saw a little girl falling off her bicycle and went over to help her. But her grandmother thought that my friend crashed into the little girl and picked a quarrel with my friend. It was not a quarrel but the woman insulted my friend,*" said another inline skater at Hòa Bình Park (interview, HB-17, June 24, 2014).

Some young kids are get introduced to skating at Lenin Memorial Park and Hòa Bình Park where they can rent skates. They often are old enough that their parents are not watching them closely, but young enough not to be conscious of their encroachment on other users' space. A young female doing workout exercises at 34T Plaza gave an account of one such spatial conflict: "*I was walking very comfortably and suddenly I was hit by children skating. That made me a little bit uncomfortable. […] Those children are grown-up enough that there is no supervision by their parents; they often play unattended. Hence, I can't confront them or yell at them. So we both let it go peacefully*" (interview, 34T-12, August 29, 2013). Most of the conflicts relating to children ended in such manner, with the users showing patience and awareness: "*I am always careful when playing near the kids so that I don't hit them*" (interview, 34T-08, August 24, 2013).

Another type of childhood spatial transgressor is the very young children whose parents rent them toy electric cars that that they drive without much control going hither and thither. A few young users said that it creates a sense of "disorder" on the plaza: "*We practice in the centre of the park and vendors also want to put their electric cars there for kids. When we ask them to arrange things in a more orderly way to take less space, if we don't use our words wisely, it can lead to conflict*" (interview, LN-18, Oct 20, 2013). This portrait of the messy, disordered public space has at times been associated with vendors as well.

Vendors

Vendors in our 3 studied sites are of various types (e.g., tea stalls, toy car or inline skate rentals, balloon sellers, moto-taxi drivers, etc.). As mentioned previously, many interviewees agreed that vendors offer essential services, participate in the life of the square, and are part of its dynamism.

In some other cases, we learned from interviews that vendors with "bad attitudes" are the source of 3 main sorts of conflict: some take a lot of the free space on the plaza, argue aggressively for that space, and leave the space unclean when their business is done. The most relevant for the discussion on territorialization is about the actual playable space they occupy either with their stands or merchandise: "*there are too many vendors, so it gets full. It makes the park smaller and smaller,*" said a young girl at Lenin Memorial Park (interview, LN-19, October 22, 2013).

The vendors were cited as a source of conflicts mostly in the discussion around that park, tea stalls and car rentals being the most cited. It is important to recall that, in principle, all vending activities are prohibited at Lenin Memorial Park. Despite that fact, the vendors remain widely tolerated, and this dual status creates a confusing relationship between them and the authorities. Some vendors will have to flee anytime the police pop up to patrol. Many users expressed the belief that those remaining on the square had to pay the police to be able to stay. These arrangements with the authorities have the effect of enhancing the vendors' belief that their claim to space is legitimate, and should remain unchallenged. Particular incidents of vendors fighting among themselves over customers and space were also alluded to: "*some tea shops scramble for space and clients, or some car rental people also argue to get their clients*" (interview, LN-13, August 23, 2013).

These issues with the presence of vendors, their claim on space and occasionally bad behaviour have a significant impact on youths' access to space. Yet youths remain somewhat irresolute in their criticisms of vendors. A 24-year-old man doing exercise at Lenin Memorial Park said the vendors are "*messy and unhygienic*", while agreeing that their presence is '*convenient*' (interview, LN-12, September 9, 2013). A 20-year-old girl at the same square shares a similarly ambivalent opinion: "*In general it affects the hygiene issue, that means they eat and then throw the garbage everywhere.*" But then she added that their presence was still enjoyable: "*[P]eople need to buy drinks too, and the drink sellers will help them*" (interview, LN-15, September 12, 2013). For some, it is only a matter of raising the vendors' awareness on cleanliness: "*I think if the vendors can maintain the public hygiene it would be a lot better. Sometimes they do not clean up the area, or the place is dirty after they leave. It ruins the appearance of this public space*" (interview, LN-16, October 20, 2013).

Romantic couples

The issue with couples is manifold, but is also rather simple to pinpoint. According to traditional values public displays of affection are bad. As explained above, in Vietnamese cultural public demonstrations of love are deemed impolite, or even offensive. It is often an intergenerational problem, as youths' new standards of decency are shifting quickly, creating a quickly widening between them and their parents, their grandparents and elderly people. The break is also wide between the urban youths' new manners and the surge of newrly arrived rural migrant youths.

Enjoyed for its romantic scenery, and probably because it is considered a proper park rather than a square or a plaza, most of the issues regarding couples were brought up in Hòa Bình Park. Many couples can be seen walking hand in hand, or "*[t]hey just sit together, take photos and chat*" (interview, HB-14, June 21, 2014). A few instances of couples quarrelling have been mentioned, but the relevant territorialization problem arises when they are seen kissing, cuddling in the grass, or simply being over-familiar. In such circumstances, they create a space of 'discomfort,' an area that other users want to avoid: "*Actually, their actions ruin the image of this park because they don't just hold hands, they even sit, lay down on the grass, cuddle and kiss. A lot of users don't like it*" (interview, HB-16, June 21, 2014).

These areas of discomfort obviously disturb the older generations, sometimes leading to conflict and direct reactions: "*Some old people told them not to do that*" (interview, HB-16, June 21, 2014). Most users still don't see it as a direct source of conflict, thinking their actions are just normal and hardly ever inappropriate. Yet, they questioned the lack of awareness of the couples towards the overall feeling of uneasiness, or simply the fact that some couples do not care about what other users think of them. Generally people were concerned about the disregard these actions express towards other users, and how their actions really affect the occupation of the space: "*I think kissing is good, but they should not do it in public. […] Public spaces are for everybody to come and enjoy entertainment activities, but not the place for couples to show love*" (interview, HB-22, June 25, 2014).

Motorbikes

During observation sessions at the 3 parks, it was easily observable that motorbikes parked directly on the parks' plaza were breaking off parts of the playable surface. Some motorbikes were also seen driving directly across the squares, and we chose to investigate this as a probable source of conflicts and space encroachment. Motorbikes are an important transportation mode in Hanoi, but have always been greeted with mixed reactions. While they make the city more accessible, parking the vehicles has often infringed on pedestrians' space. This is true also for the public spaces investigated, as a few users mentioned that motorbikes were "*convenient for [their owner], but not for other people. […] It takes pedestrians' space so they have to walk on the road. [That] will cause inconvenience*" (interview, 34T-11, August 24, 2013).

Yet, some youths still expressed their concerns about the lack of parking area near Lenin Memorial Park. Because there have been a few reported cases of motorbike thefts on this square (despite police surveillance), the users will bring their motorbikes directly onto the paved surface of the square: "*everyone has to look after their own vehicle*" (interview, LN-9, September 8, 2013). Parking on the square is forbidden in principle, which forces the users to keep their motorbikes illegally close to their playing area, rushing out quickly when the police come to patrol. Most evenings, one can still witness nearly 20 to 30 motorbikes parked on the square near the road: "*Actually the owner is always right beside it. If they are*

unlucky and the police come, if the vehicles are beside them, they can go immediately"
(interview, LN-11, September 9, 2013).

A lot of users also saw a direct threat from the motorbikes riding on the squares. Their speed creates obvious danger zones for kids playing around and those practicing sports with swift moves and sharp turns (skateboarding, soccer, inline skating, etc.). In 34T Plaza, it was said that some "*move in this space too fast and carelessly, […] without paying attention, and they hit other people and have very bad attitudes*" (interview, 34T-07, August 21, 2013). Similarly, in Hòa Bình Park, some users expressed their concern: "*People should not be allowed to drive motorbikes in the park. The park is just for people who want to sit, relax or play a game*" (interview, HB-13, June 26, 2014).

Some suggested that there should simply be more order in the management of motorbikes, that it should be more "organized", while making parking spaces available for more convenience. It is proposed that the rules about driving in the parks should be better enforced. Finally, some are simply stricter: "*In my opinion, there shouldn't be any kind of vehicle in the plaza because it is a playing area, it should only be for people playing. There are a lot of children here, what if the vehicle hits them?*" (interview, 34T-11, Aug 24, 2013).

Security

Where most conflicts appear to be avoided with patience, lenience and conciliation, it is still important to measure the role of formal security in Hanoi's public spaces in cases of serious conflicts. Some crimes have been reported in interviews, mostly thefts, but also personal attacks on people. In these cases, the police intervened properly.

Apart from these more serious cases, a vast majority of interviewees confirmed that, most of the time, the police or security guards are not necessary to solve conflicts. Users settled most fights among themselves. In Hòa Bình Park, for instance, some youths implied indirectly that the park was too large to allow proper security interventions. In the case of a robbery or a fight, the police arrived after it was already settled, or were not even requested. It was still not thought that the park was unsafe.

In Lenin Memorial Park, the park's proximity to a major street gives an impression of increased safety. It is also said that it is the park with the highest presence of police and authorities: "*There are some conflicts, but because this park is very central, they are easily stopped. […] the police come very fast*" (interview, LN-05, August 23, 2013). Yet, police interventions also prevent the youths from staying in the park too late: "*At about 11 to 12 PM they have their patrol car and see where people leave their motorbikes and then remind them not to gather here*" (interview, LN-11, September 9, 2013). Some young soccer players even informed us that their group reached an agreement with the police, allowing them to play on the square (it is theoretically prohibited) as long as they leave before 4PM, when the largest number of users will start to congregate on the square. In that case, the police also acted as mediators for negotiating the square's high density. Regarding conflicts about territorialization, as mentioned earlier, users themselves informally settle the issue: "*Firstly, people will try to solve the conflict. We only ask for a supervisor's help when it is not going well. But people around here get along quite well with each other. The atmosphere is very friendly, there are no conflicts*" (interview, LN-19, October 22, 2013). As discussed in a previous section, most of the police interventions are directed at vendors: "*police often come here to restrain all the vendors because they are illegal*" (interview, LN-18, October 20, 2013).

The case of 34T Plaza is different in a way, as a private management company provides security. This applies for surveillance in general, but also to channel complaints filed by the local residents. Signs are present at the square to forbid inline skating, skateboarding, climbing (aimed at parkour practitioners), running and cycling. While these activities are widely tolerated, it was mentioned at numerous occasions that the security guards would use these official guidelines to randomly displace, or chase away some of the youths engaged in these sports. Youths here have shown perseverance and resilience to get their activities tolerated: "*Well, we just come here shamelessly. We don't just stay in one place so they don't know when we come. We try to practice where we won't affect anyone. But then, […] we still get chased away*" (interview, 34T-19, November 16, 2013). Parkour groups are the chief victims of these policies, but it also applies to skateboarders forced to practice near the street to keep the noise of the skateboards away from the residential towers. Security guards will also chase away soccer groups on many occasions. The private form of management serves the residents, not the users of the square specifically, which gives the impression that the possibility of users getting help from the security guards there is more difficult: "*What I don't like is mostly having to deal with the manager of this building. […] If I complain to them, it is worthless*" (interview, 34T-01, August 2, 2013). One interviewee even pushed the criticism further: "*The security staff here is like "Nup hero" (useless). They usually hide away, and come only when there is a problem, but even then they cannot do much to solve the problem*" (interview, 34T-09, August 24, 2013).

c) Conclusion

We gather from this study that despite a very high density of use in the public spaces, the youth will display rather impressive amounts of patience to avoid conflict. A few negotiation strategies have been listed, such as politeness, avoidance, and a broad awareness of others' needs in terms of space. These strategies stem from a general acceptance that the public space is, indeed, too crowded, and that it is difficult to blame this fact on other users. This awareness then unfolds into an array of territorialization strategies, or what we choose to call spatio-temporal choreographies: people come in groups, at fixed hours, build synchronized habits and routines, and respect informal sets of agreements amongst users, allowing for a harmonious functioning of the public space.

It is still important to note that most of the conflicts registered during interviews were related to the reality of 'overcrowding.' For example, some conflicts derived from the great number of children who rightfully need access to play space. Couples showed that the rapid urban growth created clashes in customs and habits. Users called for more order and management of vendors and parking areas, while authorities also proved tolerant faced with the overwhelming need of the people of Hanoi for public space.

The conflicts that do arise cannot overshadow the public's capacity to reach informal agreements, and coexist through freely negotiated arrangements. Most agree that vendors should not be displaced. Lifestyle sports practitioners have also gained more and more legitimacy and recognition for the beneficial aspects of their sports. Motorbikes are problematic, yet essential. Children will be children, simply in need of more play space. ***At various occasions, the fruitful negotiation strategies in place appeared to stem from the rich mixed-use and diversified actors in place***. When asked if there should be stricter rules to manage or segregate the variety of users of the square, one young male in 34T Plaza told us about the benefits of such coexistence: "*I think we should just let it be as it is, because if*

we separate to different areas, we will lose all the joy. There should be integration; otherwise there will be isolation. The best is when we just all play in the same place; this way we can not only watch people skating, but also have our own quiet space to think" (interview, 34T-13, August 29, 2013). Users gain awareness from rubbing shoulders with others, learning from others' collection of skills and personal interests.

More mixed-use public spaces would allow for more conflict avoidance. Users expressed the view that their access to public space had decreased in the last decade, a trend that is highlighted by other academic research and illustrated in section 3 of this report. From To Luong Le, in his thesis on Hanoi's Urban Green Areas (2013), we learn that "i) the demand of public [space] in inner Hanoi will grow mid-term and increase strongly long-term; ii) Hanoi's residents will claim strongly for more parks in the future; iii) The number of conflicts inside [public parks], among the visitors will occur very soon and require a specific master plan for the development and the management of [Urban Green Areas]" (Le To Luong, 2013). From observation and interviews, we have determined that demand by users of the 3 studied sites has reached the saturation point. The conflicts mentioned in this research arose from the increased pressure put on the scarce quantity of public space in Hanoi. From here, the capacity of youths to negotiate their space peacefully might be strained by this growing need in formal playable surfaces. Even if disturbances in public spaces are now at low levels, users still expressed specific dissatisfaction with the lack of space. Development policies in Hanoi should take into consideration this dissatisfaction, and acknowledge a greater need in easily accessible mixed-use public spaces to prevent the appearance of greater conflicts between users in the future.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study of public spaces and their use by youths in Hanoi illustrates the importance of public spaces for this segment of the Vietnamese capital's population —and for the wider urban society—along with the need for more and better quality public space in a rapidly urbanizing city. In the following pages, we formulate a number of recommendations based on these results and our conversations with our partners, HealthBridge, and the Institute of Sociology.

We begin by summarizing why public spaces are important for youth and the whole society (section a), before turning to recommendations (section b) targeting specific types of public spaces, as well as long term actions and goals related to planning issues, monitoring systems and a research and development agenda.

a) Public spaces are important for youth development and the whole society

We have seen the benefits that youths gain from using public spaces. In terms of **health**, more public spaces designed to accommodate active uses means more space for practicing sports. Public spaces play a significant role in the everyday lives many youths; they visit these parks several times per week, sometimes daily or even twice a day, and spend long periods of time there.

In addition, contact with others through these activities supports their psychological well-being. When they socialize in the city's public spaces youths act as peers for one another and this helps in **preventing distress and loneliness**. This is particularly evident in the case of youth migrants newly arrived to the city (e.g., university students) who can find information and mutual support in public spaces for their studies, (by joining a study group, for instance), or by joining a lifestyle sports group.

Hanoi's public parks provide youth with green spaces, water views and the **environmental benefits** that come with these two natural elements. Furthermore, this supports a range of activities and also gives urban youths a chance to maintain a healthy contact with nature in the context of a dense urban environment. Youths are very aware of the environmental benefits that trees and plants bring to the city. They emphasize the role of these spaces in maintaining clean air and point to the crucial role trees play in providing shaded areas that can be used during warmer periods of the day and year. The scenery and greenery offered by those public spaces which have numerous trees, plants, and bodies of water helps their users **relax and release stress**. This in turn helps in prevent the use of other means of coping with psychological strain, such as drugs and alcohol.

Youths have little power to make a claim on a share of the public space for their own use. We observed, however, that they generally address this limitation tactfully and purposefully avoid conflicts with users belonging to other age groups (e.g., small children, elderly). Moreover, youths promote a very positive discourse on the activities they practice in public spaces, particularly in the case of lifestyle sports practiced in groups (structured or not). We

have also seen how significant public spaces are for youth development and identities, greatly contributing to the *maturation process*. We recommend raising parental and governmental awareness of the importance of recreational sports activities practiced by youths outside of conventional institutional settings (e.g., schools, mass organizations), as part of their development and growth into healthy and balanced adults.

b) Varying quality, fragmented accessibility and the complex evolution of public spaces in Hanoi: How can Hanoi provide youth-friendly public spaces?

The Vietnamese capital is still a long way from reaching the $7m^2$ of "green space outside of residential units" per capita set by the Ministry of Construction for Special-grade cities such as Hanoi (c.f. Vietnam Building Code, 2008, art. 2.6.3). This is despite significant efforts in recent years to extend the city's public space network. Between 2000 and 2010, the total area covered by public gardens saw a threefold increase, and 10 new parks were built across Hanoi's urban territory. However, during the same period, the city lost approximately half of its ponds and lakes. While this primarily affected smaller bodies of water, the loss nevertheless amounts to a total diminution of 15% of water surfaces in the city.

When taking into account the demographic evolution of the 18 to 25 year-olds in the city, we find that these changes in Hanoi's public space landscape have led to an increase of the total area of public gardens per young person. However, these same changes are also accompanied by a slight decrease in the total area of parks per young person. Even more worrisome is the significant reduction in the total area of bodies of water per young person. There is an urgent need to protect, preserve and improve bodies of water in Hanoi.

New public spaces are unevenly distributed creating issues of accessibility for residents in various parts of the city. In large portions of the city centre youths do not have access to a public space within a reasonable walking distance from their home, which we have determined to be 900 metres based on their most frequent modes of transport and resulting travel times (estimated from results of our survey in 2014). The situation is particularly problematic for parks. Indeed most of the new public spaces built in the inner city since 2000 are relative small public gardens designed for mainly static use. The city's 10 new large public parks, which are meant to support more active use, are essentially located in peripheral urbanized areas. Moreover, some of these new public spaces – sometimes called ecological areas (*khu sinh thái*) – are managed by the private sector and charge much higher entry fees to users than parks under city control. Though these spaces are appreciated by middle-class and affluent families, they remain unaffordable for the vast majority of lower-income residents.

Design of public gardens and lakes
Considering the actual dearth of public spaces (in the inner-city in particular) and given the relatively good accessibility of existing public gardens and lakesides, we recommend the expansion of the official definition of these public spaces with a view to supporting more types of use. Public gardens and lakesides already support some recreational uses, but with an adequate and well-balanced redesign, these spaces could be more fully exploited. By **allowing for more diverse activities**, rather than favouring only static activities, these

smaller public spaces have the potential to meet part of the unfulfilled need for open space in the city.

Two design interventions could easily be implemented in the short term in the city's existing and future public gardens. First, we recommend **integrating small hard-surfaced areas in public gardens and on the banks of bodies of water that can accommodate active uses** that do not require large amounts of space. This could be badminton or shuttlecock courts traced on the ground or small, fixed exercise equipment such as is found in many of Hanoi's parks (e.g., chin-up bars). Second we recommend creating more **tree-shaded areas and installing more benches** within gardens or on the lakeshores. In addition to the environmental and public health benefits discussed above, having more trees and shaded areas in public gardens and around bodies of water will encourage more people to come to use them and to stay for longer periods of time, especially in the summer.

Citizens in central districts are in urgent need of new public gardens and lakesides. Given the scarce availability of land in those areas, '**pocket parks**' could be a suitable model for Hanoi (see also recommendations in the section 'City-scale planning of public spaces' below).

Design of parks

It is very important to enhance the quality of existing parks. Our results suggest that environmental quality and maintenance play a central role in defining the quality of the experiences that youths have in public spaces. The most important actions will be **improving the quality of bodies of water in parks, adding more trash bins, and making sure that they are emptied regularly enough to avoid overflowing, maintaining and keeping up physical facilities and installing restrooms.**

(Re)design of existing and future parks should take into account:

- **Accessibility: no entrance fees, several entry points located near the street, and at least one park located at a reasonable walking distance** from each of the city's residential areas. Our survey suggests that youths walk a maximum of 900 metres from their place of residence. It is very likely that this figure is lower for less mobile categories of residents (e.g., elderly people, parents with small children, physically impaired);
- **Physical setting:** Park design needs to find the right balance between **the provision of flat, open, and hard surfaces** to support unstructured sports activities, and quieter zones that are safe for even the most vulnerable users, where park-goers can retreat from the bustle of city life, enjoy greenery and landscaping, with shaded areas and places where people can shelter from bad weather;
- **Diversity of facilities for various users**, rather than developing youth-only parks;

In support of these recommendations, we observed that new activities (skateboarding, inline skating, hip hop, etc.) are very popular with young men, and increasingly so with women too. However, few parks in the city offer areas suitably designed (in terms of texture and surface) to accommodate these activities and the more traditional ones such as badminton. We recommend developing public spaces for youths that are *diverse in design and material so they can support a variety of youth activities*. This includes good surfaces for rollerskating, walking and cycling; raised surfaces to jump from; lighting after dark to ensure safety; other equipment to support sports activities, such as a skating rink, table tennis tables, a soccer field, or just a sports field marked on the floor (e.g., badminton or shuttlecock courts).

Youths prefer to be among a variety of people rather than being only with their peers. If there is a diversity of users youths enjoy watching the different people and feeling like they are part of society. We recommended developing public spaces where youths *can integrate with other people in society*, by providing benches and other urban furniture for youths and others to sit at, chat with and watch each other. Having the opportunity to sit freely on the grass is also desirable (although it might not be possible in those public spaces used most intensively). Free public spaces (without user fees) also allow young people to gather outside their respective homes in areas where they do not need to consume to stay.

Youths prefer density, they like to be in a crowd, because it provides an attractive atmosphere and also makes the space safer. The safety of young people could be further enhanced in most of Hanoi's parks by ensuring that there is good lighting throughout the park and its surroundings all night long, and by ensuring the presence of security guards who are easily visible in the entire public space.

City-scale planning of public spaces: spatial quality and empirical criteria

It is very important to integrate parks into a city-wide public space planning strategy and to have a metropolitan vision of the public space network (including public gardens, lakesides, parks, and other spaces designated as "public-use green space"). This coincides with the growing attention paid to the spatial qualities of public spaces reflected in new policies, such as the Urban Planning Law and the Public-Use Greenery Planning in Urban Areas – Design Standards (see the 'Positive policy change' section of this report). However, there are two points that need to be clarified in relation to the extant policies:

- While new planning policies promote the creation of a network of public gardens, street-greenery and green spaces (parks), the criteria that this network should follow are formulated in vague qualitative terms, such as 'harmony' and 'elegance' of the streetscape. Such criteria are not easily actionable, and we recommend that planners should be provided with more concrete guidelines. Moreover, new urban design policies are mainly centred on the material and physical space surrounding or "framing" open and outdoor spaces. We recommend that policies address more directly issues related to the detailed design of urban public spaces themselves. Urban design guidelines must go beyond vague indications about the need to take into consideration the dominant shapes, colours and forms in and around parks to tackle the questions of how the design of public spaces can contribute to maximizing their use, accessibility, security and conviviality. In line with this, we strongly recommend that policy makers and experts envisage the formulation of a specific document spelling out the public space design guidelines to be applied in cities.

- The current public space policy emphasizes the need for Vietnamese cities to meet specific ratios of "public use greenery land" per capita. While such two-dimensional, city-wide targets might help planners during master planning exercises, they pose important problems. First, the public policies related to this issue are set out in different laws and policies which are inconsistent with respect to the ratios stipulates—an ambiguity that needs to be clarified. Second, and more importantly, however, the existing ratios address neither the geographic distribution of "public use greenery land" throughout city's territory, nor do they take into consideration the quality of the "public use greenery land" included in calculating the ratio. Third, there should be recognition of different types of public spaces (for example, from regional parks to pocket parks or gardens) and the different roles they play in city life

(ecological, sport, recreation, daily life). This will facilitate and insure a coherent and efficient planning and governance of public spaces.

If Vietnamese policy-makers choose to continue to rely on ratios to guide metropolitan public space planning we recommend that these ratios be complemented by guidelines regarding the distribution of new public spaces. These complementary guidelines should be explicitly aimed at making sure that all of the residents of a city, no matter where in the city they live, have access to various types of public spaces (large city-parks, smaller pocket parks, lakesides, etc.), with specific sub-targets expressed not only in terms of total surface area, but also in distance to residential zones, and types of public space to be met by each of the city's districts.

Monitoring system of lakes, public gardens, and parks

In order to strengthen the protection of existing bodies of water, parks, and public gardens, we recommend setting up two measures applied at the local level (district) by the local authorities:

- A first mechanism, meant to protect parks would **establish policy measures requiring that formal permission from the competent authorities be delivered before any physical or functional alteration to an existing lakeshore, park or public garden**. This is similar to existing policy measures protecting trees;
- The second measure would establish **a monitoring system for bodies of water, parks and public gardens,** i.e., maps of city-wide spaces, and detailed aerial photographs of each space. Such a monitoring tool should be updated at regular intervals, for example every 6 or 12 months, depending on available budgets. We are willing to share our database of public spaces with local authorities, if needed.

Management of public spaces

The daily management of public spaces is a challenge. Our research shows that the monitoring of private guards, vendors, and parking are crucial elements.

Public spaces managed by private companies are perceived as the least pleasant for youths, either because these companies are controlled by people with different interests from those of the youths (34T Plaza), or because guards are seen to be arbitrarily applying rules, and making money out of this (Hòa Bình Park). On this basis we recommend that:

c) the management system of public spaces in Hanoi be re-evaluated, with specific attention to **the role of guards** in order to set up mechanisms to ensure they protect all users and do not engage in practices that enhance their personal finances.

Vendors can have a positive role in public spaces, as 'eyes that observe what is going on.' We have also seen that important social interactions between park goers occur at vendors' stalls, and that they provide youths with affordable beverages either within, or close to, public spaces. However, youths also mention many disadvantages to the presence of vendors. They disrupt the atmosphere when conflicts arise either with customers, or related to their claiming of park space. They not infrequently claim too much space, including benches and facilities intended for park goers. And, in some cases, they (and/or their customers) contribute to a dirty and littered park. We therefore recommend that:

- a system be set up that **structures vendor activities,** with stricter rules and guidelines related to where they may set up, the maintenance of their facilities, and behaviour expectations to protect users from potentially harmful behaviours (such as having unclean facilities, or driving in the park, etc.).

Parking is also a problem. Youths would like to have access to ample, affordable, and safe parking spaces. At the same time, they are well-aware that on-site parking areas encroach on the already limited space available for recreational activities in public space. In considering what recommendations to make related to parking it is important to keep in mind that parking needs vary according to the type and role played by each public space in the city. For instance, large parks (12 hectares and above) draw users from all over the city and, at least in the short term, they need to be accessible by motorbike (the predominant mode of transportation in Hanoi). However, smaller parks (less than 12 hectares), public gardens and lakeshores have very limited usable areas and are primarily used by nearby populations who can access them on foot, thus limiting the need for parking facilities.

In line with the above, we recommend a rethink of the current system of parking near public spaces with three main principles in mind: i) make the provision of parking accord with the the type of public space it is serving; ii) limit parking areas within the boundaries public spaces; iii) favour active modes of transportation. More specifically:

- Large parks (12 hectares and above) should be equipped with dedicated, guarded parking facilities, either on-site, or in the immediate vicinity of the park. Existing parking facilities should therefore be maintained, and new ones should be created in those large parks that lack them. In each case the goal of providing adequate parking needs to be balanced against the need to safeguard space for the park's primary purposes, and it is the latter which must be preserved in the case of conflict.
- Smaller parks (less than 12 hectares), public gardens, and lakeshores should only provide users with access to off-site parking spaces (for instance, on-street parking where the road network allows it, or in a nearby lot).
- Parking fees should be modulated to foster a shift towards public transit and active transportation modes. Hence, parking fees for bicycles should be waived in all dedicated parking spaces (on- and off-site) while fees should be maintained for motorbikes. In the medium- to long-term, plans should be made to better connect public spaces to the city's public transit network and, potentially, to a bike lane network. Once alternatives to individual, motorized transportation are in place, we recommend raising the fees charged to park motorbikes in and around all public spaces.

c) Research and development agenda

Hanoi has been undergoing intensive and extensive urbanization. The protection and development of public spaces is urgent but this is a complex process involving multiple actors. A long-term research agenda is therefore crucial. We call for **more concerted efforts to gather the opinions of different actors (*),** such as youths, citizens belonging to other age groups, local authorities at the commune, district, and city levels, and urban planner and academics. This will allow for a wider understanding of public spaces in Hanoi and support the development of truly collective, accessible, and comfortable public spaces for all Hanoians.

On the research plan, focus should be given to suitable design guidelines and informed policies. We suggest future **research avenues on a typology of public spaces, climatic-sensitive design, publicness, and management (*)**.

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Appendix 1: Qualitative interview guidelines

Youth interviews in three case study sites

We are doing a research in urban planning and sociology about youth and public spaces in Hanoi. We want to understand how youth use the space, what they do, why they do it, etc. We would like to have your opinion as a user of this place.

1) Personal experience of Hoa Binh Park

- Tell me about the first time you came here (why did you come, with whom, when, etc.)
- How often do you come to this park [per week, per month]?
- Generally, how long do you stay ?
- Generally, by which means of transportation do you come here?
- Why do you come to this park in particular? And why not a city park?
- Are there specific periods of the year (seasons), days of the week, or time of the day when you tend to come here ? Why do you come at these moments ? Why not at the other times ?
- Generally, do you come to this park/plaza alone or with other people ? [If the latter] with whom ?
-

2) Activities
- Generally, what do you do in this park ? (relax, sport, strolling, hanging out with friends, etc.)
- Why these activities ? (for example inline roller is trendy, so we can ask people practicing skateboarding why do that and not inline roller)
- Generally, what young people do in this park?

if you practice an activity (dance, skate, rollerblade, bicycle etc.) in group :
- How do you describe your group : association (hôi), club (cau lac bô), informal ?
- How, where and when did you meet as a group?
- Do you practice in different places or only here? If different ones : wich ones? Why?
- When do you practice? how often?
- How do you deal with other groups like inlineroller / hip-hop / fitness…?
- Why do you use this particular spot in the park?

3) Evaluation and perception
- What would you say you like the most about this park/plaza ? (ask for detailed explanation)?
- What do you dislike the most? Why? (ask for detailed explanation)
- If you could make any changes that you wanted to this park/plaza, what would you like to change? Why?
-What is your general opinion about public spaces in Hanoi?

4) Other users and conflicts
- Have you ever witnessed problems between users of the park / plaza?
- Can you tell us what this (these) problem(s) was(were) about . Who got involved in (them)?
- In the end, how was(were) it(they) resolved?

- How many times did you see this kind of problem?

- What is your opinion about the presence of street sellers/*quan nuoc* in parks like the one where we are in now?

- What is your opinion about the presence of other commercial activities (rental of electric cars for kids, café) in a park/plaza like the one where we are in now?

5) Authority and Management
- From what you know, who [what agency, what organization] is in charge to manage [name of public space]?
- From what you know, are there some activities that are not welcomed in this place? If yes, which ones ? What do you think about these rules?
- Do you feel restricted in using this space? Do you think it is different for girls and boys?

6) Romantic couples
- Do you see couples here?
- What do they do?
- What is your opinion?
- Have you seen trouble between couples and other users?
- If you had a boyfriend/girlfriend, would you come here? Why?

Hướng dẫn phỏng vấn thanh niên
Chúng tôi đang tiến hành một nghiên cứu trong lĩnh vực quy hoạch đo thị và xã hội học về thanh niên và các không gian công cộng tại Thành phố HN. Chúng tôi muốn tìm hiểu các bạn thanh niên trẻ sử dụng những không gian này như thế nào, họ có những hành động gì và tại sao họ hành động như vậy .... Do vậy, chúng tôi muốn lấy ý kiến của bạn với vai trò là một người đang sử dụng các không gian công cộng này.

1) Trải nghiệm bản than về công viên Hòa Bình
-    Bạn có thể cho tôi biết về lần đầu tiên bạn đến đây? (Tại sao bạn lại đến đây, bạn đi với ai và khi nào...)
-    Bạn có thường xuyên đến công viên này không? (bao nhiên lần 1 tuần hoặc 1 tháng)
-    Thông thường thì bạn đến trong bao lâu mỗi lần?
-    Bạn thường sử dụng phương tiên giao thông nào để di chuyển đến đây?
-    Lý do gì khiên bạn chọn công viên này để đến mà không phải là một công viên khác trong nội thành?
-    Khoảng thời gian cụ thể nào trong năm (mùa nào), ngày nào trong tuần hoặc thời gian nào trong ngày bạn thường đến đây? Tại sao bạn lại đến vào các thời điểm này mà không phải là các thời điểm (thời gian) khác?
-    Thường thì bạn đến công viên này một mình hay với ai khác nữa? [sau đó] cụ thể bạn đi với ai?

2) Các hoat động tại công viên
-    Bạn thường làm gì khi đến công viên này? (thư giãn, chơi thể thao, đi dạo hay đơn thuần là đi chơi với bạn bè ...)
-    Và tại sao bạn lại chọn các hoạt động này? (ví dụ: do trượt patin đang là xu thế, vậy chúng tôi có thể hỏi các bạn chơi trượt ván rằng lý do tại sao họ lại chơi trò này mà không phải là trượt patin?)
-    Theo bạn thì các bạn trẻ thường làm gì khi đến công viên này?

Nếu bạn đang chơi một hoạt động nào đó theo nhóm (ví dụ: nhảy, trượt ván, trượt patin (loại một hàng bánh), xe đap địa hình...):
- Bạn có thể mổ tả về quy mô về nhóm của bạn: một hội, câu lạc bộ, hay không chính chức (tự phát)?
- Tần suất, thời gian và địa điểm các bạn trong nhóm thường gặp nhau?
- Bạn có chơi các trò này ở các không gian/địa điểm khác nữa không hay chỉ ở đây? Nếu có, thì là không gian/địa điểm nào? Tại sao?
- Bạn hay chơi vào khi nào? Mức độ hay tần suất ra sao?
- Các bạn giao lưu với các nhóm khác (patin, hip hop hay tập thể hình..) như nào?
- Tại sao bạn sử dụng địa điểm cụ thể này trong công viên?

3) Đánh giá và quan điểm
- Bạn có thể cho chúng tôi biết điều gì bạn thích/hài lòng nhất về công viên này? (hỏi chi tiết về lý do)
- Và điều gì làm bạn không hài long nhất? Tại sao? (hỏi lý do chi tiết)
- Nếu bạn có thể thay đổi thì bạn muốn thay đổi điều gì trong công viên này? Tại sao?
- Ý kiến chung của bạn về các không gian công công tại Hà Nội là như nào?

4) Những người sử dụng khác và các xung đột
- Đã bao giờ bạn chứng kiến những xung đột/tình huống làm phiền trong công viên chưa?
- Bạn có thể cho chúng tôi biết những vấn đề/xung đột đó là gì? Có những ai dính líu đến?
- Và cuối cùng thì sự việc đã được giải quyết ra sao?
- Bạn đã thấy hoặc chứng kiến việc tương tự như vậy bao nhiêu lần rồi?
- Ý kiến của bạn như nào về sự có mặt những người bán hang rong/quán nước/quán cóc trong công viên, ví dụ nhưn ngay trong công viên chúng ta đang đứng?
- Ý kiến của bạn như nào về sự có mặt của các hình thức buôn bán (ví dụ như việc thuê ô tô điên cho trẻ con, cà phê) trong công viên/quảng trường mà điển hình như trong công viên này?)

5) Chính quyền và quản lý
- Theo những gì bạn biết, tổ chức nào chịu trách nhiêm quản lý công viên Hòa Bình này?
- Theo bạn, có những hoạt động nào mà không được phép thực hiện trong công viên này? Nếu có thì bạn có thể liệt kê?? Bạn ngĩ sao về những luật lệ này?
- Bạn có cảm thấy bị giới hạn/không thoải mái trong việc sử dụng không gian công viên này không? Bạn có ngĩ có sự khác biệt giữa các bạn nam và nữ trong việ sử dụng không gian chung này không?

6) Các cặp tình nhân
- Bạn có gặp các đôi nam nữ/cặp tình nhân trong công viên này không?
- Họ đến đây làm gì?
- Ý kiến của bạn ra sao?
- Bạn đã bao giờ gặp các vấn đề xảy ra giữa các cặp đôi ấy với mọi người xung quanh chưa?
- Nếu bạn có bạn trai/bạn gái thì các bạn sẽ đến đây? Tại sao?

Group interviews in three case study sites

Building relationships & communication

- How did they meet, who has created the group / when?
- If someone wants to join, how does this work, any rules for joining?
- How many boys/girls in the group?
- Is the experience of being part of a group different for girls and boys?
- Are the girlfriend/boyfriend of the group members welcome in the group?
- How do they connect when meeting up?
- Do they have means of communication with each other (website, facebook)?
- What do they discuss aside their activity (break dancing/hip hop etc.)?
- What other activities do they do aside this activity?
- Do they support each other also in other issues then break dancing (problems at school/parents etc.)
- In a day / a week, how much time do they spend together (main activity / other activities)?

Group identity and individual Identity

- *Are you proud to be part of this group and why?*
  - o (Do you feel more confident when being part of this group)
- Do you feel more confident when you are *better than others* at this activity (break dancing/skating etc.)?
- Is it important to achieve, be better than others in the group?
  - o *Or do you want to be better as a group, better than other groups? (competition among groups)*
- Is there a group identity? Dress-code? Other codes/rules? Who decides on them?
- How loyal are the members to the group? (For example do the members as well take part in other groups? Do they come every time etc. is there social pressure to be part of this group from the individual members?)
- Do you feel different from others in society being part of this group, when yes why and how?
- Do you feel more part of society being part of this group, when yes why?
- How important is this group in your life? In what sense? Is there a difference in your life before/after joining this group?
- What does the group bring to you? What are the benefits of being a member of the group?

Location

- Why do choose this particular square as a group? Since when does this group use it?
- How would you describe this Square?
- What do you like/dislike about it?
- If you were asked to improve it, what would you change?
- Why not using the large parks in Hanoi? Or other similar squares (Ly Thai To Statue)?
- Are there other public spaces you use in Hanoi for this activity? Or do you use other public spaces for other activities?
- Do you use one special place for one activity (for example break dance at Lenin Square, one place for smocking pot)?
- Are you loyal to one location or you use several locations, and why?

- Do you also go to commercial open spaces (water-park, entertainment park?) When yes why, when no why not?

Conflicts

- Are you limited in practicing this activity (for example break-dancing) in Hanoi? What about in this particular space (rules, regulations)?
- What do your parents think you doing this?
- What do your friends that are not part of this group think about you doing this activity (break dancing/skating/parkour)?
- Any conflicts with authorities? With other users? (at the square but also outside using this square)
- Who are the other users on the squares you like the most? Why?
- Who are the other users on the square you really don't like? Why?

Gender-focused interviews with non-user girls

1 - Profile [part-I]

- In what year were you born?
- Are you married? Do you have children? [if so, ask how many, and age]
- Whom do you currently live with?
- How many siblings do you have (ask for brothers and sisters)?
- What is your position in the family (first child, second, etc.)?
- What is your current occupation?

2 - Free time

- -In any given week, how much free time do you have? [Or - estimate number of hours per day]
- Can you tell us what moments in your daily life you consider to be your "free times"? [Probe to find out if its' all time out of work/school or if it includes domestic duties]
- What activities do you generally do in your free time? [E.g., *read, watch tv, text-messaging, surf the internet, sport, hang out with friends in café, small eatery, go to cinema, go out of the city, visit family/parents*]
- Among these activities, which one is your favourite? Why?

3 - Personal experience of public spaces

- -Are there any public parks near your home? Which ones? [note: these will be located on a map latter to record interviewee's "mental map" of nearby public space]
- -Why don't you visit this/these parks? [Make sure to ask if parents have a role or if domestic/family duties are using too much time]
- -In the past, have you ever visited a public park? [If yes, ask for when and where, if it used to be regular visits and why stopped going]
- Is there anyone in your family who goes to parks (e.g., siblings, parents, domestic aid)? [If respondent has brother(s), make sure to check if they visit the parks and why do so why she doesn't.]
- -Since you don't go to public parks or squares, do you use any other public spaces? [E.g., sidewalks, cafes, shopping malls, drifting on motorbike…]
- When you go to this [these] place[s] / do these activities, do you generally go alone or accompanied? [if accompanied, asked by whom]
- Among the other public places and the activities that you have just named, which one is your favourite? Why do you like it best?

4 – Women, youth and public parks

- According to you, what kind of young girls go to public parks? [Probe: urbanites/girls from countryside, unmarried or married girls, jobless or low education girls, etc.]
- -According to you, is it appropriate for a girl to go to a public park or square alone? Is it more appropriate to do so in group? [ask for details]
- What do you think about the youth who do "new activities" such as hip hop dancing or skating at Lenin Square or at the Ly Thai Tho statue?

- Do you relate to the girls who take part in such activities? [probe: what do you think about them, would you like to be one of them, why yes why no]?
- If you would like to participate in these activities and are not doing it what is constraining you not to participate?

5 - Profile [part II]

- Did you grow up in Hanoi?
- Do you currently live in the province of Hanoi? [if yes, ask district, if no ask province]
- What are your parents' main occupation?
- What is your highest educational level?
- Would you define yourself as an active-extrovert or calm-introvert?
- Do you think girls should be gentle?
- Do you think girls should take care more of their parents than boys?
- What do you think about gender division in home tasks, life responsibilities, and economic activities in Hanoi?

Gender-focused interviews with girls in three case study sites

1 - Profile [part-I]
- In what year were you born?
- Are you married? Do you have children? [if so, ask how many, and age]
- Whom do you currently live with?
- How many siblings do you have (ask for brothers and sisters)?
- What is your position in the family (first child, second, etc.)?
- What is your current occupation?

2 - Personal experience and evaluation of the park

- How often do you come to this park/square [per week, per month]?
- Are there specific periods of the year (seasons), days of the week, or time of the day when you tend to come here? Why do you come at these moments and less at other times?
- Generally, how long do you stay?
- Why do you come to this park in particular?
- What do you like the most about it? [Ask for detailed explanation]
- What do you dislike the most about it? [Ask for detailed explanation]

3 – Personal activities and opinion about new youth activities

- Generally, what do you do in this park? [E.g., relax, sport, strolling, hanging out with friends, etc.]
- What is your opinion about youth who practice "new activities" such as hip hop dancing or skating at places like Lenin Square or at the Ly Thai Tho statue?
- Do you relate to the girls who take part in such activities? [Probe: what do you think about them? Would you like to be one of them? Why so?]
- If you would like to participate in these activities and are not doing it what is constraining you not to join in?

4 - Free time and identity

- In any given week, how much free time do you have?
- Can you tell us what moments in your daily life do you consider are your "free times"? [Probe to find out if its' all time out of work/school or if it includes domestic duties]
- What activities do you generally do in your free time? [E.g., *read, watch tv, text-messaging, surf the internet, sport, hang out with friends in café, small eatery, go to cinema, go out of the city, visit family/parents*]
- Among these activities, which one is your favourite? Why?

5 - Women and parks

- According to your own experience, are there more women or more men using Hanoi's public parks? [If applicable: Why do you think that there are fewer women than men?]

- From your point of view, do young women use parks differently than young men? [If so, what would you say are the main differences?]
- As a young woman, is there anything that discourages or limits you from going to public parks? [Ask for details]
- When you come to this park, do you feel that other users observe or judge you? [Ask for details]
- Generally, do you come to this park/plaza alone or with other people? [If the latter: with whom? E.g., boy friends, girl friends, group of friend, family members]
- According to you, is it appropriate for a girl to go to a public park or square alone? Is it more appropriate to do so in group? [ask for details]
- Do your parents know that you come to this park? [If yes, what do they think about it? If no, why do you not tell them?]

6 - Security

- Would you say that you feel safe in this park? [If no, what makes you feel unsafe here?]
- Are there any other public spaces in Hanoï, where you feel safer? [ask to explain why]
- Personally, have you ever been harassed in a public park? [If yes, can you tell us what happened?]
- If no, have you ever seen a women being harassed in a public park? Can you tell us what happened?
- When you come to parks like this one, what tricks (or strategy) do you rely on to feel safer? [e.g., come with a friend, only come during daytime, etc.]
- If you could make any changes that you wanted to this park, what would you like to change? Why?

7 – Profile

- Did you grow up in Hanoi?
- Do you currently live in the province of Hanoi? [if yes, ask district, if no ask province]
- What are your parents' main occupation?
- -What is your highest educational level?
- Would you define yourself as an active-extrovert or calm-introvert?
- Do you think girls should be gentle?
- Do you think girls should take care more of their parents than boys?
- What do you think about gender division in home tasks, life responsibilities, and economic activities in Hanoi?

Interviews with romantic couples

Our research focuses on the behaviours and representations of love relationships among youth. All your answers will remain anonymous and will be treated as strictly confidential. THANK YOU for your cooperation.

First, we would like to ask you some questions about your romantic relationship

---

- When did you meet your partner the first time?
- In what circumstances did you meet your partner?
- When did you start your romantic relationship? How long have you been together?
- Who initiated your romantic relationship?

- The first time when you met your partner, what did you like to him/her? (question for men and women)
- Before this relationship did you ever have a relationship? If yes, how many?

- Do your parents know about your romantic relationship / your partner?
- If yes, what do they say?
- If not, why?

- Have you met the friends of your partner?
- What do you think is the most important for a romantic relationship?
- What are your expectations in a romantic relationship?

- At what point do you think a couple should have sex relation?
- Have you spoken with your partner about contraceptive method?

Finally, we would like to ask you a few questions about you and your family and to know what you think about this park

---

- In what year were you born?
- Do you live far away from the park?
- Whom do you currently live with?

If male and/or female do not live with his/her parents:

- Where do their parents live? (place and distance from Hanoi)
- Why does not he and/or she live with their parents? (study, work ?)
- Since when has he and/or she left their parents?
- Have you seen some differences between the life in the city from life with his/her parents? Which differences?

If he and/or she lives with parents:

- Where do your parents live ? (name of place and distance from the park)
- How many people live in the family apartment?

All of interviewee:

- What is your father and mother's main occupation?
- What is your highest educational level?

Appendix 2: Questionnaire youth (18-25 years old) – Hoa Binh, Lenin & 34t

Time interview: **Date:**   **Park:**   **Interviewer:**

Gender   Male ☐   Female ☐   Your highest education level:

Age   University ☐
                                                                   College ☐

Accompanied   Yes ☐   No ☐   High school ☐
                                                   Elementary school ☐
Ward & District

Since when do you visit this park?   Occupation parents:

Do your parents know you are here?   Yes ☐   No ☐

1. **How do you usually travel to this park?**

Walk ☐   Bicycle ☐   Motorbike ☐   Car ☐   Bus ☐

From: Home   /   Work /   School   /   Other

Travel time in minutes:

2. **What do you usually do in this park?**

Play sports with others	Exercise alone	Watch people	Hang out with girlfriend/boyfriend	Sit & think
Read	Walk the dog	Watch my kids	Hang out with friends	Relax my mind

Other:

3. **Which days of the week & what time of the day do you usually come here?**

| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |

5   6   7   8   9   10   11   12   13   14   15   16   17   18   19   20   21   22   23   24   1

Other:

4. **Why do you come to this park in particular?**

Closer to home	Closer to work	Closer to School	No fence around park	No entrance fee
More green and natural	My friends come here	Security/police doesn't bother me much here	No motorbike fee here	Cleaner here
Safer due to more guards/police	More social security (elderly/ other users)	Larger flat surfaces to play	Meeting new people/ making new friends	More intimacy and privacy

Other:

Appendix 3: Survey on accessibility

Detailed map of the surveyed parks and garden

Figure 61: Thành Công Park from Google Earth (2014)

Figure 62: Nghĩa Đô Park from Google Earth (2014)

Figure 63: Linh Đàm Park from Google Earth (2014)

Accesibility survey questionnaires in Vietnamese and English

Date:_____ Time:_____ Park:_____

Date of birth:_____ Gender:_____ Accompanied: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Major street intersection near home: _____

Ward: _____ Weekday or Weekend: ☐Weekday ☐Weekend

- -

We would first like to ask you a few question about how you travelled to this park today.

1. Where were you before coming to this park today?

_____

   1a. If not home, what is the closest major intersection? _____

2. How did you travel to this park today?

a)Walk   b)Bicycle   c)Motorbike   d)Car   e)Bus

3. What was your travel time in minutes to the park today?

_____

   3a. Would you say this is a typical travel time?   a)Yes   b)No

   3b. If no, what is a typical travel time? _____

4. We do not always travel using the same modes of transportation and from the same places. In the past two weeks, have you used any other modes of transportation to get to this park? Where did you leave from? How long did it take you? (H = Home, W = Work, S = School, O = Other)

Walk	Bicycle	Motorbike	Car	Bus
☐ From: H-W-S-O	☐ From: H-W-S-O	☐ From: H-W-S-O	☐ From: H-W-S-O	☐ From: H-W-S-O
Time: _____	Time: _____	Time: _____	Time: _____	Time: _____

If coming from somewhere other than home, please specify closest major intersection:

We would now like to talk about what a typical visit to this park is like for you and ask a few more questions.

5. How much time do you spend at this park during a typical visit?

6. What do you typically do at this park?

	a) Play sports		b) Socialize		c) Exercise
	d) Relax individually		e) Other:		

7. What kind of obstacles do you face on your way to the park?

	a) Heat		b) Crowded sidewalks		c) Traffic
	d) Difficult road crossings		e) Risk of accident		f) Poor lighting at night
	g) Personal security concern		h) Poor transit access		i) No guarded parking
	j) Other:				

8. If applicable, does the entry fee limit your number of visits to this park?

a)Yes   b)No   c)Not applicable

9. Do you also visit this park during the weekend/week (depending on day)?

a)Yes   b)No

9a.Do you also come at other times of the day? If yes, which ones?

_____

10. Why do you come to this park in particular?

a) Closer to home	b) Closer to work	c) Closer to school
d) Bigger than others	e) Smaller than others	f) Nicer than others
g) Not as busy as others	h) Has my specific activity	i) Friends come here
j) Other:_____		

11. What do you like about this park?

_____
_____
_____
_____

12. What do you dislike about this park?

_____
_____
_____
_____

13. Is this park the park you most frequently visit?

a)Yes   b)No

14. Approximately, in the last two weeks, how many times have you visited this park?

_____

15. In the last two weeks, have you visited any other parks in Hà Nội?

a)Yes   b)No

15a. If yes, which ones and how many times have you visited each of these parks in the past two weeks?

Park name	Number of visits in past two weeks

THANK YOU!

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Ngày: _____ Giờ: _____ Tên công viên: _____

Ngày sinh: _____ Giới tính: _____ Có đi cùng ai không: ☐ Có ☐ Không

Nhà bạn ở đâu (Ngã tư phố chính gần nơi bạn ở): _____

Phường: _____ Ngày thường hay ngày cuối tuần: ☐ Ngày thường ☐ Cuối tuần

--- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- ---

Đầu tiên chúng tôi muốn hỏi một số câu hỏi về bạn và cách mà bạn đi đến công viên hôm nay.

1. Trước khi đến công viên này hôm nay thì bạn đã ở đâu?

_____

1a. Nếu không phải đi từ nhà, bạn đi từ đâu? (Ngã tư phố chính gần nhất): _____

2. Hôm nay bạn đã đi đến công viên này bằng phương tiện nào?

a) Đi bộ b) Xe đạp c) Xe máy d) Ô tô e) Xe buýt

3. Hôm nay bạn đi đến đây mất bao nhiêu phút?

_____

3a. Đây có phải khoảng thời gian thông thường không? a) Có b) Không

3b. Nếu không, bình thường bạn mất bao nhiêu phút? _____

4. Thông thường, mọi người không phải lúc nào cũng đi cùng một loại phương tiện, và thường đi từ các nơi khác nhau đến đây. Trong hai tuần qua, bạn có sử dụng phương tiện nào khác để đến công viên này không? Bạn đã đi từ đâu đến công viên này? Bạn mất bao nhiêu phút để đi đến đây? (N = Nhà, C = Cơ quan, T = Trường, K = Khác)

Text

☐ Đi bộ	☐ Xe đạp	☐ Xe máy	☐ Ô tô	☐ Xe buýt
Đi từ: N-C-T-K	Đi từ: N-C-T-K	Đi từ: N-C-T-K	Đi từ: N-C-T-K	Đi từ: N-C-T-K
Thời gian:____	Thời gian:____	Thời gian:____	Thời gian:____	Thời gian:____

Nếu bạn không đi từ nhà, hãy chỉ ra ngã tư phố chính gần nhất:

_____

Bây giờ chúng tôi muốn hỏi về những hoạt động thông thường của bạn tại công viên này và hỏi bạn thêm một số câu hỏi nữa.

5. Bạn thường ở công viên này trong thời gian bao nhiêu lâu?

_____

6. Bạn thường làm gì ở công viên này?

a) Chơi thể thao	b) Giao lưu	c) Tập thể dục
d) Nghỉ ngơi một mình	e) Khác:	

7. Bạn thường gặp phải những trở ngại nào trên đường đến công viên này?

a) Nắng nóng	b) Vỉa hè đông đúc	c) Xe cộ
d) Khó khăn khi đi qua đường	e) Nguy cơ gặp tai nạn	f) Thiếu ánh sáng vào buổi tối
g) Lo lắng về sự an toàn của bản thân	h) Thiếu giao thông công cộng	i) Không có chỗ gửi xe
j) Khác:		

8. Việc thu phí vào cổng công viên có ảnh hưởng đến số lần bạn đến công viên này không?

a)Có   b)Không   c)Không phù hợp

9. Bạn có thường đến công viên này vào cuối tuần/ngày trong tuần (tuỳ thuộc vào ngày hôm nay) không?

a)Có   b)Không

9a. Bạn có thường đến công viên này vào các buổi khác trong ngày không? Nếu có, vào buổi nào?

_____

10. Vì sao bạn chọn đến công viên này?

a) Gần nhà	b) Gần cơ quan	c) Gần trường học
d) To hơn các công viên khác	e) Nhỏ hơn các công viên khác	f) Đẹp hơn các công viên khác
g) Không đông đúc như các công viên khác	h) Có hoạt động mà tôi tham gia	i) Các bạn tôi đến đây
j) Khác:_____		

11. Bạn thích công viên này ở điểm gì?

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. Bạn không thích công viên này ở điểm gì?

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. Công viên này có phải là công viên bạn thường xuyên đến nhất không?

a)Có   b)Không

14. Trong hai tuần vừa qua, bạn đến công viên này khoảng bao nhiêu lần?

_____

15. Trong hai tuần vừa qua, bạn có đến công viên nào khác ở Hà Nội ngoài công viên này không?

a)Có   b)Không

15a. Nếu có, bạn đã đến công viên nào, và bạn đến đó bao nhiêu lần trong hai tuần vừa qua?

Tên công viên	Số lần đến công viên trong hai tuần vừa qua

CÁM ƠN!

Appendix 4 - The structure of public space policy-making in Vietnam

Up to the mid-2000s, Vietnam's formal legislative framework gave very little attention to the issue of public space. The last few years however saw an explosion in the number of policy documents concerned, in one way or another, with the ruling of public space.[25] These formal policies stem from various government bodies which, in the Vietnamese legal system, are authorized to issue laws, ordinances, decrees, circular, decisions, instructions, orientations, standards, codes, etc.[26]

The organizational structure of law-making in Vietnam includes both a nested hierarchy (from National Assembly to local People's Committees) and horizontally distributed responsibilities (for instance, between line ministries such as the Ministries of Construction, Natural Resources and Environment, Transportations, etc.). When the object of legislation is cross-sectoral in nature, which is often the case, the coexistence of a vertical and horizontal distribution of power over law-making generates important coordination challenges and often leads to overlaps, conflicts, and ambiguities between policy documents.

This is the case with public space policy-making, which involves five the main government bodies:

- The National Assembly passes overarching or "high" laws (e.g. Construction Law, Land Law, Urban Planning Law) which touch on the question of public space in a very general manner. These high laws are meant to be specified through implementing decrees, decisions, and circular issued by lower government bodies;

- The Government issues decrees and circulars related to public space that implement laws passed by the National Assembly. For instance, the 2009 Decree on Urban Classification 42/2009/ND-CP of the Government aimed to guide the implementation of the Construction Law passed by the National Assembly in 2003;

- The Ministry of Construction (hereafter "MoC") also issues decrees and circulars aimed at implementing national laws. This line ministry however also has concrete responsibilities with regard to public space through the production of general construction master plans for each of the country's provinces (including city-provinces such as Hanoi). The MoC further issues planning codes and standards that regulate physical aspects of the production of public space;

- The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (hereafter "MoNRE") produces general land-use master plans for the entire country and land use-plans for each province. These plans essentially regulate the *legal status* of land (and not its functional

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[25] Other domains of public and private action, it should be noted, have also only recently been introduced into the country's reformed legal system.
[26] The Vietnamese legislation is modeled on the French system and includes five main types of texts hierarchically ordered as follows: constitution (*hiến pháp*), laws (*luật*), decrees (*pháp lệnh*), decisions (*nghị định*), and circulars (*thông tư*).

use) according to prescriptions stipulated by the Land Law (passed by the National Assembly);

- The People's Committees (hereafter PC) of provinces, such as Hanoi, adopt the general construction master plans produced under the MoC's supervision. These local government bodies further issue plans (*kế hoạch*), decisio*n (quyết định*) and orientations (*chỉ thị*) aimed to implement locally policies issued by higher levels of government. These policies regulate, for instance, the investment, construction, and management of public spaces.

- The PC of Hanoi also issues policies that regulate the *use* of public space, a question which is not directly broached by higher levels of government. An example of such policies is the "Orientation on the implementation of 2014, Years of Urban Order and Civilization" (01/2014/CT-UBND).