

Thi My Chau Nguyen

# Children's experiences and perspectives on public spaces in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Supervisor: Marit Ursin and Tatek Abebe

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences

Department of Education and Lifelong Learning

## Abstract

This study aims to explore children's perspectives and experiences on public spaces in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It further questions structural and contextual forces that shape children's everyday experiences in public spaces. Employing methodology perspectives from Childhood studies, it acknowledges children's social world to be studied in its own right, and the children's voices are central in the study about them. In that manner, 11 boys and girls aged 6 to 13 living in the city's core were invited to share their perspectives and experiences through a range of participatory tools, including semi-structured interview, photographing or describing daily activities. Six adult guardians also joined as informants on the topic. Theoretical framework for making sense of data was drawn from key perspectives of Childhood studies: social constructed, structural and actor-oriented. Actor-oriented perspective sees children as active social actors in shaping their own life and their surrounding world. Social constructionism recognizes the role of socio-cultural contexts in shaping different practices and realities of childhood. Meanwhile, application of structural perspectives on childhood study invokes that childhood is a permanent social structure which is impacted by close or distant structural variables; these cannot be missed out in explaining children's life circumstances at particular time and space.

The study found out that children's perspectives on urban public space were diverse and, in many cases, fluid depending on the conditions in which they found themselves. On their spatial practice, children used public space for multi-purposes: playing, entertaining, working, navigating and other activities for wellbeing, of which, they most aspired to commuting to public spaces for play and peer companionships. Their experiences in public spaces were complex, ranging from unsatisfying to fulfilling. Yet public spaces were reflectively space for them to express, both within and without social pressures on their identities. With structural view, generational relations, cultural values, and societal changes throughout Vietnam's recent adoption of development model were identified as important factors that greatly shaped Vietnamese contemporary childhood, including children's everyday life experience in urban public space. The study suggests its findings to be utilized for evident-based policy making better experiences for children in urban public space. In the meantime, it enthusiastically recommends more studies on the theme children and spaces in Vietnam, as this has been left largely undiscovered, especially by means of child-centered approaches and Childhood studies perspectives.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my father Nguyen The Hieu, and my mother Tran Thi My Dung, who have raised me with great love. I also offer this to my spouse and my entire family whose companionships and supports have lifted my steps in life. Finally, this is a gift to all my Childhood studies teachers whose teaching has elevated my intellectual capacity on the discipline, and beyond that onto the polyvalent societal dynamics.

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I value the chance to be in an academic environment with classmates from different parts of the world. Their diversity enriched my education experiences and promoted my understanding of cultures. Big thanks to Olha Tiutiunnyk for her delightful friendship. Finally, I would like to express paramount gratitude to my spouse and mom-in-law who have so favorably supported my stay and education pursuit in Norway.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CSOS – Civil Society Organizations

DESA – Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN)

HCMC – Ho Chi Minh City (formerly known as Saigon)

IPL – Department of Education and Lifelong Learning

ILO – International Labour Organization

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

NOSEB – Norwegian Centre for Child Research

NTNU – Norwegian University of Science and Technology

UN – United Nations

UNCRC – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNICEF – The United Nations Children's Fund

Vietnam – Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Vietnam MoET – Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training

# 1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The choice of research topic

I migrated with my family from the rural south of Vietnam to the city at the age of five. It was in 1980's and our new home was Ho Chi Minh City - formerly known as the "Pearl of the Far-East". My neighborhood was a small quarter with narrow alleys sided by simple houses of working class people. It had temples, ponds, and bordered with many rice fields, a public park, a market, a central coach station and a graveyard. I usually spent time at the open space and commuted to school, running errands and playing with neighbors. Sometimes I saw people fighting with each other's with knives, or police-men chasing criminals with gunshots through the alleys of my quarter. I heard quarrels and slang words almost every day out there. The place was a spot of criminal and social problems. But I was only made aware of this bad reputation when I had grown up and talked to the outsiders from my place. For me as a pre-teen child, my neighborhood was an interesting and happy place. I enjoyed my every day's outdoor activities within it and nearby areas. We children were greatly autonomous back then. It was usual that we were let to be outdoors alone, and we didn't need activities that cost money.

Colliding with the start of my childhood in this urban context was Vietnam's economic reform in 1986. The nation's economy changed from being centrally-planned to market-oriented. Urban development was made to be principal mission of the nation in order to facilitate development process. My ward<sup>1</sup> transformed quickly. Most obviously was the building of new concrete settings where many new people moved in. During this period I continued my education at secondary school, which none of my neighbors did. My connection with immediate neighborhood places diminished due to the fact that I had new friends (classmates) elsewhere whom I liked to be with. Yet, since I had greater mobility freedom since twelve, I hung-out with my friends at further public places in the city: we gathered there as our own comfort zone to gossip, to watch people and things, and have snacks. When we wanted to play, we would go somewhere with an entrance fee.

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<sup>1</sup> Several connecting quarters make a Ward, several wards make a District. A city would have several districts, those that close to city center are categorized as "urban districts"; the periphery ones are called "rural districts".

Nowadays nearly 36% of the Vietnam population lives in an urban area, nearly to the double from 1986<sup>2</sup>. Children in my neighborhood still do some of the things at public spaces as we did at their age. However, there are new settings for their experiences: a modernized city, new cultural values, different ways of organizing family daily life, etc. While recalling my own childhood, I am curious to find out in this contemporary context, what children think about the public places of their neighborhood, and how their experiences in those places are.

I come from an educational background of Childhood Studies – an inter-disciplinary field about children and childhood. One of our recognition is that children and childhood are deserved to be studied in their own right. Throughout the study program, an aspect about childhood, I am most interested in the child's relationship with places. In my earlier stage of studies I came through Montgomery's (2003) elaboration on the contemporary discourse "Children out of place". Later empirical literatures continue to reveal richly children's social world at outdoor and public places. Some studies focus on describing that world, other elaborate on the interplay between children and contextual forces in shaping an aspect of their childhood. This empirical knowledge, together with theoretical perspectives from Childhood Studies, has made a shift in the way I look at childhood in relation with places. This also triggers my curiosity – in an academic way – to the current childhood at my place. Hadfield-Hill (2016) suggests that, in this context of rapid urbanization, there is no better time than now to explore children's experience of space during the "urban remaking" and "urban transforming"<sup>3</sup> process. Her point makes me think that my curiosity is put at an appropriate time.

Childhood Studies claims that there are different realities of childhood. Childhood vary in space and time. My experience of public places in my neighborhood from two to three decades ago is obviously different as nowadays'. I look for literature about this topic related to my home-land; there has been no similar one. Some studies reflect a part of my theme but with different frameworks. Child's perspective was not the emphasis of their data collection method, due to different focus in topic or different perspectives. Through thorough reflections I finally conceive a research project with the theme: "Children's experiences and perspectives on public spaces in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Vietnam".

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<sup>2</sup> According to The United Nations - Country profiles: Vietnam (United Nations - DESA / Population Division, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> Hadfield-Hill conceptualizes that urban remaking involves structural changes to existing urban environments and beautification of city space; while urban transformation refers to the development of completely new cities.

## 1.2 Research main aim and objectives

The research aims to explore children’s experience in urban public space in HCMC - Vietnam. It then goes further to find out why their experiences are as such. That may result from the interplay between the child’s own perspectives, background, immediate context and macro factors, especially urbanization and development, etc. The main aim, therefore, will be put like this:

Research’s main aim: To explore children’s experiences and perspectives on contemporary urban public space in Vietnam. This aim goes further to find out societal and contextual factors that shape children’s encounters in public spaces.

Research’s main questions:

1. How is urban public space *perceived* by children? This seeks to explore children’s unique perspectives on the public space of the city where they live, especially at the immediate and surrounding areas of their own neighbourhoods.
2. How do children *use* urban public space? This draws insights on children’s public spatial practice and experience: kinds of activity they do and experiences they have with the space and social-material elements within it.
3. What are the *societal and contextual factors* that have impact on children’s experience in public space? This attempt to look into aspects of familial practice, culture, societal change, development and urbanization to identify elements that have implication on the reality of children’s experience in public space nowadays.

Systematic planning from research’s main aim to tentative research details questions will be presented in the table below, following guideline from Ennew et al.<sup>4</sup> (2009, chapter 2).

Research’s aim	Research’s main questions	Research’s tentative detail questions
To explore children’s experience in urban public space in Vietnam and factors which shape their encounters	1. How urban public space is perceived by children?	1.1. How do children define public space? 1.2. How do they think about public space? Why do they think so?
	2. How do children use urban public space?	2.1. What activities do children do in public space? 2.2. How do they think about their experience in public space?
	3. What are the societal and contextual factors that have	3.1. According to children, are there factors that affect (encourage/restraint) their approach and use of

<sup>4</sup> Ennew with Abebe, Bangyan, Karapituck, and Noonsup

	<p>impact on children’s experience in public space?</p>	<p>public space? How do they response to those factors?</p> <p>3.2. What are underline forces that shape children’s experience with public space as how they share and experience it?</p> <p>3.3. How do familial/parenting and cultural factors/discourses affect children’s relationship with public space?</p> <p>3.4. How do larger societal-economical-political processes (development, urbanization) have implication on children’s experience in public space nowadays?</p>
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**Table 1: Research’s aim, main questions and detail questions**

Posing these research questions, my plan is to employ methodological perspectives of Childhood studies as “glasses” I wear to see and interpret social phenomenon; whereas participatory methods with children will be the focus of my study method.

**1.3 Outlines of the thesis**

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the choice of research topic, detailed objectives and questions. Chapter 2 presents facts about research area and literature review on the concerned topic. Chapter 3 discusses theoretical framework, key theories and concepts relevant to the topic. Chapter 4 elaborates research methodological and ethical aspects. Chapters 5 through 7 present key findings of the study, coupled with reflections about it from Childhood studies perspectives, as well as relating the findings to wide range of existing literature on the topic. Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes the project results and gives recommendations for policy making and further research.

## **2 CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

This chapter presents background information relevant to my research topic. It firstly starts with introducing Vietnam and HCMC's socio-economical condition. Then, children's situations in this geographical area will be addressed. Vietnamese's lifestyle and facts about public places in HCMC will be next discussed. All these information provides contextual information for understanding Vietnamese children's experiences in urban public spaces. These information are drawn from reports, studies of local government, organizations and individuals. Books, articles, and a small part of my own knowledge as a native in Vietnam will also be referred to when relevant. All form a background for my further elaboration of data interpretation at later stage.

### **2.1 Socio-economical context of Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh City**

#### **2.1.1 Socialist Republic of Vietnam**

Vietnam is a tropical country in South East Asia. It borders Cambodia and Laos in the West, China in the North, and the East Sea in the East<sup>5</sup>. The area is 331,231<sup>6</sup> km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 93,671,600<sup>7</sup> people.

The nation was formed from the Hung Kings era since 1,000 B.C., and went through various periods of independence, dependence and internal wars under feudal regimes. In modern history, since 1858 Vietnam was invaded by the French and later American colonialism. The country regained total independence since 1975, and adopted centrally-planned economy model (following communism ideal). The model did not help Vietnam to overcome economic crisis as a consequence of long war periods. In that situation, in 1986, Vietnam conducted economic reform, transforming the economy to socialist-oriented market model<sup>8</sup>. Since then, social-economic condition of the nation became stabilized and developed. It has become one of the most dynamic economies in South East Asia; with private sector expanded, foreign investment developed, state-owned enterprises downsized, and industrial and service sector focused (Unicef Vietnam & HCMC People's Committee, 2017). Vietnam also expands external relation; joining 63 international organizations so far, amongst those are World Trade Organization (WTO) (2007), Asia Pacific Economic Corporation (APEC) (1998), The

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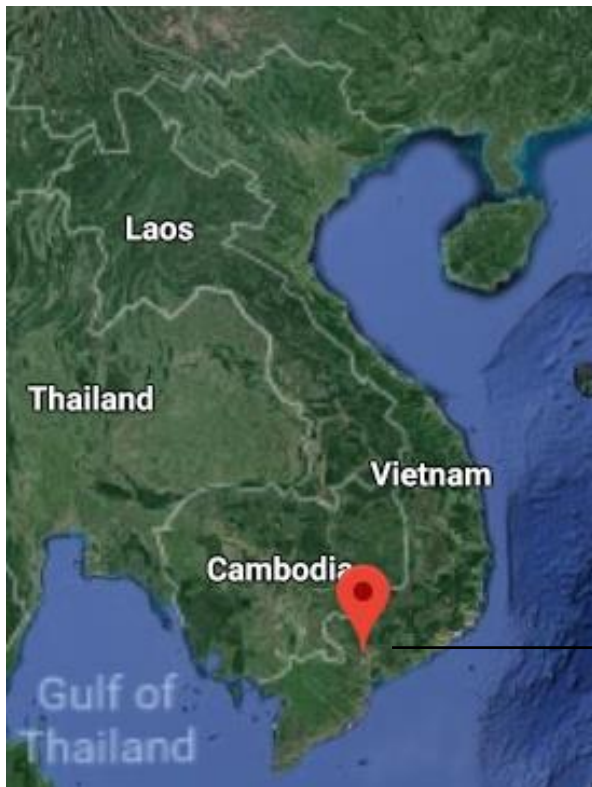
<sup>5</sup> From Vietnam government portal - Geography (Vietnam Government Portal, no date-a)

<sup>6</sup> From General Statistics Office of Vietnam – Population and Employment (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, no date)

<sup>7</sup> Same as <sup>6</sup>

<sup>8</sup> From Vietnam government portal - History (Vietnam Government Portal, no date-c)

Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) (1995), United Nations (UN) (1977), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1976)<sup>9</sup>.



**VIETNAM**

**Vietnam country profile:**

Official name: Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Region: South East Asia

Area: 331,231 km<sup>2</sup>

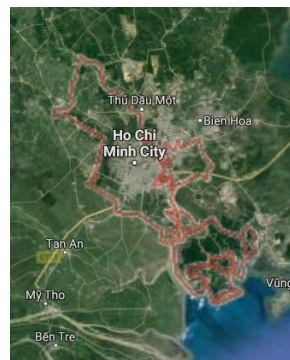
Population: 93,671,600 people

**HCMC profile:**

Location: South of Vietnam

Area: 2,095 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 13,000,000 people



**HO CHI MINH CITY**

**Map 1: Vietnam country and Ho Chi Minh City. Source: maps.google.com**

Vietnam has surpassed the status of low-income to become middle-income country since 2010. People at large enjoy basic to good material condition nowadays, and it continues to be improved. Household living standard survey 2014 reported that 83.7% households found their living standard improve compared to five years earlier (General Statistics Office Viet Nam, 2016). Almost all households have electricity, improved source of drinking water, and shelter with finished floor, roofing, and walls. Television, refrigerator, motorcycle and mobile phone are possessed by the majority of families (General Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2015). Economic poverty rate also significantly diminished to below 8%; even though with the new standard of measuring poverty (multi-dimensional) applied since 2016, 10% of Vietnamese households are still in poor and pro-poor condition. In parallel, middle-class is growing, reaching 13% of the population<sup>10</sup> (General Statistics Office Viet Nam, 2017). On aspect of

<sup>9</sup> From Vietnam government portal - Participation to international organizations (Vietnam Government Portal, no date-b)

<sup>10</sup> From The World Bank – Vietnam Overview (The World Bank, 2018)

education, literate level are very optimistic, with 93% of population from 10 years old knowing how to read and write (General Statistics Office Viet Nam, 2016).

Together with economic development, the country witnesses rapid demographic and social change. Population grows from 60 million (1986) to 95 million (2017). Working age population (15-64 years) is 68,2% (General Statistics Office Viet Nam, 2017). Approximately one third of population lives in urban area (General Statistics Office Viet Nam, 2016).

According to the report “Vietnam 2035: Toward Prosperity, Creativity, Equity, and Democracy”, 30 years of renovation has brought tremendous economic and social development to Vietnam, but development challenges have also entailed. Some of those are income per capita have not reached as high as expected, and the growth speed is declining. The development has in the meantime caused pressing social and environmental problems. Inequities are widening; especially in term of equal thriving opportunities for disadvantages groups. Urban development has been scattered and planned with weak evidence-led approaches; therefore some development potentialities have been hindered. A new reform plan has been considering by the nation’s leaders to boost its development level closer to other nations in the region, such as China, South Korea, Malaysia or Thailand.

### 2.1.2 Ho Chi Minh City

Ho Chi Minh City – formerly known as Saigon - is located in the South of Vietnam with an area of 2,095 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 13 million people. Occupying only 0.63% of the nation’s area, but it is current home to 13.87% of the nation’s population. This mega city has the highest population density in Vietnam: 3,809 people per km<sup>2</sup>. It is also an investment hub, and the most developed city of Vietnam. GDP per capita is USD5,428 in 2016, while average national figure is USD2,185 (Unicef Vietnam & HCMC People's Committee, 2017). Monthly income and expenditure per capital in HCMC is also significantly higher<sup>11</sup> than national average (General Statistics Office Viet Nam, 2016).



**Photo 1: HCMC panoramic view. Source: vietnamnet.vn**

It is said that under the French colony time (1858-1945), the French developed this city initially for 500,000 people. Today the city has 13 inhabitants, mainly due to *mechanical*

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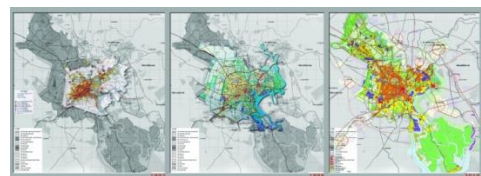
<sup>11</sup> Monthly income: VND 4,839,700 (appr.USD 210), compared to 2,637,300 (appr.USD 115) at nationwide



*growth*<sup>12</sup>. Dense population indeed imposes pressure for the government bodies to assure adequate job supply, social services provision, as well social order, including public space's safety.

In term of land planning, from 1990 to 2012, HCMC *metropolitan area*<sup>13</sup> increased approximately 650 km<sup>2</sup> urban land and nearly 3.5 million inhabitants (M. A. Nguyen, 2015). Substantial agriculture and nature land were converted into inhabitant land to accommodate the growth. Yet, since the city's core is the main venue of people and business, spatial pressure to this area is huge. On the other hand, there had been also excessive transformation of agriculture land to industrial land which was later inefficiently used; meanwhile the city needed enough nature for its vitality. It was reported that the city's surface temperature increased 3.5 degree Celsius within 17 years (1989-2006)<sup>14</sup>, while green house gas emission doubled within 10 years at national level (2000-2010)<sup>15</sup>. Concretizing of the earth surface in the city (without a robust drainage system) also causes water to overflow on streets, especially when there are big rains or high tides. There are substantial days in a year when the city is "flooded".

On the other hand, within the latest three decades, the urbanization of the city, albeit strong, did not happen as local government had planned. According to Nguyen Mai Anh (2015), since 1975, HCMC has been going through three times of spatial planning. But due to the plans were based on the authorities' will and did not adequately match the economy's rule (e.g. people come stay and invest where it is affordable and convenient); they failed to draw investment and people. While the authorities aimed to develop the city to East and North-East, population, housing and job grew at West and South-West (M. A. Nguyen, 2015). The "Vietnam 2035 report" added that the urbanization model of Vietnam is fragmented; not holistically and macro-leveled implemented. It was based on the central government's strategy without sufficient consideration of the natural development



**Map 2: HCMC's 3 times planning at 1993, 1998, and 2010. The city has greatly transformed, and currently comprised of 19 urban and 5 rural districts.**

<sup>12</sup> Mechanical population growth refers to the difference between the number of immigrants and emigrants to and from an area. While natural population growth refers to the difference between the number of death and new-born people in an area. According to General Statistics Office, population growth in Ho Chi Minh city is 6.3% (as of 2015), mainly mechanical type.

<sup>13</sup> Ho Chi Minh city and its surrounding areas

<sup>14</sup> (T. V. Tran, 2011)

<sup>15</sup> (World Bank & Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, 2016)

flows. Therefore each city functions like a separated island, they do not connect to each other to intensify urbanization advantages (World Bank & Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, 2016). Within a city like HCMC, the city centre has been the centre and will remain as same one (*mono-core*), despite the government has attempted to develop and intensify the satellites hubs at its periphery areas – (*poly-cores*) (M. A. Nguyen, 2015).

Air and water pollution in the city is severe; due to industry, construction, heavy traffic, dense population and wastes. Most people wear a mask when they go out on the street, while most family buys bottle drinking water instead of boiling tap water to drink. For green space, HCMC has amongst the world's lowest value of green space per capita: 1m<sup>2</sup>/person. There has been growing concerns about safety at public places due to unsafe traffic<sup>16</sup>, robbery, cheating, harassment, or child kidnapping. Recently, public cameras have been installed throughout the city as an effort of local government to better controlling safety at public spaces.

For the coming decades, HCMC are expected to continue being the metropolis of Vietnam, connecting with the global economy, while providing an urban environment for diversity, innovation, and bridging people to the world (World Bank & Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, 2016).

## **2.2 Conditions of children in Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh City**

### **2.2.1 Children in Vietnam**

As the second country in the world to ratify United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990, Vietnam shows its commitment to children's holistic well-being and development. Care, protection and education for children have been a thorough policy of the nation since the first Constitution in 1946 (Vietnam National Assembly, 1946, 2013). These children's entitlements were also regulated through law system, directly represented in "Law of Protection, Care and Education for Children" version 2004. This law was recently modified into the new "Law on Children" in 2016, enforcing participation right of children and regulating responsible organizations in promoting and protecting children's rights. The country now has National Committee about Children, Children Service, and 24/7 Child Protection National Operator 111.

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<sup>16</sup> National 's death cases due to traffic accidents were more than 2,800 in 2018 (Phuong Son, 2019).

It is important to note that Vietnam legislation defines children as human being below the age of 16, not 18. The latest report of Vietnam to UNCRC Committee on the definition of child has noted: “*The CRC stipulates that children should be defined as persons under the age of 18. An exception may be accepted when national laws define children as those of a younger age.*”<sup>17</sup> In the case of Viet Nam, the Law on Children (2016) ruled that “*children are individuals who are under 16.*” (Vietnam Government, 2019, section II.1, page 9). Expanding age-range of a child’s definition up to below 18 was what UNCRC Committee, and some locally-based CSOS<sup>18</sup> suggested; and Vietnam was willing to consider this. However, this proposal did not receive enough approval during the process of constituting the new law. Therefore the new “Law on Children” remains defining children as person below 16 years old. In this dissertation, unless it relates to Vietnam legislation and policy, or otherwise specify, the term child/children refers to human being below the age of 18.

29.3% of Vietnam population is below 18 years old (General Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2015). For children situation, there are wide range of both government bodies and international agencies reports and sometimes there is unanimity on those data. Below are some of important facts on children situation in Vietnam consulted from different reliable sources.

According to Household Living Standard Survey 2014 (General Statistics Office Viet Nam, 2016), *multi-dimension poverty children*<sup>19</sup> rate is 21%. There are no difference between genders on child poverty, however, most (90%) of poverty child are from rural area, especially minority ethnic children. Percentage of children experiencing *deprivation*<sup>20</sup> in aspect of education, health, shelter, water and sanitation, and leisure is 9.8, 45.3, 6.7, 33.6 and 65.9% respectively. These ratios are significant higher in rural than in urban area (General

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<sup>17</sup>An adolescent is a person who has full rights and duties as a citizen. According to the Viet Nam’s Constitution of 2016 (Articles 27 and 29) and the Civil Code (Article 20), Viet Nam’s adult age is 18. In the observations made on recent Viet Nam’s national report, The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended that Viet Nam continues to improve the national legislation system in line with the CRC, paying special attention to the definition of children. [This footnote is from the report itself.]

<sup>18</sup> Civil Society Organizations (CSOS): Non-State, not-for-profit, voluntary entities formed by people in the social sphere that are separate from the State and the market. CSOs represent a wide range of interests and ties. They can include community-based organizations as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

<sup>19</sup> Different than single-dimension (based solely on income of household), multi-dimension poverty children are human being below 16 years of age lacking from 2 of 7 conditions for their development, including : education, health, housing, clean water and sanitation, not working at early age, entertainment, and social protection.

<sup>20</sup> How to define Deprivation is based on Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) from UNICEF (de Neubourg, Chai, de Milliano, Plavgo, & Wei, Working Paper 2012-10). It prefers to use international standards to access child well-being, such as UNCRC, Millennium Developments Goals, with consideration of national standards and social norms, etc. Children are considered deprived from one dimension mean that children deprived from at least one of the indicators of that dimension.

Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2015). It is noted that, while these figures are relatively high, it is established based on the unfulfillment of as few as one among several indicators of each category. Such as, for health category, a child who misses a type of vaccination is counted as deprived, despite his approach to other health services is fulfilled. The high percentage of deprivation above may draw impression that Vietnamese children's condition is catastrophic. However, viewing from progress perspectives, Vietnamese children nowadays benefit great improvement in conditions for their well-being. Most of them get adequate healthcare, education, clean water, and increasing means of recreations. Nonetheless, a growing part of these provisions is incorporated with cost-share or fee-based regime. On the other hand, development brings as well new challenges to children as a particular social group.

Take a closer look on children's health, Vietnam has overcome period where curative health was the focus. It now fosters preventive aspect of public health. Almost all children get basic vaccinations. Child mortality rate before the age of five is significantly decreased to 2.18 % (General Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2015). When healthcare for children has been somewhat under control, in recent years, issues such as child nutrition and size have received growing attention. Vietnamese is amongst the smallest in size compare to their counterparts in the region. Malnutrition rate is pretty high, resulting 14.1%<sup>21</sup> of children below five are light-weighted, and 24.6%<sup>22</sup> are stunning. In the meantime, another aspect of malnutrition – obesity – is also on the rise, reaching 5.3%<sup>23</sup> of child population.

About child education, Vietnam has achieved nearly universality for primary and lower secondary education (Vietnam MoET, 2015). Besides, early childhood education is mobilized, approached by 71.3% children aged 36-59 months (General Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2015). However, out-of-school children still exist, mostly due to poverty, disability, or geographical constraints (Vietnam MoET, 2015).

About work, some aspects of child work have been culturally accepted in Vietnam. But nowadays with the universal child's rights and child's definition, many circumstances of child work in Vietnam are considered as child labor. Vietnam Child Labor Survey in 2012 reported

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<sup>21</sup> Vietnam National Institute of Nutrition – Statistic on children's nutrition situation by year (Vietnam National Institute of Nutrition, 2018)

<sup>22</sup> (the same source as <sup>20</sup>)

<sup>23</sup> As of 2015. From People's Police e-newspaper – Physical strength and size of Vietnamese (People's Police online, 2018)

that more than half of children age 5-17<sup>24</sup> did household chores, such as babysitting, cleaning and cooking. One in six children engages in economic activities; more than half of those is categorized as “child labor”<sup>25</sup> (ILO Vietnam, 2014). Child labor are found more at boys than girls, and at rural than urban area (General Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2015). Besides child labor, other form of child abuse, violence against children, and child marriage<sup>26</sup> also exist.

Child participation in matters that affect them remains very limited. Legislation system such as Constitution or Law on Children generally recognizes the right of the children to have their voice listened, their opinions considered; but this children’s entitlement are regulated very generically. Meanwhile, on the contrary these documents strongly emphasize that children are expected to respect adults and helpful to family members. Children also have duties to study, respect teachers and to contribute for nation’s development in the future.

## **2.2.2 Children in Ho Chi Minh City**

According to Situation analysis of children in HCMC (2017), on health aspect HCMC children’s malnutrition rate is low, with 7% stunning, 4.9% underweight. Child mortality rate is 7.14 at per 1,000 live births, much lower than the national average. Fully vaccinated children under 1 year old is 99%. It is noted that, while the main cause of child mortality under the age of 5 is illness, the next cause is accident, especially traffic related one. Child injuries accounts for 4 per 1,000 children in 2015; the top cause is falls, and the next is traffic accidents. Besides, most of children under age of 5 in HCMC having respiratory problem due to urban pollution (Unicef Vietnam & HCMC People's Committee, 2017).

With regard to education situation, even school attendance rate is amongst the most optimistic in HCMC compare to the rest of the nation, out-of-school children rate persists at 5.2% at lower secondary, and 1.5% at primary level. School attendance rate is lower at migrant, disable, or minority ethnic group (Unicef Vietnam & HCMC People's Committee, 2017). As for child labor situation, survey in 2012 reported 44,053 child labors in HCMC, in which 83%

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<sup>24</sup> This is the age-range of sample that the Child Labor survey 2012 did statistic on. The report refers to this sample group as “child population”.

<sup>25</sup> “Child labor” is works that exert a negative impact on the physical and psychological development and the dignity of children. Criteria to judge if the work would cause negative impact is based on the number of work-hour for each age-range, and the type of work. (Vietnam Government, 2012; Vietnam Ministry of Labor & ILO Vietnam, 2014)

<sup>26</sup> It is experienced by 11.1 per cent of women aged 20-49 at the period of survey (General Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2015)

age 15-17 years. Due to strict fine applying to companies employing minor labor<sup>27</sup> illegally, child labor was usually found at private, small company and households (Vietnam Ministry of Labor & ILO Vietnam, 2014).

Situation analysis 2017 noted that approximately 1% of the city children are in special circumstances<sup>28</sup>. Corporal punishment to children is common. However, it is seldom reported as it is to great extent culturally accepted. Child abuse<sup>29</sup> is rare, officially accounting for 0.04% of children, however this issue is believed to be under-reported. Besides, school bullying is also a growing issue<sup>30</sup>, especially between students themselves. HCMC is also believed to be transit location of child trafficking to Cambodia, even in period of 2012-2013 there was no case reported. Yet at nationwide, there were 285 cases for period 2008-2013. Commercial sexual exploitation of children in this city are of high incidence amongst other country's areas in the country (Unicef Vietnam & HCMC People's Committee, 2017). Lastly, Situation analysis 2014 by ActionAid Vietnam added that, at public places, there are evidences that girls and women being abused or harassed<sup>31</sup>.

For child participation, in-depth interview with parents in HCMC found that 20/28 parents did not allow their children to participate decision making on familial daily activities issues. They thought their child was too young and lacked of awareness. Children participate in establishing programs and policies making remains limited, mostly at level "consulted and informed". Besides, most of interviewed children from sub-city levels shared that they did not have opportunities to participate in their community activities (Unicef Vietnam & HCMC People's Committee, 2017).

### **2.3 A brief note on Vietnamese's lifestyle**

This section provides a glimpse on Vietnamese lifestyle. It is impossible to describe it in a brief section because people's ways of life are various. But there are a few of typical values and facts about Vietnamese and HCMC people's (the Saigoneses) lifestyle.

Culturally, a Vietnamese lives in a family of multi-generations comprised of elders, adults and children. When the children become mature, a girl will be married and moves to

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<sup>27</sup> According to Vietnam Labor Code, minor labor is person under age of 18 who engages in labor contract, besides, also noted that it is legal to work from the age of 15 (Vietnam Government, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> See definition at Introduction chapter.

<sup>29</sup> Generally termed in the report, what specific type of abuse was not presented in this report section.

<sup>30</sup> 50% of interviewed children experience schoolbullying, according to the report.

<sup>31</sup> ActionAid Vietnam cited in Situation Analysis 2014 by UNICEF and HCMC People Committee (Unicef Vietnam & HCMC People's Committee, 2017)

husband's house, a boy remains staying with parents and make his own family within it. He is also responsible for taking care of parents and worshiping ancestors. In case a family has several sons, then only one son (usually the oldest or the youngest, depending on the sub-culture) remains staying in the house when he grows up. The rest will move out when they get married. In this case the parents may support them with acquiring new lands. Marriage could be seen as transition from childhood to adulthood; while being able to earn income, and help significantly with family's livelihood could be marked as one's maturity. A Vietnamese child in general does not have to go through any "rite of passage" for marking his transition to adulthood.

These customs are nonetheless applied to Kinh – the majority ethnic in Vietnam – and not to all 54 ethnics in Vietnam. It also varies depending on family circumstances. Yet, regardless generational family members share the same roof or not, they suppose to mutually support to each other. Children suppose to be grateful and helpful to parents, while parents suppose to give their best to children.

Thirty years after the economic reform, the Family and Gender Research Institute conducted a research called "Set of values of Vietnamese family" to explore how family life has evolved. The study found out that while economical condition of family has changed greatly (better material condition), the values on relation between family members transform at slow speed. Native values such as to be loyal and to live harmoniously within family and neighborhood are more supported than imported cultural values of self-expression. Yet, there are growing numbers of people supporting new values such as gender equality, generation equality, and self-enjoyment. On the other hand, while multi-generation under the same roof is a tradition, it is no longer a preferred choice to majority of people (N. V. Le, 2017). Indeed, nuclear family style has nowadays increased; due to both spouses can go out to work and be economically independent with the bigger family. Besides, value of privacy and freedom has also absorbed into Vietnam's culture, making it a socially acceptable choice for newly-formed nuclear families. However, this trend does not suppress the mutual support culture. Grandparent generation would come staying to help with taking care for grand-children, while the parent generation would also host and take care for grandparents at old age. This is what Vietnamese people construct as the right manner, failing to do so would make them feel bad and the society would also criticize on them.

According to “The foundation of Vietnamese culture” (N. T. Tran, 1999) , Vietnamese puts community over their individual, as originating from agriculture civilization people rely on collective work to overcome nature challenges to succeed their crops. Staying stably at one place for the crops also means the relationship between neighbors should be kept harmonious for peaceful living. Vietnam’s native belief is worshiping ancestor and nature. Every family has an altar to worship the previous generations of the family. People believe ancestors are always there to support them, and offer respect to ancestors. Vietnamese also think there are spirits of nature, such as mountain, tree, river, etc. Ghosts are believed existing by many people; some of them are scared of ghosts. Besides, Vietnamese culture respect women, considering them of paramount importance, as they take role reproduction, and manage domestic life. This cultural trait comes from Vietnam’s agriculture civilization, where multiplication of plants and sustainability of lives are essential wishes, and women are symbol of reproduction. The idea that a woman worth nothing is influenced by Confucianism, absorbed into native culture during a thousand years of Chinese dominance over our country. This discourse gradually fades nowadays due to new global value of gender equality, and modern way of social functioning that allow women to be economically independent. However, female as “weak gender” and male as “strong gender” still remain as dominant discourses in Vietnam.

The Brahmanism and Buddhism arrived in Vietnam since the beginning of Christian Calendar, while Catholic came much later in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays there exist more religions in Vietnam, such as Protestant, Hinduism and Muslim, but Buddhism has been always the most populous religion in Vietnam (N. T. Tran, 1999). Depends on their belief Vietnamese go to their sanctuary on different schedules. Churches are often full at weekends, while pagodas are crowded at Full Moon and New Moon days. We also have temples worshiping nation’s founder Kings, heroes and Saints, etc. In Vietnam there are no conflicts between religions, as we are from an agriculture civilization with strong emphasis on harmony and stability; different belief system coming to Vietnam could stand peacefully aside the others.

A day of a contemporary Vietnamese often starts early, as the sun rise at around 05:30 and set 17:30. Many of them would step outdoor for fresh air and do physical exercise when sunshine is mild. Work/school usually starts at 7:30, and finish at around 16:30. Weekend is often one or two days depends on the working place. It would be time to tidy up the house, shop food and relax. For the elders, throughout the week they would help with looking after the house



and younger children. Work-active Vietnamese only have about 22 paid leave per year (10 days of official national holiday, and usually 12 annual leave offered by workplace). Therefore in general, adult's time off is very limited. People tend to live on a hurry pace and try to combine tasks for time-saving.

Take a specific look to HCMC's way of life, the urbanite's daily life activities focus around economy activities and consumption. Majority of people's livelihood here rely on service and industrial sectors, which make up most of city's GDP - 58.2% and 23.3% respectively (HCMC People's Committee, 2017). It is noted that not few of them are self-employed with informal works, such as selling food



**Photo 2: Children ridden to school in the morning. Source: Zing.vn**

and merchandises, or miscellaneous services. Adults and children rise up as early at 06:00 and usually buy breakfast on the way to work or school. Navigation between places is mainly with motorbike through the heavy traffic. It takes usually 1 hour for driving only 10 kilometers within the city. Navigation takes more time when the city is flooded. Due to urban air pollution, most of riders on streets wear a mask. Children would have lunch and take a nap at school on their own studying table while adults take a quick lunch at work and continue their job. Sunset time will be adults coming home preparing dinner while children usually go to some sort of extra class for usually 1.5 hours more. Around 19:30 family members may finally be rested in the home, have dinner, watch television and prepare for the next day. If there are free moments between this life rhythm, adults or children would hang out especially at commercialized public spaces.



**Photo 3: Families usually go to mall at weekends for shopping necessities and entertaining**

Saigon's material life has improving and children have received greater care than before. New discourses about a good childhood, children as investment, and how to take care children properly have integrated into local way of child upbringing. This has gone a bit too far it makes grandparents generations comment that nowadays we lavish our children so much we are spoiling them. As in the past children assisted family chores substantially and

shared a modest material living standard with family. Now Vietnamese try to give children more things and better things. These comments are largely true but do not apply to all cases. Some urban children still work and help parents diligently, and live in poor or pro-poor situation.

## **2.4 Literature on public space and children**

In this section, I would like to address some literatures on children's relationship with public places and essential points they made. On international level, the theme of children's experience of public space has been richly studied. In the Global North, significant number of researches elaborate on how public space has been perceived as adult's territory and how children are marginalized in terms of where they could be and what they could do (Clark, 2013; Elsley, 2004; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Mouritsen, 2002; Valentine, 1997). Researches for the Global South countries, while sharing the same concerns, also pay great attention to children in street situation, who are considered a social problem, or problem themselves (Abebe, 2008; Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012; Beazley, 2002; Ursin, 2012). All these literatures, in the meantime, have richly presented evidences on how, within contextual constraints, children and youth make the most of their experience in public places, be it playing, hanging out, or earning a living. These literatures also point out that there are mismatches between what adults think about their child's relationship with public spaces, and children's own experiences. Children adapt, resist, and challenge adults' restraints on public space's use. Children also compete between themselves for claiming own territories within public space. Some even dominate public spaces. Yet these patterns are temporal and spatial, it is subjected to change through time and space. Children also use public places to carry out different kind of activities, Titman (1994, cited in Clark, 2010, page 72) categorized in four kinds of place that children search for in outdoor environment: "place for doing", "place for thinking", "place for feeling", and "place for being" themselves. Public space could also be a place for *privacy*<sup>32</sup>, as Atman conceptualizes (in Titman, 1994), where children could be there alone for themselves, or be private with their friends.

In Vietnam, study on children in relation with public space is very few. The four researches below are of rare studies on the theme, albeit with difference focus, methodology and theoretical perspective. These literatures are rich resources to reflect upon in conjunction with

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<sup>32</sup> Atman describes privacy as the ability of an individual to regulate social interaction, to control the desired level of contact with others. (Clark, 2010, page 95-96)

my particular research topic, perspectives and methodology. It should be noted that, Vietnam urban context evolves fast year after year; some findings from previous researches therefore would be used as reference for how things were, and not how things are. Nonetheless, many of the findings still resonate with the realities at the present time.

The first study is by Giang Nguyen (2009) that focuses on urban public space and people's social communication.

Giang conducted questionnaire with 200 adult samplings and some additional in-depth interviews in order to explore people's experience in public places as well as their willingness to communicate at these places. She found out that the percentage of people willing to communicate varied from 36 to 92% depending on the type places. At supermarket or market least people bother to communicate because they find such place is mainly for purchasing-selling. On the contrary, people are open for communication at park, and even more willing if the place is pagoda, church or alley where they reside.

People commute to public places for doing physical exercise, getting some fresh air or talk with neighbor. Activities at public places could be for personal purpose or for community. Through statistic results, Giang found that the closer the place to the inner city, the more people tend to use public space for personal purpose. While at periphery districts, more percentage of people use public places for community communication. However, looking from the whole view, Giang marked that high percentage of people open to communication at urban public space in Vietnam appears to contradict to Han Paul Bahrdt whose work (in the West) found that people tend to keep distance in urban public space. Giang suggested that HCMC and probably Asian cities as well have a higher sense of public human communication than that at Western cities.

Another research conducted by Nho Tran (2009) focuses on the reality of playing and communication space for children in the urbanization process in contemporary HCMC.

Nho's methods were questionnaires for parents, some interviews with children, coupling with observations at several parks in the city. She reviewed that city planning for public space failed to achieve its target in reality. Public space was diminishing while land for investment purpose was prioritized. On the other hand, the remaining public places and its facilities for children were ill-maintained, and weakly-managed. The situation at residential area was not better, most of land was used for construction of private living space, and as a result, it lacks

of green public space for children to gather. For navigation between places, children did not go by themselves but their parents gave them a ride, because there were no separate paths for children to navigate safely. She argued that, lack of opportunity for children to be in touch with green public space in the city, to navigate between places by on their own would diminish their sense of connection to their surrounding world, therefore it affected children's social activities and well-being.

Nho noted that almost all children (98.9%) had the need to go out to place where they could meet and play with other children. Having friends' company at public spaces appeared to be more important the spaces. Children needed to go out even some of them have private yard at home. That was why it was so necessary to have public space as a setting for children to meet. Interviewed children also shared that they felt hot and ill-ventilated in the home; they liked to get some air outdoor and play with others in the alley which they perceived as their "yard".

A third research of significance to this thesis is conducted by Linh Le (2013), exploring urban citizen's perspective on safety at public spaces.

Linh conducted 240 questionnaires and some interviews with adults in three urban districts of HCMC. She found out that people felt unsafe with street environment for many reasons. It was a place of strangers, no one knew if the others were sincere or dishonest. Most people thought that helping others when accidents happen at public places was not a considerable idea; it might cause trouble for the helpers themselves. For public traffic, it was found to be quite disordered. People drove in the wrong lines, even onto the pavements. The walkers also walked in the line of vehicle, for there were a lot of obstacles on the pavement (illegal occupation of pavement for business, usually). Some vehicles ran fast meanwhile walkers were not given priority when crossing streets. Streets also felt unsafe because there were many hard-to-recognize alleys connecting to the main streets, as a result, there were risks of unexpected crashes. People also often found unsafely-hung cables above street, and damages on the street surfaces. Trashes at public spaces were also amongst the complaints. For parks, what often seen there were people littering, spitting, street-vendors, or couples showing affection. All was considered inappropriate for such place. Besides, drug user and prostitution were occasionally found at parks, it made people felt unsafe.

The news from media contributed to make people worry more about public safety. Significant participants wished to have security guards at public place to maintain public order and safety, to offer assistance when needed. Installing public camera system, providing more

street light and better managing vehicle circulations were suggested. While waiting for public space safety to be improved, people applied strategies to protect themselves when going out, such as not bringing valuable items with, limiting communication with strangers, and dressing modestly for not attracting mal-people’s attention.

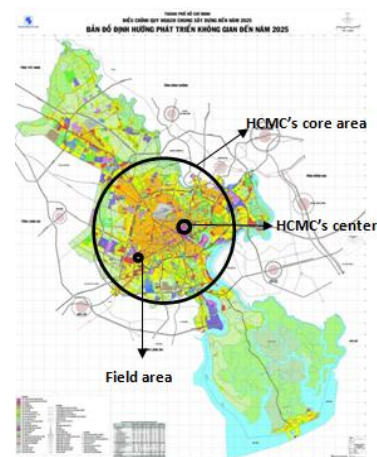
Finally, Drummond (2000) researched on the topic of “Street Scenes: Practices of Public and Private Space in Urban Vietnam.”

Drummond employed ethnography with participant observation to explore perspectives and practice of public and private space in the context of urban Vietnam (Ha Noi capital and HCMC). She said that in Vietnam context the distinction between these two spaces was transgressed from “inside-out” and “outside-in”. From inside-out, urbanites used the pavement (public) in front of their home for running small business, or for private activities such as eating, cooking and bathing. Exercising, napping or cuddling were also be found in the same public place, due to cramped and lack of privacy house condition. From outside-in, the State invaded families’ private way of organizing, such as mobilizing families to have a cultural way of life, including having fewer children for better raising them, supporting state’s regulation and adopting a civilized way of behavior at public space.

Drummond noticed that the use of streets and pavements for personal expression and leisure, while still was most common (in 1990s), pseudo public spaces were emerging like what had happened in the West, with leisure activities taken place at commercialized spaces. Recreation parks, malls, etc. were some of arising privately-owned public spaces where recreation was actually an act of consumption, for the benefit of the corporations. Finally, she emphasized that the definition of public and private space – while being complex – had been dominated by Western ideals. In the context of urban Vietnam, this had to be mediated with locally and culturally acknowledgment.

## 2.5 Further information on public places in HCMC

HCMC is expanding. All the researches above reflect city core areas, as marked at the map besides. I also focus to this area as well (my field area is within 15 kilometers from city center). The city has urban and rural districts. At urban districts, population and urbanization are most intense



**Map 3: Position of field area versus HCMC’s center and core area**

(construction land marked by yellow color). Further parts of the city are mainly rural districts; they are as far as 50km away from city center. Those rural districts have beaches and forest that urban districts do not have. Below are notes on some types of public spaces in the city's core.

**Squares.** The city does not officially have a square but it has some wide spaces between constructions used as squares. Apr.30<sup>th</sup> Square right in the heart of city is that kind of place. Yet since it consumes much time to navigate between places in the city, those who do not stay within a couple of kilometers from the square would not visit it often.

**Parks.** HCMC is severely lacks of parks. Green area per capita is only 1 m<sup>2</sup>/person, among the lowest rate compare to other cities in the world. Some provisioned lands for new parks were cancelled or decreased, while existing park's land is partly cut or commercialized.

**Streets, pavements and markets.** These three kinds of places can co-exist at one place. Pavement and the streets can be used for market gathering. Street market appears to be more crowded than a proper market. Pavements are often narrow and occupied by some small businesses or different objects.



**Photo 4: Market on the street and pavement.**  
**Source: Zing.vn**

**Alleys.** Same as streets, part of alleys can be occupied with small businesses, some table and chairs from the immediate house, etc. At alleys, however, people tend to gather more, share more and know more about each other. Children would run more freely within alleys due to less traffic and more acquaintance to the neighborhood.

**Semi-public places.** Some types of semi-public places most visited in the city are pagodas, malls, community's Cultural Houses, Children Houses, or private residence's parks. As open-space with some rules, each place has its own traits, regulations or discourses on the way people should act.

## 2.6 Summary

Vietnam is a developing country in South-East Asia. Its economy is improving and people are enjoying adequate material condition. Urbanization assists nation development plan but it also

leads to social and environmental problems. In general, children in the city enjoy a better quality of life than the rest of nation, but they also share the same pressure that densely urbanized area has brought about. Safety and environment issue are some of premium concerns for children. The city severely lack of public places, and green area per capita is amongst the lowest of the world. People in the city, including children nowadays, are left to fee-based places for entertaining instead of traditional public places which are weak-maintained and scarce. Most urbanites are busy and live in fast pace due to intense working and studying hours. Children navigate between places on the ride. People tend to keep distance to each other. But within each neighborhood, communication is more open between households, and children are often present in their neighborhood's common area for everyday life's activities.

### 3 CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When one looks at a social phenomenon, it is from certain perspective(s) that one is looking from. The same does a social research: it employs perspectives, theories and concepts to view and interpret social phenomenon. This chapter dedicates to explain theoretical ground I am standing on: Childhood studies. In the coming sections I will present the discipline's essential perspectives, theories, concepts about children and childhood and how I plan to operationalize them for my research. I also will elaborate on some further concepts not exclusively for childhood but very relevant to my research topic, such as: “*place*”, “*space*”, “*development*”, “*urban development*”, etc. Those concepts and ideas around them provide a rich intellectual ground for discussing my empirical data. We first now have a look into Childhood studies discipline and its key perspectives.

#### 3.1 Childhood studies and its key perspectives

Childhood Studies is an interdisciplinary field derived from the new<sup>33</sup> paradigm of Sociology of Childhood since 1970s. At that time, there had been growing critics that, while children related topics were not scarce, their voices were absent in studies about themselves. Children were also underestimated by the mainstream ideas on them. They were perceived as incomplete human beings. Childhood was seen as a human's temporary stage during which children grew physically and cognitively, this period of passage ends when they reach adulthood (Prout & James, 2005). The paradigm argues for a new conception of childhood, as Prout and James (2005, page 8) defined: “*Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies*”. This implies that childhood is a permanent structure of a society, and childhood is also socially constructed; it is perceived and practiced dissimilarly in each society. An illustration of this argument could be drawn from “The historical construction of childhood” of Gittins (2004). She gave an example of a baby who is a biological reality but born into a social world where its meaning are given by adults and its wider social world. The status of “child” could be defined by ambivalent factors, such as age, physical maturity or social status. Acknowledging that childhood is social construction provided frame of interpretation for the early years of human life (Prout & James, 2005, page 8).

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<sup>33</sup> The paradigm was new at that time it arose but is no longer “new” now as several decades has passed.



In addition, the paradigm considers children deserving to be studied on their own right, as individual social actors. It critiqued developmental psychology and socialization<sup>34</sup> theory which saw children as passive recipients of social process, underplayed the role of children as active participants of their growing up and socialization (James, 2009).

Childhood Studies has several key approaches in studying children and childhood, such as historical, actor-oriented, structuralist, or constructionist, etc. It is said that there are not clear-cuts between them, but each has different emphasis. Utilizing different lenses to view children and childhoods enriches our knowledge about them. Although each perspective has its usefulness, recently there have been calls for accounting of broader context when studying about children. Because recognizing larger forces that shape children lives helps bringing about sustainable change to their lives. Reflecting on the discipline's perspectives in related to my specific research topic, I found it is necessary that I use combined approaches to explore and explain children's experiences in public spaces. The approaches are: structuralist, actor-oriented and constructionist which I will introduce in the following sub-sections.

### **3.1.1 Social constructionism perspective - Deconstructing and reconstructing childhood**

When claiming that childhood is socially constructed, there is the need to “*deconstruct*” our taken for granted perspectives on childhood. Aspects of children's lives that need deconstruction include, for example, dominant themes like “*rationality*”, “*naturalness*” and “*universality*”. According to Prout and James (2005), “*rationality*” relates to developmental psychology which influences beyond the border of this discipline to Sociology of Children and Childhood. “*Rationality*” is considered an attribute of adult. On the contrary, children are seen as irrational. Their cognitive skill gradually develops during childhood until they reach adulthood. This perspective is thought to be imported straight to sociology through the theory of socialization. Childhood is a time of human-on-the-making when children learn and internalize social norms until they become a responsible adult, ready to be part of social system. “*Naturalness*” infers the way we see children and childhood as if we already know them. Since we get used to seeing them and we were also once children, we got a taken for granted perspectives on them. Based on our strong ideas on “*irrationality*” and “*naturalness*” toward childhood, our practices on children and childhood are largely identical, it is what

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<sup>34</sup> According Nielsen (2009/2014), socialization concept originally developed by Durkheim who emphasized socialization as two-ways social process where children also take part in shaping their environment. However Parson later displaced this concept in favor of individualistic basis by ascribing socialization as simply a process of individual internalization. The new paradigm was critical to this dominant way of understanding the concept.

Prout and James mean by “universality”. Moreover, there are many realities of childhood depending to the contexts, there is no such universal childhood. Childhood could be addressed as plural: childhoods.

Montgomery’s “Childhood in time and place” (2003, page 46) elaborates on the essence of Social constructionism perspective like this: “*Social constructionism is concerned with ideas about children, not facts about them*”. A reality is one and fixed, but the perspectives to it is plural and fluctuate. This is what the approach focuses on. Puritan, Tabula rasa, and Romantic discourses are examples of how childhoods in the West were differently constructed through time. Puritan discourse perceives children as naturally evil; they need to be disciplined to overcome this and become moral. Tabula rasa discourse finds children as a “blank slate” with potential, his environment and education will shape how they become; therefore children need to be well shaped for their sake. Romantic discourse believes children are innocent and need to be protected from “polluted” world; childhood should be a time of carefree and happiness (Montgomery, 2003). The author suggested that the latter discourse from Western world have been spreading to wider parts of the world and is nowadays dominant discourse about children.

Furthermore, social constructionism not only looks at how childhood are perceived and practiced differently, but also attempts to understand why people construct it differently. As Jenks (2004, page 94) states, “*Children, quite simply, are not always and everywhere the same thing; they are socially constructed and understood contextually, and sociologists attend to this process of construction and also to this contextualization*”. Discourse analysis is one of the techniques this perspective uses to understand “this process of construction”. What discourse is will be mentioned in the section Concepts.

I find the approach is an indispensable tool to understand how children’s experience in public space is shaped by social and cultural contexts. What local people think about the nature of children, and how they expect children to be must have a strong influence on children’s daily activities. Besides, discourses about public spaces would also shape the way children think about and interact with spaces.

### **3.1.2 Actor-oriented perspective – Children have agency**

It is nowadays widely recognized that children are social actors, but the new sociology of childhood argues for a more developed conception, that children have agency. While actor means someone doing something, agent is someone who does something with others, and by

doing so (s)he contributes to social reproduction process (Mayall, 2002 summarized in James, 2009).

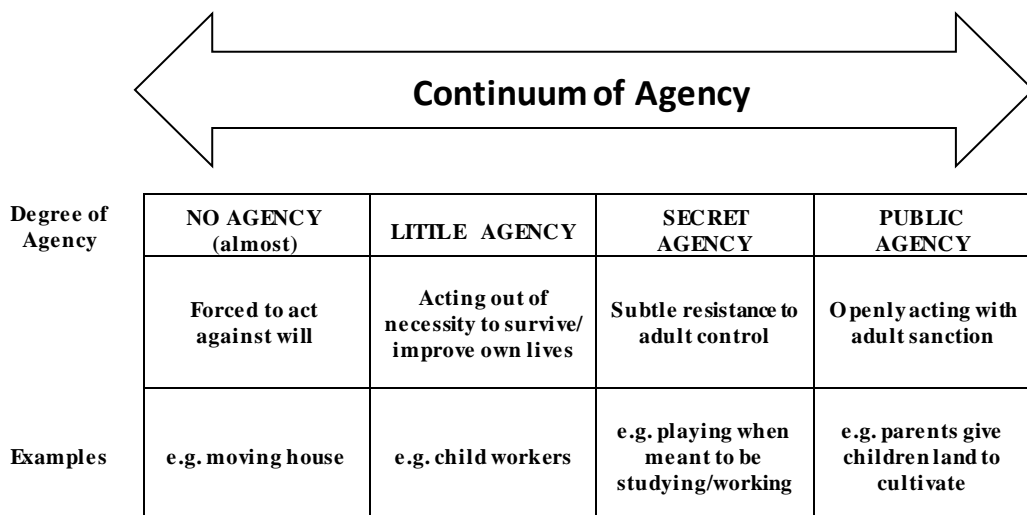
One of the decent elaborations on child's agency was from ethnography study of Corsaro and Molirani (2008) at kindergartens in Italia. Corsaro et al. found that children did not simply internalize their surrounding world but also made sense of their culture and participated to it creatively. The researchers conceived this phenomenon by the new concepts "*peer culture*" and "*interpretive reproduction*", stating that:

Children creatively appropriate information from adult culture to produce their own peer cultures. Such appropriation is creative in that it both extends or elaborates peer culture and simultaneously contributes to the reproduction and extension of the adult world. This process of creative appropriation is seen as interpretive reproduction. (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008, page 301-302)

Two central themes that consistently appear in peer culture are : "*(1) Children make persistent attempts to gain control of their lives and to (2) share that control with each other*" (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008, page 302). This culture was expressed at various circumstances. For example, school children collectively transformed their sitting chair into playing tool. This implicitly challenged teacher's rule on the official function of chair; however children managed to control the way they wanted to use it. Or, children brought cell-phone to school, making "secondary adjustment" by disguising it in a way that teacher would tolerate. For working children, they also found ways to turn their work into play, or to combine work with play (Corsaro, 2009). All those are manifestation of children's agency in gaining control of their daily life.

James noted that, apart from peer culture, children's agency - "*their ability to act creatively and to make things happen*" – can also be found at different social structures (James, 2009, page 42). For this she referred to Mayall, who suggested that children's life world as individuals should not be the focus. Rather, children must be seen as a social group who exercise their agency in the structural forces such as generational relation at family or legal system (Mayall, 2002 summarized in James, 2009). Example of study of this type is how children dealing structural elements related to living arrangement due to family separation (James, 2009).

Another rich elaboration on child’s agency was the work of Robson, Bell and Klocker (2007, page 135) who defined: “Agency is understood as an individual’s own capacity, competencies and activities through which they navigate the context and positions of their lifeworlds, fulfilling many economic, social and cultural expectations, while simultaneously charting individual/collective choices and possibilities for their daily and future lives”. While agency is recognized as a child’s attribute, these authors go further on discussing whether children have the same capacity to agency, or if there are factors impacting it. The answer is there are, but what exactly are the factors depends on the way agency is conceptualized. Materialist approach finds children having role in productive and reproductive sphere but their agency is framed by material realities and social rules. Feminist approach suggests that the interplay between social contexts, cultural discourses, spatial relations, and personal biography elements affects agency. Meanwhile, Klocker also developed sub-concepts of agency: “*thick agency*” and “*thin agency*”, based on structuration and Foucault approach<sup>35</sup>. *Thin agency* is performed when young people’s background and context unfavorable to them. On the contrary, if the condition is opportunistic, *thick agency* has chance to manifest (Klocker, 2007 introduced in Robson et al., 2007). Robson et al. also suggested that “Agency is dynamic” and “An individual moves along the continuum accordingly” (Robson et al., 2007, page 144). They concretize these points with the model below:



**Figure 1: Continuum of rural young people’s agency (Robson et al., 2007, page 144)**

<sup>35</sup> Student’s note: Structuration and Foucault approach discuss different issues. Because the text in referenced document was brief, I assume that authors refer to “Structuration” as middle path of structure and agency, and “Foucault approach” relates to the idea that where there is suppression there is resistance.

Young people’s agency transforms in accordance to time and space, or when power relations shift. Agency is not only affected by generational relation, but also between peers. Besides, a child’s state of well-being and emotions also affect his agency, but this state is also affected by outer conditions, e.g. a child accompanying by his friends may feel more confident to express agency than being alone. Finally, authors suggest that different theories to agency complementary to each other. Noting also that, sometimes agency cannot be recognized, there may be alternative form of power, for example, quiet resistance. Children’s subtle way of agency should be attentively recognized, so that children in those cases are not barely seen as passive, victims or powerless<sup>36</sup>. Agency approach deconstructs victim perspectives and move to empowerment alternative. Children have agency, however little or subtle, and one’s agency is one’s power.

It is relatively recent that children are recognized with agency. Research agenda for it has been scaling up, but not so many compared to the dominant view of children as greatly passive in social process. Actor-oriented perspective is what I want to employ for my project, to recognize different manifestations of children’s capacity through the course of their daily public spatial practices.

### 3.1.3 Structural perspective – Childhood as a permanent social structure

Perceptions about children as incomplete human being and childhood as preparative period have pushed children group to the periphery of social structure. Contesting these views, application of structural perspective on childhood studies evokes that children are permanent social structure, a constituting part of generational structure, as illustrated below by Qvortrup:

	Childhood	Adulthood	Old age
2000s			
1980s			
1960s			
1940s			
1920s			

**Figure 2: Model of generational relations (Qvortrup, 2009, page 24)**

Vertically reading, childhood is there at any historical time, be it 1960s, 1980s or in the present year (2019). Horizontally reading, childhood is an integrated segment of generational

<sup>36</sup> Authors’ note: It does not means there are no cases where children are victims and totally passive.

structure, without childhood there would be no adulthood and old age; these segments inter-are. Mayall (2009, page 175) put it like this: “*‘Child’ is relational with ‘adult’, in the sense that ‘the child’ is defined in its difference from ‘adult’*” and “*Childhood is relational with adulthood, too, in the sense that relational processes between the two may lead to changes, both within families and within society more generally*”. It is useful to locate childhood in intergenerational structure since social practices between generations bring about reality of childhood. It should be noted that generational relations does not only imply relations between family members, such as children-parents-grand-parents, but also between generations in a society, involving child, youth, adult, elderly, etc. Children are subjected to different treatment compare to other generational units. This has implication on their daily life experiences, such as their experience in public spaces which is shared with other people of different ages/generations.

Structural perspective is also utilized in conceptualizing children as a permanent social group being impacted by larger structural conditions. Those are historical socio-economic, political and technological parameters. Qvortrup asserted that the reason this perspective coming into existence because it would give different insight than from other perspectives. He stated that in order to explain life circumstance of children – as a structural form – we “*have to take into account and be deeply informed about the parameters which describe and explain these life circumstances*” (Qvortrup, 2009, page 28). What influenced children life world/ life circumstance are from larger forces around them, despite they are aware of it or not. “Structural transformation” (time) or “structural variation” (space) shapes plurality of childhoods. What makes childhood in one time different than at the other time, or one place distinctive to another place could be identified by utilizing this approach. Suggesting this perspective for studying about childhood, he does not negate that children have agency to navigate their life, but structural forces should not be denied either:

The point is that no child can evade the impact of economic or spatial forces, nor ideologies about children and the family – let alone political and economic ideologies and realities [...]. Discussions of either structure or agency seem similarly abortive. Children are of course actors in a diversity of arenas, even where this is not visible to the ethnographic gaze; yet, they are born into economic and cultural circumstances which cannot be explained away. (Qvortrup, 2000, page 68)

To sum up, this perspective complements other approaches by exploring contextual factors that shape children's experiences in public spaces. Immediate contexts could be family's way of life, or guardian's rule on children and public space. Larger contexts could be culture, socio-economical conditions which affect children as a social group with particular interests and social position.

## **3.2 Concepts related to the study**

### **3.2.1 Discourse and childhood**

Addressing childhood, Jenks (1982, page 23) stated: *"The idea of childhood is not a natural but a social construct; as such its status is constituted in particular socially located forms of discourse"*. What do we mean by discourse? Discourse is set of ideas forming in historical and social context. It reflects perspectives of a group about their surrounding world. Discourse reflects perspective on reality, but it in turn creates reality. Since how we perceive would decide how we act, and while we act we are creating reality (Montgomery, 2003). Montgomery noted that, discourses vary not only from one to another society, but even in the same society, there exist ambivalent discourses. Each discourse, author continues, *"draws upon its own particular knowledge-base, works from its own particular set of assumptions, offers its own explanation of 'how the world works' and incorporates its own set of values and ethics"* (Montgomery, 2003, page 47).

The term "discourse" is deeply elaborated in Post-structuralism. This approach suggests that, while discourse is set of ideas about the world, it derives from knowledge and languages. Language and knowledge are not neutral, they have power. For this, Michel Foucault – who had early work on developing definition of discourse, and exploring how it is formed - said that *"It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power"* (Foucault, 1980, page 52 cited in Punch, Bell, Costello, & Panelli, 2007, page 207). For example, the statement – language - such as "Children are to be seen and not be heard" may come from the discourse that children are not so competent with word-expression. This discourse might arise from developmental theory knowledge. This knowledge could be biased, incomplete, but it is powerful because it is put into practice. *"Care-taker thesis"* or *"liberationist thesis"* are another two examples of discourse. They contrast one other. One perspective suggests that children should be protected and decided for, other claims for children's right to be self-determined (Archard, 1993). Each discourse based on different knowledge on children. Montgomery (2003, page 47) asserted that

discourses about childhood reflect how the early years of human life is interpreted and how it relates children to other age groups.

Discourse and discourse analysis is important for this thesis because there are substantial ideas about children and public spaces at field place that strongly shape children's experience in space. These ideas come from well established cultural values and practices, but also formed as a result of globalization and development process that Vietnam has been through over the last three decades. What exactly are those discourses will be elaborated in analysis chapters.

### **3.2.2 Place and space**

As the topic of this research is about experience of children with public spaces, it is important to elaborate on the concept of "space", "place" and their implications to human experience. There are many different decent approaches to the concepts to the point that it is beneficial to consider many of them instead of only one.

On physical aspect, Oxford dictionary defines "space" as "*a continuous area or expanse which is free, available, or unoccupied*" while "place" is "*a particular position, point, or area in space; a location*". It also defines "space" differently, as "*the dimensions of height, depth, and width within which all things exist and move*" or "*the freedom to live, think, and develop in a way that suits one*".<sup>37</sup> Besides, I must also note that space can be understood as an abstract expanse where one can "dwell" within, such as virtual space, or social space.

Nairn & Kraftl (2016, page 24) make a conceptual distinction between space/place like this: "*While space is perceived more geometrically – as a fixed and predictable spot on the surface of earth, place is a spot in space that gain place-like qualities and meaning through human experience*". James and James (2012, page 131) shares the same perspective, stating: "*Place is more than simply a geographical location – it is a space imbued with social and cultural meanings*". These conceptions are the same as Oxford in recognizing that place is a part of space, but it is different in a way that place is perceived more than just physical existence, it gains meanings through human's perspectives and experiences.

Holloway and Hubbard (2001, page 235) recognize that place is usually perceived objectively as a part of the earth's surface, marked off by boundaries, a physical "given". In that sense, place is something physical only, and "dead". But there can be subjectively approaches to

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<sup>37</sup> According to Oxford Dictionaries: Definition of *space* in English (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019b) and Definition of *place* in English (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019a)



place as well, in that sense, places are perceived as “*subjective spaces brought into being through human consciousness*”, or “*cultural products brought into existence through the contested realms of representation*”

(Holloway & Hubbard, 2001, page 236). It is useful to combine both subjective and objective conceptualization of place for better grasping its multi-dimensional meanings. For this, Nicholas Entrikin elaborates: “*to understand place in a manner that captures its sense of totality and contextuality is to occupy a position*



**Photo 5: A public bench in Trondheim city**

*that is between the objective pole of scientific theorizing and the subjective*

*pole of empathetic understanding.*” (Nicholas Entrikin, 1991, page 12 cited in Holloway & Hubbard, 2001, page 236). Places are perceived more holistically when one does not embrace a single mode of thinking about them. I have noticed a public bench in Trondheim with embroidery worn around its back. This bench is an object, a place, but more than that it is personified. The bench gives physical conditions for people to sit on, but in turn, this bench is meaningful it is given a beautiful “coat”. The bench, the place in this case is both physical and empathetic.

Further discussing the subjective dimension of place, Holloway and Hubbard (2001) assert that place is socially constructed. Moreover, while people construct places, places also construct people (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001, page 7). For example, a public space can be perceived as business, relaxing or playing place – people construct place. Pseudo commercial public spaces evoke children’s identity as consumer – place construct people. While elaborating on the inter-connection between people and place, the authors also stress that, in the face of globalization which affect people everywhere, local places local places still play an important role in shaping people everyday’s life. I find this is true, because context is not only about economy polity but also about other elements like culture and place that interplay with human’s life.

It would be inadequate to discuss about place without some notes on its relation to power. Holloway and Hubbard (2001, chapter 8) state that place entwines with complex network of power that influences the way people behave. We usually think that power is executed

through authority; yet power is also enforced by the way space is composed as well. This power is sometimes challenged and renegotiated. Children playing skate board over public infrastructure is an illustration. Public stairs and walls are not for that game, but by doing so children claim their places in the public spaces.

Through diverse elaborations on space and place above one can see that both place and space can be understood and used beyond the physical existence to political social and cultural realm. Knowing different perspectives to space/place sharpen my capacity in understanding people's experiences in space and identifying underline causes of it.

### **3.2.3 Public space and semi-public space**

The origin of public space could be traced back in Greece - the "agora" - where all people could gather, the agora was and functioned as "*the place of citizenship, an open space where public affairs and legal disputes were conducted ... it was also a marketplace, a place of pleasurable jostling, where citizens' bodies, words, actions and produce were all literally on mutual display, and where judgments, decisions, and bargains were made*" (Hartley, 1992, page 29-30 cited in Mitchell, 1995). The idea was that public space supposed to be accessible for everybody with different background to do things, to discuss about matters concerning them. Public space is the representation of democracy (except for people that were excluded to participate in democracy at that time - slaves and women), as Horvat asserts: "*Without public space there will be no democracy*"<sup>38</sup>.

The other way of perceiving what public space relates to aspect of ownership: public space is owned by the state but open for all citizens. Public space can be defined in contrast to private space as well. While public space is open for public sphere, private space is the realm of personal and familial privacy. There is no one unanimous definition for public space, but various approaches to make sense of the concept. UNESCO offers one more definition, which I find practical, as follow:

A public space refers to an area or place that is open and accessible to all peoples, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age or socio-economic level. These are public gathering spaces such as plazas, squares and parks. Connecting spaces, such as sidewalks and streets, are also public spaces. In the 21st century, some even consider

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<sup>38</sup> Srećko Horvat - a philosopher and political activist - stated in a video on the website [www.publicspace.org](http://www.publicspace.org) - Multimedia: Without public space there is no democracy (Horvat, 2017)

the virtual spaces available through the internet as a new type of public space that develops interaction and social mixing. (UNESCO, 2017)<sup>39</sup>

Public space – as the original meaning of it – has been facing its decline due to privatization of public spaces for commercial purposes<sup>40</sup>. Horvat<sup>41</sup> gives example of what one could do in authentic public space and a “pseudo” one. At traditional public spaces, one can give a public speech, shout loudly, or play guitar; however, one will be restricted to do so at pseudo-public places (shopping centre, for example). Another aspect that public space used to provide us, according to Braidotti, is stillness and doing-nothing-ness. At public spaces it was possible to connect to stillness without being bombarded by advertising signs and sounds. It was also possible to occupy the space without having to consume anything. Public space is now is largely associated with consumerism and commodification. Public benches where people can just sit and consume nothing almost disappear<sup>42</sup>.

Semi-public space is private space but accessible to the public, such as shops, malls, cafeteria<sup>43</sup>. It could also be public space that belongs to a private residential area where all people can use, but it is privately owned. In Vietnam context, semi-public space would include temple, pagoda, church, communal house, or children’s cultural centre. Those places are open to people but are associated with some restrictions and rules. It is noted that, even genuinely public spaces also have rules – such as rules on public order applied to all citizens. Pseudo-public space is also a semi-public space, the word “*pseudo*” implies that the space appears to be public, yet it is privately owned by developers/corporations<sup>44</sup>.

### 3.2.4 Development and Urban development

For “development”, there are technical definitions of it, such as, what it does, which are its stages, how many modes of it and what it brings about. There are also discussion on what development implies and why it comes to existence. I would like to first introduce technical dimension of it. According to Ashok et al: “*Development represents the entire gamut of change by which the entire socioeconomic system is tuned to the diverse basic needs and*

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<sup>39</sup> According to UNESCO webpage- Social and Human Sciences: Inclusion Through Access to Public Space

<sup>40</sup> It means the place that looks like public but it is actually privately owned, the use of the space is with some restrictions.

<sup>41</sup> Srećko Horvat stated in a video on the website [www.publicspace.org](http://www.publicspace.org) - Multimedia: Without public space there is no democracy (Horvat, 2017)

<sup>42</sup> Professor of Philosophy, Rosi Braidotti stated in a video on the website [www.publicspace.org](http://www.publicspace.org) - Multimedia: Public Space for me would be how the civic interacts with the production of knowledge (Braidotti, 2016)

<sup>43</sup> According to Wikipedia – Public space ("Public space," 2019)

<sup>44</sup> According to The Guardian - Pseudo-public space: explore the map – and tell us what we’re missing ("Pseudo-public space: explore the map – and tell us what we’re missing," 2019)

*desires of the individuals and social groups within that system who move toward a condition of life that is materially and spiritually better.*” (Ashok, Allen, Frank, Rajiv, & Sudhir, 2016, page 494).

“Development” model was formed on the basis of modernization theories and was brought to the global South with purposes. In the geopolitical circumstance in 1940s when the colonization regime came to an end, the ruling nations wished to maintain power over the liberated nations in mean development model. Yet, the Enlightenment idea in the 18<sup>th</sup> century also influenced the global North to share this model to the global South. The idea was that the civilized and developed nations brought civilization and way to wealth to the rest of the world (Ansell, 2005). The promise of development as a way to bring better life for everyone has been questioned in Hart’s (2008) “Business as Usual? The Global Political Economy of Childhood Poverty”. Hart (2008) critic development model for being a universal trajectory applying to all nations’ contexts. He articulates that the model is in fact a play of power which is controlled and maintained in only a few hands. It only brings benefit to a few groups while livelihood of the majority population becomes more difficult. He suggests for a look at formal processes out of specific subjectivities of individual for understanding how political economy having influences on women and children.

Development has brought Vietnam which once among the poorest country in the world to become middle-income country nowadays. But it is reported that pressing social and environmental issues persist and increase, while inequalities is widen on this land (World Bank & Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, 2016). In the context of development process, families’ ways of daily life have also been altered, highly concentrated to economic-oriented activities. They have been strongly constructed as economic subjects with production activities and mass-consumption culture.

Development always involves urban development, as urban is the field on which economic activities flourish. Ashok et al. define “urban development”, as follow:

Urban development is a multidimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of the entire urban system involved in the development process. It involves radical changes in institutional, economic, social, and administrative structures, popular attitudes, and even customs and beliefs, as well as the reduction of inequality and eradication of poverty. (Ashok et al., 2016, page 494)

Vietnam has been conducting “National urban area development program” to promote the development of cities for serving socio-economic development goals of the nation. According to the State, a place is defined as urban must fulfill five criteria: location, level of socio-economic development, population density, non-agriculture worker rate and infrastructure. It is noticeable that, the criteria are biased to economy aspects, not cultural and spiritual ones. Like development, urban development has strong implication on the urban public space’s physical and social attributes, which significantly impact children’s experience in urban public space.

### **3.2.5 Play**

Playing is an activity particularly remarkable in most of childhood. But what does it mean by play? According to Giddens’ work “Note on the concept of play” (1964), different disciplines have different concepts of play. Education theorist, philosopher, and psychologist have studied extensively about play since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There have been disagreements between them on characteristics of play. Some defined play based on the motivation toward activity, the lack of obligation to take part in it, the affective components of activities, or the non-productive nature of it. But in sum, Giddens remarked that:

The majority of interpretations seem to stress one fundamental characteristic of play, as differentiated from any other sort of behavior namely, that play is activity which is by and large non-instrumental in character. That is, play is not linked psychologically to purposes which are external to the activity and which would dictate its character. On a social level, play is relatively 'self-contained' activity, which is not linked to consequences lying outside the performance of the activity itself. (Giddens, 1964, page 74)

Sociology takes different approach to play as psychology and philosophy, its main approach to play is in term of contrasting with work. Play also is considered a type of leisure activity, but what play is different to other types of leisure activities were not satisfactory defined. Besides, some play has instrumental and economic purpose as work (Giddens, 1964, page 81). Punch (2003) stated that play, as well as work are both socially constructed, therefore a definition to them is not easy to make. Meanwhile, James and James (2012) in their book “Concepts in Childhood studies” offered a simple conceptualization of play, as “*Pleasurable activities freely engaged in by children; freedom from work; to act frivolously (carefree-non-*

*seriously) or capriciously (unpredictable)*” (page 98). This dissertation borrows this concept of play to discuss on play activities of participants at public spaces.

### **3.2.6 Everyday**

A small note here on “everyday”, as it is so often mentioned when we discuss how things affects people’s activities on daily basis. Discussing about “*everyday*”, Holloway and Hubbard has noted:

Everyday refers to the customary and routine behaviors that occur in the workplace, the home and garden, the streets, shops, parks, cinemas, places of worship, football stadia, community centers and so on. To a lesser or greater extent, there are places where people adopt everyday modes of behavior and thought, conforming to taken-for-granted assumptions about the way that people should act towards members of their family and their neighborhood, apparently without even questioning this. (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001, page 136)

Lefebvre is amongst the philosopher who had intensive work on the concept of *everyday*. He found that the concept was overlooked; it was regarded as inferior compared to other activities such as leisure or work. Lefebvres asserted that “*in the trivialities of everyday that the essence of human existence can be discerned*” (Lefebvre, 1991, briefed in Holloway & Hubbard, 2001, page 35). This concept would be a great reflexive tool to explore children’s everyday life activities and how public spaces play a role in it.

## **4 CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter elaborates on how I planned to reach the project objectives through research tools and how this plan was implemented at the field context. The chapter starts with describing field entering and sampling of participant. It next discusses methodological perspectives and research tools: how I planned and conducted them. Methodological and ethical challenges in research will be reflected after that. It then closes by presenting method of data analysis. The chapter serves as preparatory step for the upcoming data interpretation chapters, as before one working on the data, it is necessary to ask how data was generated.

### **4.1 The process in the field**

#### **4.1.1 Getting access**

The field destination was HCMC - my hometown, therefore had advantage of being familiar with some areas and people there. The city has several inner-city districts, peripheral-city districts and rural districts. My chosen field-site was the area belongs to peripheral districts. The starting point of the field-site was my own neighborhood, quarter 1 of An Lac A ward, Binhtan district and it then stretched to neighboring areas. Apart from the reason that I am acquainted to the areas, there are some rational reasons justifying my choice of field site. I know these areas since 1986 and witnessed the changes of it and the surrounding areas over 3 decades. One side of my quarter bordered the vast area of rice field where I often went to play, and passed by every schooldays as it lied between my home and my elementary school. Two decades ago, the fields were replaced by new urban housing projects, making my own neighborhood appeared to be the least developed in the area. In 2003, the district that my quarter belonged to was also upgraded from “rural district” to “city-district”. More new houses, services and business have arisen, population has increased, and the hanging-out pattern at the public space has changed. To my knowledge, this area and its surrounding ones are decent destination to conduct a study on the experience of the local children with the public spaces in the context of urban transformation.

After conducting the overall survey to the areas upon my return to my hometown in summer 2018, and reflecting on the objectives of my research, I ended up with precise field places that I wanted to work at. They were quarter 1, 2, 3 of An Lac A ward – Binhtan district, a part of Binhtridong ward – Binhtan district, and a part of ward 10, 13 - district 6. All those areas belong to peripheral-city districts, a few kilometers only to city centre. Even though these

neighborhoods administratively belong to two districts, it spread over an area of just 3 km<sup>2</sup>. The distinction between two districts seemed to be blurred on aspect of social daily activities of the locals. People commuted to public space near their home, according to their needs, such as, if they wanted to go to the park, they did not need to go to the park of their district which was further away; instead they commuted to the nearer park from home. From now on, I refer to all areas that I mentioned above my field or field place.

At field place, I did the survey to the neighborhoods and the public/semi-public places. The field did not have any square, beach, or nature place; but it had many streets and two parks as public settings; and a lot of semi-public spots such as local markets, supermarkets, mall, temples, children's cultural house, coach stations, pavements, bus stops and alleys. I visited all those types of places without needing any assistance because they are all accessible to everyone.

Below is the map of my field place, it is 1.3km on North-South axis, and 2.45km on West-East axis, total area is 3.185 km<sup>2</sup>. I did my observations at various public and semi-public places in this area and recruited participants here as well. The orange dots representing places where my participants lived, the dots do not point exactly to their house for protecting their anonymity, but it does show the areas where participants inhabited.





Note: The orange dots represent the area where participants live.

Map 4: The 3.185 km<sup>2</sup> field area (1.3km x 2.45km), satellite map provided by maps.google.com.

#### **4.1.2 Sampling of participants**

For potential participants that I needed to identify, I had planned that I would not approach them through channels of schools, local government or the neighborhood's head. This is because it was summer time, the schools closed down. The neighborhood head is a part of local government office, both mainly presumed the function of administrative management of the community. I found it would not be more advantageous to approach my potential participants through this system than through my own existing neighborhood-ship with people in my quarter. I talked to my close neighbors who had child aged 6-12, and I talked to these children. Thanks to us having known each other and my study in line with children's daily experiences, they accepted to help me. I got 3 child participants through this way. After that there were no more potential participants from my close acquaintances, whereas I needed more than three participants. Several options I came up with were: approach neighbors that I do not have close relationships with, expand the age range of participant so I could recruit more children from my area, or expand the recruitment area. I chose the last option because I thought the wider space in which I recruited the participant, the more types of public spaces children would have experience with in total. This might result rich data for my study.

When I already made up my mind about the next targeted potential participants, another challenge came up. I was not sure how best to approach them. People who lived as little as 100 meters away from my quarter did not know who I am. I was also unfamiliar with most of them. Elder residents of the area had known more about each other, but it was not so between them and their neighbor's younger generations. Besides, many new comers to the area year after year, resulting more people living side by side crowdedly but knowing little or nothing about each other. I felt it would be awkward if I visited some households to introduce myself and my project. Therefore I opted a more natural way to approach potential participants: observations of children in the public places and building rapport with them within that context. This way took longer time than direct visits to households, but I felt that this way was more natural for both participants and I. Besides, it would surely help me to identify suitable participant for my study; because before I invited children that I saw to my research, I already witnessed their activities at public space. I could also identify which children were more socialize among their peer to make initial contact. Moreover, I knew their gender and could guess their age that would help me to balance participant background. It took me about ten days to build first rapport with the children at my observation places, since then I made

acquaintance to more and more children. Totally 7 children participants I got to know this way, I talked to them before I came to talk with their guardians.

Besides participant that I invited successfully, I also had constraints with approaching the children I liked to include in my research. Occasionally, during my time at public places, I observed children doing various interesting things. What they did recalled me about some of Childhood studies theories or concepts; therefore, I wanted to invite them to my study. But I found the situations were not appropriate for me to approach them. I was stranger in those cases, and some guardians already appeared to be cautious when I looked at their children. I felt like they were thinking that I was an adult and I was not supposed to be interested on looking what children do. If I looked at them for a while, the guardian might think that I was either strange or had mal intention. There is common rumor about child kidnapping in my country. In such situations, I hold myself from approach either the children or the guardians. Other times, I did not approach the children because they were much focused on what they were doing. I felt I would interrupt their joy with my contact. Not being able to work with them, however, I took note and reflected on what I observed.

Below is the list of participants, both children and guardians. All the real name of participants was made anonymous by having new fictitious name.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Fictitious name</b>	<b>Living area</b>	<b>Type of participant</b>
1	An, boy, 6 years old	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Child participant
2	Thọ, grandma	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Guardian participant
3	Ý, girl, 9 years old	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Child participant
4	Di, boy, 11 years old	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Child participant
5	Hiền, grandma	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Guardian participant
6	Lành, girl, 13 years old	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Child participant
7	Phúc, grandma	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Guardian participant
8	Thảo, girl, 12 years old	Ward 13, district 6	Child participant
9	Mai, girl, 12 years old	Ward 13, district 6	Child participant
10	Minh, auntie	Ward 13, district 6	Guardian participant
11	Thiện, boy, 9 years	Ward 13, district 6	Child participant

	old		
12	Nhân, granddad	Ward 13, district 6	Guardian participant
13	Đức, boy, 10 years old	Ward 13, district 6	Child participant
14	Ti, girl, 6 years old	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Child participant
15	Hỷ, mom	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Guardian participant
16	Nhiên, girl, 9 years old	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Child participant
17	Nhi, girl, 6 years old	An Lac A ward, Binhtan dist.	Child participant (withdrew)
<b>Total: 17 participants (11 children and 6 adults)</b>			

**Table 2: List of participants**

### **4.1.3 Background descriptions of participants**

From the planning stage I decided that I wanted to approach children of various backgrounds, focusing on ordinary children because I found those groups have not been adequately researched on my interested topic. At field, I kept in mind that intention and tried to balance between my wish and availability of potential samples. My sample group indeed turned out to be quite balanced and diverse. The only factor that was different from my plan was the age of child participant. I had planned it to be between 6 and 12, but one participant of mine was 13. I often talked to the children for a while before I asked their age, and before I talked to them I already felt interested in inviting them to the research. Therefore I did not give up my intention if the child finally told me their age which was 1-2 years older than my planed age-range.

Some of the participants have lived at the field place since they were born; others were immigrants from rural provinces. Most of them have been going to school although a few of them have worked outdoor or domestically. A significant number of them did not live with parents due to unaccompanied migration, or because their parents had to work elsewhere and let them stay with relatives. Boy and girl proportion was pretty equal in my sampling.

Each participant's background will be presented in detail in Appendix. There were 17 of them all together, of which 11 are children, 6 are guardians. Child and guardian related to each other as relatives. After I had recruited the child, I tried to invite his guardian to join the study as well. Some of them accepted to help me, other did not. The total number of child participants was therefore more numerous than that of adult participants.

## 4.2 Methodological perspectives

As Childhood studies acknowledges children as social actor, it also promotes children as the main authors of study about them. There are ways to facilitate children involvement in the study process, among which James (2001, page 2) praises ethnography for it allows “*view of children as competent interpreters of the social world*”. Ethnography is not limited to traditional “participant observation” method but also “task-based” activities suitable to children. The emphasis on children participation in research about them has been also in line with the universally-gratified UNCRC (UN, 1989) where children’s perspectives and their right to participation must be respected.

Further discuss on methodology in studying childhood, Ennew et al.<sup>45</sup> (2009) suggest that an approach is scientific when researcher uses various methods to collect data and cross-check between data, a strategy called “triangulation”; and children should be involved in all stage of research process. Punch (2002) also articulates for a thoughtful combination of both traditional and innovative methods that should match each individual child’s strength and interest. While Clark & Moss (2011) assert for a “co-construction of meaning” process where participants are given opportunities to step back and reflect on their views and experiences, by mosaic (multi-method) approach. In this approach, besides observation and interview, multi participatory visual methods are recommended for researching with children. It is because: (i) children could choose amongst methods which one they prefer, (ii) participation reduces power imbalance between researcher and child, and (iii) visual method is usually compatible with child’s strengths.

Learning from these insights, in order to explore the topic of children’s experience of urban public space, I planed totally six methods: Secondary data review (1), Informal observation (2), Neighbourhood walk with Interview (3), Interview with parents (4), Recalling (5), and Mapping with Photographs (6). Amongst these methods, method 3, 4, 5 were participatory, and method 6 was both participatory and visual.

## 4.3 Research tools

Continuing the methodology perspectives that I discussed earlier, I had planned 6 methods: Secondary data review, Informal observation, Interview with parents, Recalling, Neighbourhood walk with Interview, and Mapping with Photograph. Finally, when I arrived

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<sup>45</sup> Ennew J., with Abebe T, Bangyai R., Karapituck P., Kj rholt A.T., Noonsup T. with additional material from Beazley H., Bessell S., Daengchart-Kushanoglu P and Waterson R.

at field, the four first methods remained the same, there rest was adjusted, and they became Interview with children, Photograph, and Hang-out/Neighbourhood walk. I also added Field diary as a method, so totally I used eight tools. It is stressed that some tools were only conducted by me, and the others were conducted together with participants optionally. Below is the description of those tasks.

#### **4.3.1 Secondary data review**

Purpose: To gather existing empirical finding related to research problem, to collect information of structural parameters which affect local children's experience of urban public space. (Research question 1, 2, 3)

Before conducting research at field, searching for existing data related to the topic is a necessary step. If the research questions have already been answered, then it is unethical to repeat the work, because it is a waste of time and resource (Alderson & Morrow, 2012). Aware of existing findings on the topic would help me to avoid duplication of research. Secondary data review is also excellent tool for me to collect information of structural level, such as political, economic, social and cultural conditions which contextualize local childhood. For its usefulness and necessity, this tool was employed since the first phase when I incubated the project until the final stage of dissemination.

Ennew et al. (2009) also suggest that, spending time at the locality to search for secondary data is essential, since some data is not available online. When I chose the topic, I did not find on internet or NTNU library system researches relevant to the themes of children and public space in Vietnam, except for studies about street children. Yet, when I got to the field and accessed Vietnam National University system, I found three relevant researches. Consulting these studies I found out that the theoretical framework and methodology perspectives were different from my research design. Whereas I focus on children's perspectives and employed Childhood studies' theories, the researchers at field mainly focus on adult's perspectives about public space, or utilizing socialization theory and psychology when it related to the children. The difference safeguards the worth-doing-ness of my research; in the meantime those studies helped me to understand public space and children from different points of view. I also tried to contact the researchers to clarify what I did not understand while reading their papers. Fortunately, one of the researchers who currently worked at Urbanology department in a university accepted to talk to me and we had further interesting discussion on the topic.

My research topic coincidentally collided with the time when my city is at the starting point of the “Child Friendly City” Initiative, in collaboration with UNICEF. Situation Analysis<sup>46</sup> for the project was freshly published with the latest information about situation of children in my city. This was one of the good sources of secondary data. Besides, I also got some relevant primary data from National Statistic Department, and reports from local NGOs and institutions<sup>47</sup>, as well as texts of laws relevant to the research questions.

**4.3.2 Observations**

Purpose: To observe/find out about how children use public space, and to build rapport with children. (Research question 2, 3)

In order to understand children’s experience in public space, observation of public *space and places*<sup>48</sup> in which their occupation and human interaction takes place is essential. In their studies about children/youth and public space, Abebe (2008) and Ursin (2012) has drawn evidence that occupation of space and social interaction in it are temporal. Social position and identity that individual perceived and acted upon in public space also transforms in time and space. As I also wished to capture children’s relation with spaces to an in-depth extent, I planned observation sessions taking place at various time throughout the day.

At the field trip the observation is done almost at everyday basis, resulting 56 sessions of observation with totally 58 hours. The observation took places at where my participants were being out-door, or places that they had mentioned to me. I also included popular public spots of the neighbourhoods, and many streets. The synthesis of observation sessions is as below.

This tool was essential at the beginning of field work because initial information gathered from observation would provide the understanding on the context, and some knowledge on how children use public space. The task also gave opportunities for researcher to build familiarity and trust from potential participants.

	<b>Public and semi-public place in observation</b>	<b>Total hours</b>	<b>Total sessions</b>
1	Streets, pavements, alleys	22.5	19
2	Malls	8.5	7

<sup>46</sup>“ Situation Analysis of Children in Ho Chi Minh city – ‘Vietnam 2017’ (Unicef Vietnam & HCMC People's Committee, 2017)  
<sup>47</sup> “Safe cities for women and girls: Can dreams come trues?” (ActionAid International Vietnam, 2014) ; “Youth-friendly public spaces in Hanoi” – INRS Canada, IoS-VASS Vietnam and Health Bridge 2015 (Boudreau et al., 2015)  
<sup>48</sup> While space is perceived more geometrically – as a fixed and predictable spot on the surface of earth, place is a spot in space that gain place-like qualities and meaning through human experience.(Naim & Kraftl, 2016).

3	Official market, self-formed (un-authorized) markets	2.5	5
4	Children cultural house	7.5	10
5	Swimming pool	1.5	1
6	Parks	5	4
7	Bus stations	1	2
8	Temples	7.5	7
9	Public library	2	1
SUM		58 hours	56 sessions
<b>Totally, 9 types of public place were observed, with 58 hours/ 56 sessions.</b>			

**Table 3: Observation Profile**

### 4.3.3 Interview with children

Purpose: to explore children’s perspective about use of public space, to understand child’s background and support network that shape their sense of identity and activities in daily life. (Research question 1, 3)

Interview is a direct way to listen to children’s voice. For various reasons it is not unusual that matters directly involved children are discussed by adults with absence of children’s own perspectives. Even though it can be thought that one can straightforward to obtain the knowledge from the interviewee through what they said, according to Brinkmann & Kvale (2014), knowledge is not a mine out there that the miner (interviewer) dig (from interviewee). Instead it is mutually constructed during interviewing process by both researcher and participant. They suggest several ways to understand the interviewee from their perspective, such as by repeating the question in a different way, ask clarifying question if not understand clearly, observe non-verbal gesture, etc. On another aspect, James (2007) asserts that it is not enough to record what children share and report it without reflexion. She urges for “*contextualizing children’s voice*”, meaning to understand the complexities of the context that conditions their voice. Besides, children’s voice should be readily and willingly understood, their participation must not be a token for the only purpose of polishing one’s project (James, 2007). Spyrou (2001) suggests researcher to be reflexive about multi-layer of children voice, from authenticity of what they share to reflexive interpretations on the complexity of their voice. What children shared to us is not necessarily the truth, but it reflects the complexity of their voice. All these perspectives are catalyst for me while employing interview task with children and interpreting data.



It is necessary that researcher conduct pilot interview with key informant or people with similar characteristic first. That is for finding out the task's shortcomings and modifying it before conducting official interviews with targeted participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014) . Besides, Christensen (2004) also emphasize that the vocabulary must be compatible with children mode of communication and experience. Before I went to the field, I had thoughtfully prepared an interview guide with themes and questions. I piloted it with my two adult friends. They told me that the guide lacked explanation of some concepts – such as “public place”. Also, some questions sounded somewhat similar, while others were not so relevant to the topic, and the interview also took too long (90 minutes). After the pilots, I prepared aside explanation to some terms, shortened my question list and remove unimportant questions. Still, at the field I needed to shorten it more after the first interview, because the child started to feel bored after 15' being interviewed. I also had difficulty with explaining questions, I thought it was easy to understand but it was not to many participants. I tried to give examples, and printed out photos to illustrate what I meant. This approach helped, yet sometimes it leaded participants to repeat my examples. I then needed to further explain to them that they need to share their own ideas.

As this was the first time I directly conduct interview tool for research, I was concerned about losing focus during interview. Therefore I planned to use an audio-recorder (with consent from interviewee) to record conversation instead of taking note. This strategy would give me more time to fully focus on the conversation and observe non-verbal languages as well. At field, most of children agreed to be audio recorded, they felt shy at first but then they laugh when hearing their voice from the audio. After the test they seemed to be comfortable with this device activating during the interview. Some other children preferred me to take note. I always asked them to choose which record method they want before interview. I explained to them again about the confidentiality of the conversation and reminded them that they could suggest stopping interview anytime they want. I also emphasized to them that I was learning from them and valued all they shared. I tried to make the atmosphere relaxed, but I must say that I was not able to make the interview interesting enough to draw their intention for long. I knew that because after about 15 minutes of interview I often had to repeat my questions or children tended to answer me shorter than before. Some children also suggested postponing to the next day. Although there was some challenges for me to facilitate task, I was quite happy that interview sessions were happening quite smoothly and many information was gathered.

We also often had laughter at sessions, and they fixed me if I said something incorrect. This made me think that they were relaxed enough and confident while working with me.

Although I got 11 child participants, only 8 of them joined the official interviews, the rest were with informal conversations.

#### **4.3.4 Interview with guardians**

Purpose: to understand more about child's background and supporting network, and to explore parent's perspective on their child's use of public space, how it affects child's experience of public space. (Research question 3)

Children's background and supporting network would affect children's perception of their own identity and their everyday life activities, including how they use public space. Familial network, especially parents, forms the closest social structure that contributes in shaping children's daily lives. Therefore I found it necessary to include parent's voice in my quest for knowledge about children. Through interview with parents, I would like to understand more about the child's background, adult's perception about their child, how all these would affect child experience in public space. Themes to interview guardian include family background, perception about children and public space, adult's rules for their child, etc. Details could be found in Appendix.

While I found this task necessary, I was unsure if I have enough resource (time, effort, availability from parents, etc) to implement it. Therefore I planned to prioritize interviewing with children first, then, if the condition allowed, I would interview with some guardians. At last, I was able to talk to some guardians. What happened was most of the time "a conversation" rather than "an interview". Majority of guardians did not have time to sit long with me. I also found that a conversation mode would facilitate our information exchange in a natural way without time-frame or question-list frame. I did not interview guardian theme by theme but depending on the circumstance I started with suitable and important theme I usually mentioned about their neighbourhood as a starting topic and ask what they think about local public space. I also asked if they gave their child advises on how they should be in public spaces. Those were the core of my interview aim. Further topics I only discussed with the parent who had more time to talk with me. Even the conversations were usually brief; it surfaced many interesting facts about guardians' perspectives on public spaces and on their children.

I worked with totally 6 guardians for this task. They were 1 mom, 1 auntie, 3 grand moms and 1 granddad. They were not all parents because, first of all, most parents were away for work; it was the grandparents that look after the child during daytime when I came to visit. In addition, some parents stayed far away and let the child stay permanently with relatives. Reflecting on the fact that people who stayed closest to the child would know the child better and affect the child's daily activities to a greater extent, I interview them instead of trying to seek interview with the parents.

#### **4.3.5 Photograph**

Purpose: to explore children's perspectives about public space. (Research question 1)  
In this method I planned to deliver a digital camera to participants and ask them to take photos of places and things at public places of their neighbourhood. The themes were what they like/ not like, feel safe/ unsafe, feel comfortable/ uncomfortable with at those places. The photos would then be developed and the children would give comments on those.

I had a small inexpensive digital camera and intended to lend it to children for photograph task. I had been sure it would not be a problem. At field, I suggested this method to children but received little acceptance. The reason was that the guardians did not want their child to keep valuable object like camera. They were concerned that the children might break or lose it. As it was rainy season in Vietnam, rain showers came very often and the wetness could damage electronic device easily, especially when children were suggested to take photos of things in public/outdoor space. I told the guardians and the children that my camera was a cheap one, and they did not have to worry about breaking or losing. But most guardians were sure they did not want their child to keep it. Some children appeared to concern as well. I realized that camera was a property, and while guardians and children wanted to help me, they did not want to take risk of causing trouble. At last, for this task I could only collect a few photos, but children's comments on those were pretty rich.

#### **4.3.6 Describing/ Recalling daily activities**

Purpose: To learn about child's daily schedule, and understand how children allocate their daily time at public space. (Research question 2)  
While other tasks focus on specific theme related to child's experience at public space, this task is about how the child spend their time of the day, no matter it is in or outdoor, at public or private places. The tool provides more information on child's context, such as things they do, people they are with throughout the day. The child may also list activities at public places

that he did or did not mention before at interview task, in that case information can be supplemented and cross-checked.

I expected to know in detail about what children did within the day, from morning to noon, then afternoon, evening and night. But their recalling was not that detailed. Some children told about the morning and then the evening, for example. Anyway, because children recalled many activities it helped me much in knowing about their everyday life. I conducted this task with 7 children totally.

#### **4.3.7 Hangout and neighborhood walk**

Purpose: To visit public places at which children usually spend time and learn what they do, how they think about those place, as well as observe the context of their places. (Research question 1, 2, 3)

At first I planned neighbourhood walk as a basic walk that children will led me from home to a public place that they want to talk about. At field, the task was adjusted. To some participants, neighbourhood walk was replaced by hangout. In both cases the conversations about child's experience in public space could take place. I hung out with three children, two of them often played in the temple every afternoon when I came to watch. One of them I sometimes accompany to his training place with permission from guardian. For neighbourhood walk, I did with four children. Even though the two methods were different, it allowed me to be at place where children had activities. I observed what they did, and their environment. I also asked question which they explained to me. For my manner at sessions, I tried to remain friendly and non-judgemental. As Driskell (2002) has made a point that, during hangout researcher should neither praise or denigrate children's view, nor communicate own opinion on what they share, for avoiding biased (Driskell, 2002). I did praise participants when appropriate, like cheering them when they play. I also expressed sympathy to them when children said about situations they did not feel safe. I thought these acts were necessary.

I find these neighbourhood walk and hangout very useful. They enriched my understanding of children social world and helped me to reflect better on how context and children's experience interfaced.

No.	Nick name	Interview with child	Interview with guardian	Photograph	Recalling	Hangout/Walk
1	An, boy, 6 yrs	Conversation	Grandma, note-taking, home			Hangout
2	Y, girl, 9 yrs	Audio-record, at temple and home	Grandma, note-taking, home	2 photos	✓	Hangout
3	Di, boy, 11 yrs	Audio-record, at temple and home	Grandma, note-taking, home	3 photos	✓	Hangout
4	Lành, girl, 13 yrs	Note-taking, on street and at home	Grandma, note-taking, home		✓	
5	Thảo, girl, 12 yrs	Audio-record, at park and conversation at home	Auntie, note-taking, home		✓	Neighborhood walk
6	Mai, girl, 12 yrs	Audio-record, at park and conversation at home	Auntie, note-taking, home		✓	Neighborhood walk
7	Thiên, boy, 9 yrs	Audio-record, at park		2 photos	✓	Neighborhood walk
8	Đức, boy, 10 yrs	Audio-record, at park	Granddad, note-taking, coffee shop		✓	Neighborhood walk
9	Nhiên, girl, 9 yrs	Note-taking, at home				
10	Ti, girl, 6 yrs	Conversations	Mom, audio-record, Children cultural house			
11	Nhi, girl, 6 yrs	Conversation				

Table 4: Profile of methods Interview with child, Interview with guardian, Photograph, Recalling, Hangout/Neighborhood walk

### 4.3.8 Field diary

Taking note of what is happening during the working days was an important task to me.

When I conducted each tools, each of them had different noting, but diary was like a combination of all reflection resulting from all tool. I always kept with myself a small notebook to note down my ideas and reflection whenever I needed. Occasionally, I talked to my phone for recording what I was thinking, because I felt I might draw attention from people around me if I was to write attentively in public place. Some people did look at me with curiosity when I wrote. Therefore in some case I talked to my phone instead. In my city it was more normal to see people talking to their phone than people writing at public spaces. What I recorded during the day was transferred to computer at the end of the day. I added more ideas if I had. I wrote totally 43 sections of diary, relating to 43 working sessions. I also had photos, videos and audios that I took myself to complement what I was talking about. These were valuable source that helped my effectively in the process of writing the thesis. Below is the outcome of the tool.

<b>Diary tool</b>	Number of diary sections	Number of diary pages	Number of photos	Number of audio and video file
	43	80	552	23

**Table 5: Diary Profile**

## 4.4 Methodological and ethical challenges

### 4.4.1 Methodological challenges

#### **Lacking of experience in planning and conducting research tools**

Throughout the tools presentation part above, some challenges while conducting them was shared. Most of that was from my lacking of experience in planning and conducting tasks. Such as, for interview, it did not manage very well in explaining questions; as a result, children could not answer to it thoroughly at first. Sometimes I tried to give children example to illustrate what I meant to ask, but this led them to give the same answers as examples. For the photograph task, I could never imagine that the camera that I thought inexpensive was something that guardians and children feared to keep because it was valuable and easy to break object to them. I should have used disposable camera instead, then hesitation might not happen, children might enjoy using it and I might collect many more interesting photos from them.

I also had issue of balancing between flexibility and comprehensiveness of interview conversation. I tried to make the interview like a natural conversation. Therefore I did not strictly stick to the theme order as I listed. We went through themes flexibly during the conversation. But sometimes my flexibility caused me to miss some themes. Therefore, I did not manage to ask the children all the themes I planned. On the other hand, I must say that my interview plan was too long for children that it was hard for them to engage in completely. I did adjustments on interview plan, and other tools at field, but I wish I could have more experiences to facilitate tasks in a more efficient and interesting way for children.

### **Risk for being subjective**

As I conduct research in my home country, I know to some extent about local children's social world, and have general knowledge about my society. This could assist me in interpreting data from contextual perspective. Yet while being a native at field place give advantages for me, it could also be a challenge. I could be overly subjective, and inherently less sensitive in perceiving ordinary phenomenon to me. Randi Nilsen (2018, in lectures) sometimes reminds students that we may take what familiar to us for granted, there are new knowledge to explore in what we think we are familiar with. Being aware of this risk, I employed participatory method to invite children to express their views. I also combined various methods for cross-checking and consolidating data. I also read documents relevant to my research topic from different research methods and perspectives. All these work have helped me to remain critical while researching at a familiar context.

### **4.4.2 Ethical challenge**

Ethical matter should be considered in all phases of the research, from the choice of research topic to the dissemination of research finding. For this study, it followed "Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanity, Law and Theology" (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2016), especially part B – Respect for individuals, and particularly B14 – Protection of children. The study also applied what learnt from the course "BARN3201 Methods and Ethics in Childhood Studies" from NTNU, and its key literatures: "The right to be properly researched: How to do rights-based, scientific research with children" (Ennew et al., 2009), and "The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook" (Alderson & Morrow, 2012). Below are presentation of ethical challenges I met during project phases and that way I deal with it.

### **Conflict of interest**

When researching on a topic I would want to gather as much information as I could. Employing several methods and various optional tasks, my expectation was from participants was high. At field when I worked with the children, they were willing to help me. However they had other priority, such as helping family with housework, or playing. Sometimes they agreed to meet me, but they had to look after siblings when I came. Other times they wanted to postpone the task to next day because they wanted to play. Sometimes they lost concentration when talking to me, I tried to encourage them to focus a bit more for my sake and they tried, but doing that I guessed I made them to work a little bit more than they had wished. I also found the conflict between what I expected to hear from them and what they actually shared to me. For example, I saw public spaces in their neighbourhoods had some obvious issues, I thought children would notice and mention about those, but in some cases they did not. Even though I recognized this expectation within me, this did not try influence interviewee's answer. I reminded myself to respect what participants shared as how they wished and how they perceived the world around them.

### **Power imbalance**

Children often get use to consider adult as someone they have to listen and conform to. They may feel obliged to take part in the research, or share their opinions differently to what they actually think for pleasing adults (Punch, 2002; Solberg, 1996). To alleviate this inherent power imbalance, defining researcher's role in regard with participants is one of the way. Corsaro took the role of friend with his participants in a kindergarten (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008), Solberg chose to be the co-worker to working children (Solberg, 1996), whereas Mayall played role of an unusual adult – an adult with sincere wish to understand about children (Mayall, 2002).

At field, children always called me “auntie”. It is normal in my country that people refer to self and the others with different words according to their age and type of relationship. I was called aunties because I was about their parents' generation. I thought it was appropriate to local culture that I took role as an adult researcher. It was unavoidable that children considered me as adult, and had respect attitude to me. In the meantime I expressed friendliness and respect to them. I emphasized that I was learning from them and they were helping me, though sometimes I felt that some of them were humble or shy with me. They also seemed to be embarrassed for not knowing how to answer me. My presence as an adult



research, no matter how friendly I tried to be, probably had implications on how they felt and what they shared to me.

Another aspect of power imbalance is material benefit that researcher offers to participant, this may make the child feel obliged to participate and share what they think pleasing adult. Alderson and Morrows (2012) think that it is ethical to consider a “fair return” for the participants. It could be reimbursement for transportation fee, compensation for their lost working hours, or appreciation and incentive. I did not give children or guardians any money for participating to research, even with a working child, all of them helped me voluntarily. However, I had a small gift voucher to them at the last task they conducted with me to show my appreciation to their help.

### **Informed consent**

Seeking for consent is not only ethical requirement of a scientific research but also a must in aspect of respecting children rights to get information and to decide on matters affecting them. I planned to give information in both modes: paper-based and verbal. For paper-based, I used the form of the Norwegian National Ethics Committees, it gave brief yet comprehensive information on the project aim, methods, voluntary and confidential principles.

Even though I tried to employ both forms of giving information to each participant, only some of them received paper-based form and gave written consent. Many of them were reluctant to take the paper to read. In those cases, I relied on verbal mode of giving information and received verbal consent from them. Among 17 people that gave consent, only six gave written consents, and the rest gave verbal consents. There was one case withdrew consents due to not having available time.

When I gave information about the project and principles of participation, I found that participants and guardians were not very interested in listening long to me. If I was to inform and explain to them thoroughly, it would take at least a quart minutes or more. I knew I had responsibility to give enough information and explain until they understood well before giving consent, no matter how long it would take. However, after I introduced about myself, they often asked simple questions, such as what I was doing, what kind of things that participants would do, or what were the benefits/ purposes of all these works. They often agreed to me quickly after initial information I shared to them. When I explained further, it seemed they did not care to listen. Fortunately, for the child in particular, I had further

meeting times with them through tasks, I took these opportunities to exchange further information on the project with them. Besides, I always described task, repeated about confidentiality and voluntary to participants prior to each task with them.

For asking permission of child's guardian in addition to the child's own consent, I did it, but not always with parents, sometimes it was with auntie, grandma or granddad. I had to address them because the children were staying with them permanently without parents by their side. It is also culturally accepted that grandparents are more respected than parents. Therefore, when the grandparents agreed, children had permission from his family for participating as well. To sum up, giving information and seeking consents was somewhat challenging, because in some cases I had to adjust and conformed to local norm, as well as the way local people response to it. I thought my flexibility was a type of "situational ethic", as Ellis (2007) mentioned, and together with "standard ethics" that I also performed, I have tried my best to pursuit ethical requirement on the aspect of Informed consent.

#### **4.5 Method for data analysis**

All the data I collected was organized in digital folders with passwords. Only I know the password, and can see the data. That has been how I have kept the data confidential. I also make a back-up version for all those data, with passwords as well. My experience of nearly losing data at field made me become more prudent.

Participant shared to me in Vietnamese language, but while transcribing I translate to English. However, I keep Vietnamese expressions in cases their senses cannot be grasped with simple translation. Sometimes there are adverbs that express much attitude of the interviewee but word-on-word translation to English would mean nothing. I transcribed all interviews to written using WinWord. For photos I did not develop them (except some photos taken by participants that I developed and gave to them). I keep my field photos as digital files, locked with password as well. I did not use any data analyzing software since I think the amount of data was not huge I was able to work on them by myself. I also thought having direct contact with data this way could help me to grasp the data's essence better. At the data synthesizing step, I grouped data from different tools under each research questions that I had posed, and then reflected what the main themes revealed from these data were. At the dissemination stage of the study all participant names were change to fictitious names. Details that could be traced to participant's identity was also be adjusted for confidentiality.

## **5 CHAPTER FIVE: DATA INTERPRETATION – CHILDREN’S PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC SPACES**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In an attempt to learn children’s experience in public space, I firstly explored their perspectives to it. Employing Childhood’s studies key principle for researching with children, children’s voice must be consulted in study about them. This is particularly true when researcher needs to know about their perspectives. Most data presented in this chapter is from children’s voices, in mode of verbal or non-verbal expressions. At times, complement data from our neighborhood walks, hanging-outs or my observations, etc. were added in the presentation to bold their view points. Nonetheless, participants’ sharing was the foundation from which my discussion was built on.

There possibly diverse perspectives of children in HCMC to public spaces, what presented here is the most common themes drawn from research tools conducted with a dozen of boy and girl participants from 6 to 13 years old who stayed in HCMC’s urban core area. By chance all of them were from working class from my convenient sampling technique. The area they stayed has been through strong urbanization process over the last three decades. Their neighborhoods and immediate surrounding areas has transformed into a mixture of old and new urban settings, long-term residents and migrants, middle and working class. All these differences were co-existed in a small geographical field area of three km<sup>2</sup>. Participants could approach to this complex urban spatial environment, albeit at different frequencies. Their perspectives to places within the area are of highly value as they have been the insiders of this spatial world. Some participants’ perspectives to public space obviously came from their actual experiences in it, but others appeared to be just ideas which have been more or less impacted by their surrounding environment. A small note here before the next section, as mentioned in the Introduction chapter, public spaces as subject of my study include semi and pseudo public spaces as well. Therefore, the data will reflect perspectives of children about public spaces in that sense.

### **5.2 Children’s perspectives to public places**

With an attempt to explore how children define “public place”, I tried to ask them “According to you, what is public place?” The questions seemed to challenge participants. They thought

for a while before giving answers. They defined this concept based on the appearance of public places as they saw,

Public place is place where there are many people. (Di, boy, 11 years old)

It is place where there are many vehicles. (Y, girl, 9 years old)

Participants did not define public place in term of ownership, or openness of space, but in term of appearance they usually saw: many people, many vehicles. This characteristic is true to most public spaces in an urban area at day time. The answers, however, confirmed their knowing of what public place was, since over its identity they defined its characteristics.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, direct question on the concept of public spaces was commented by my piloted interviewees as hard question. I was suggested to prepare an explanation for the concept to participants. At field, I explained to them what public place was, telling them that public place was accessible to everyone without having to pay a fee. As we were on the same ground of understanding what public places meant in the scope of this study, they were invited to share with me their perspectives about it. Public area of their own neighborhoods, park, street, supermarket, and temple were types of public places that received substantial inputs from them.

Overall, empirical data showed that participants had contrasting points of view and feelings about public spaces. These perspectives were not static but fluid according to time and spatial and personal circumstances. I group their inputs in competing themes as in the table below, and will discuss each pair of themes in the following sections.

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
<p><b>Hospitable, Attached</b></p> <p>Being in immediate public areas to child's house; Being at other places where they can could have good experience</p>	<p><b>Unfriendly, Rejected</b></p> <p>Not being welcomed at public places; Being rejected by surrounding adults</p>
<p><b>Likes of space</b></p> <p>Physical condition of public spaces: Spaciousness of public space, nature (air, breeze, trees, rain), nice settings</p> <p>The boisterous of neighborhood and public</p>	<p><b>Dislikes of space</b></p> <p>Ugly appearance of public space: uncollected trashes, animal waste, smell, smoke and dust pollution.</p> <p>Disturbing behaviors at public space: people</p>

spaces; Opportunity for favorite activities, being in companionship of friends, family members, or other children presented in the space

**Feeling safe at public space**

At front door, immediate neighborhood, or other public spaces with adults’/peers’ company

Even in these cases it does not feel absolutely safe

sleeping on public benches, people disturbing their presence at public space

**Feeling scared at public space**

Prominent scared of risk for being kidnapped, encountering traffic accident. Some fear for being stolen, getting lost, or seeing ghost

**Table 6: Perspective of children about public spaces**

**5.2.1 Public places as hospitable and rejecting spaces**

Public areas in the immediate neighborhood felt hospitable and familiar to majority of participants. Pavements and alleys within short walking distance from participant’s houses were the venues of their everyday out-door time since their early childhood. This type of space was particularly boisterous at working class area where adults and children reached regularly for activities and social interactions. The custom formed a sense of belonging from residents to the space. This contrasted to middle-class area where the residents rarely lingered at neighborhood out-door.

Further to their immediate neighborhood, participants also felt connected to public places they had particular good or meaningful experience in. Di (boy, 12 years old) found temple in his neighborhood like home because he could train his passion for football there. Y (girl, 9 years old) however felt attached to supermarket for it felt so cool with the conditioned-air whenever she visited. Apart from immediate neighborhood and special public places, participants did not show their sense of attachment to public places even they might find them at times hospitable, such as parks or marketplaces.

In most types of public spaces, even places they feel like home, it is not rare the occasions that they did not feel welcomed by others. Di shared that although he thought of the temple as his home, it did not mean that he felt welcomed. *“None welcomes us here! Sometimes, we incidentally kick the ball to visitors then we got scolded”* said he. Mai (girl, 9 years old) in another neighborhood shared that she got complaints or moved on for incidentally banging into to neighbor’s doors or vehicles. *“They said: You kids, go away to play!”* shared her. Participants felt most rejected at some business areas where they did not buy the service. This

was not the case of supermarket systems due to them having welcoming protocol to all visitors but generally at small-scaled, private businesses. A group of children told me how their presence as watchers to the coin-op games in a public park was discouraged. They recalled: “*They [people who managed the game area] said: ‘Are you planning to fuss around here?’*”, then explained to me: “*We only watched, but they said that we were messing thing up. They said so because they wanted to chase us away!*”

Elsewhere cities in the world, such as Nathya Nagar (India), Bangalore (India), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Warsaw (Poland), and Trondheim (Norway), children found their communities friendly, and felt free to use public and semi-public places where their energy and playfulness were appreciated (Chawla, 2002b, page 222). It appeared that children in the project site did not find a sense of hospitality from general public to them at public spaces. Rather, it was usually neutral attitude to their presence, so long as their way of being was tolerable by the general public. Nonetheless, despite prevalent marginalized attitude and behavior onto them, participants still felt a great sense of belonging to their immediate neighborhood and places that enabled them with significant experiences.

### **5.2.2 Public places with the likes and dislikes**

When being asked what they think about public spaces, space was objectified in aspects of physical and social existences onto which participants gave comments. The comments were primarily about what they liked and disliked, or appreciated and un-appreciated.

On physical condition of public space, alleys and streets were remarkable noted with negative elements from participants. Those were uncollected trashes, animal wastes, construction dust, traffic smokes, and pollution-related smells. They complained the out-door pollution struggled their breath and their view. “When vehicles pass me there are dust and smoke coming into my eyes. It cause me cannot see the way... And the trash bins on the streets smell, I do not want to come near”, shared Duc (boy, 10 years old).

In contrast, public spaces with greenery or water surface were appreciated by many participants. They liked the space’s refreshing air, beautiful trees, fish ponds, or decorative landscapes. Similarly, semi-public space (supermarkets, malls) with its cleanliness and cool-air were fond of by nearly all of them.

Outweigh their inputs on physical aspect of space was participants’ perspectives on social attributes of public space. They named many things they liked about it. Thao (girl, 11 years

old) liked the boisterousness of the traditional markets. Nhi (girl, 11 years old) and Lanh (girl, 13 years old) liked crowdedness and fun atmosphere of their alleys. Di (boy, 11 years old) fancied supermarket for where he could see things, try free food-sample, or rest on comfortable seat. Mai (girl, 11 years old) appreciated the park for she could hang-out with friends there. Y (girl, 9 years old) enjoyed temple where she usually played footballs with neighbors. Ti (girl, 6 years old) adored the mall because she could look toys and played in the fee-based area, etc. In brief, participants liked seeing things happening at public space, and opportunities for conducting their favorite activities with friends or family members there.

As social attribute of public space was not constant, what they liked about it sometimes transform into what they did not. At different times of the day, the boisterousness of the public space turned into desertedness which triggered fear in them. Crowdedness of people was fun but occasionally troublesome to them due to conflict of interest related to the shared space. Participants reported that some people were unfriendly, aggressive, or rejecting them. And those people or situations were what they did not like about public spaces.



Photo taken by Y (girl, 9 years old) with her comment: *"I like this place because it is beautiful."*



Photo taken by Di (boy, 11 years old) with comment: *"The view of pagoda is very nice to look at."*



Photo taken by Di (boy, 11 years old) with comments: *"I like to watch fishes in this pond."*



Photo taken by Y (girl, 9 years old) with comment: *"This is my friend."*



Thien's neighborhood with his comments: *"My neighborhood is dirty!... Because of feces from chicken and birds, dusty also, because people build houses."*



Mai (girl, 11 years old): *"I like going to the park because there are coin-op games."*

**Photo collection 1: Outcome of photograph task on the topic: "What do you like or dislike about public spaces?"**



### 5.2.3 Public places as safe and risk space

In “Young people’s everyday landscapes of security and insecurity”, Hopkin et al.<sup>49</sup> (Hopkins, Hörschelmann, Benwell, & Studemeyer, 2018) has drawn on Gidden’s term “ontological security” as a sense of trust that our everyday worlds are reliable and dependable. They noted that the sense of security was perceived differently at each individual, and children perceived security differently as adults. HCMC public space nowadays feels unsafe to many urbanites (T. M. L. Le, 2013; T. C. G. Nguyen, 2009; T. N. N. Tran, 2009), but children seems to have a greater number of reason for fear compared to adults. Most of participants reported a prominent scare for being kidnapped and encountering traffic accident. Some of them also feared for being stolen, getting lost or seeing ghost. For some older girls, they had extra fear for “the bad thing” (sexual abuse) happening to them while they went out. In general, participants distrusted strangers and did not believe it was completely safe even while being at their own front door. They applied some ways to protect their safety at public space, as Hopkins et al. term as “pre-emptive strategy”, such as staying nearby home, being in company of friends/adults, and refraining from communication with strangers.

Below was our conversation on how participants feel unsafe and distrust about the possibility of totally safe at public space, in this case, the park:

Interviewer: How do you think about the park?

Mai (girl, 11 years old): I find that the park is not safe. My friends ask me to come with them I come but I do not feel safe. It does not feel safe at the point that there are few people in the park. I am scared of places that have few people.

Interviewer: Why do you feel scared of deserted places?

Mai (girl, 11 years old): I am scared of being kidnapped.

Interviewer: What if you stay at crowded public area and with your friends? Would you feel safe then?

Mai (girl, 11 years old): I would feel a bit safer but still not feel totally safe...because people can cheat all of us.

Thien (boy, 9 years old), added: People give candy I must not take it. If I take it I may be seduced.

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<sup>49</sup> Hopkins, Hörschelmann, Benwell, & Studemeyer

Mai (girl, 11 years old): Like, they would put sleeping pill in the food and offer to us, and then they kidnap us for blackmailing our parents.

Thao (girl, 11 years old), added: People would pretend to say “Your parents have traffic accident. Come with us, we drive you to your parents’ place!” That means they are seducing me, I won’t come with them.

Duc (boy, 10 years old), added: People cheat us to come with them and they will take our internal organs.

The constructed fear of being kidnapped for money or internal organs was very prevalent among most of participants. There were mainstream reports on cases of Vietnamese children as victims of trafficking, but not specifically about the number of kidnap cases or the motivations behind it. Child kidnap for stealing internal organs was a kind of “urban myth”, as Holloway & Hubbard (2001) termed it, that caused great concern from children and their guardians. Guardians even used this myth as an effective means to make children obey to their rule of not going out far from home by their own.

Come as the second place of fear at public space, after kidnapping, was traffic accident. “*People drive so fast and carelessly... They drive on the wrong lines*”, one of the girl participant commented, as many other thought the same. Other fears, albeit less mentioned, were about getting lost: “*I do not feel safe at the public place because if I go alone I may get lost.*” shared Duc (boy, 10 years old); being robbed: “*My mom told me when going out be cautious to take care of our money and belonging*” (Nhi, girl, 6 years old); and seeing ghost: “*I am scared of deserted places because I fear of seeing ghost*” (Lanh, girl, 13 years old).

Studies at the tree neighborhoods of Chennai (India), Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Warsaw (Poland) cities found that children felt safe and free to move about within the territory of their neighborhoods, while at Bangalore (India) and Trondheim (Norway) children even felt greater free to visit other part of their cities. The children in the project site in HCMC (Vietnam) did not feel as great safe to go about as these counterparts of them. Besides, remarkably, none of the cities as I consulted in the study project “Growing up in the city” (Chawla, 2002a) have I found children had a dominant fear of being kidnapped like children in HCMC.

On the other hand, it was not that the sense of public space’s risk negates participants’ sense of safe in the public space. As some children in the project above noted, they felt safe to go about their neighborhood but it did not mean they felt risk-free (Chawla, 2002a), children in

my project area did feel insecurity but they also had a sense of “ontological security” – trust that things was relatively ok - in certain public spatial contexts. This confidence was the strongest at times when they were at their immediate neighborhood whose place and people they knew, or when they were with their guardians. In other public space contexts that they chose to engage, they felt safe relatively; this sense fluctuated depended on how things were around them. Strategies planned in their mind such as self-defense or calling for help consolidated their belief that if something happened they would be finally un-harmed.

### **5.3 Summing up and reflecting – Children’s perspectives of urban public space**

**(1) Public spaces as both positive and negative.** Employing Bannerjee and Driskel’s (2002) concept “place of contradiction”, contrasting perspectives of participants on public space has been grouped into competing themes: Hospitable/Rejecting, Like/Dislike and Safe/Risk. These themes were what mainly stood out from our conversations, interviews and photograph tasks. Children perspectives reflected contrasting, social and physical attributes of public spaces as well as their experiences in it. Spaciousness, nature elements, boisterousness and the possibility to merge into this spatiality were what children liked about public space. On the contrary, children did not like public space’s pollution, desertedness, as well as unfriendly manners from adults. As for their sense of attachment or alienation to the space, beyond their immediate neighborhoods, children more likely felt less hospitable and more marginalized by the public. In aspect of ontological wellbeing, insecurity was a persistent concern while they were out in the public space. Girls expressed more frequently and more types of safety concerns than boys. All of them appeared to have equal fear for being kidnapped. This was remarkable different from many other studies on children’s perspectives about public space. This is perhaps because the discourse of kidnapping has grown strongly in Vietnam in general, and HCMC in particular; and possibly because my participants’ age range was from 6-13, to whom this kind of fear was more prominent than the teen and youth in other researches (eg. Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012; Boudreau et al., 2015; Chawla, 2002a; Elsley, 2004; Valentine, 1997; van der Burgt, 2015). Parallel with the fear of risk, a relative sense of ontological security existed which was most potent when children remained at their immediate neighborhood or with the company of guardians. Out of this zone children felt less secure, but promoted their sense of safety by adopting precautious protocols and tentative defensive strategies.

**(2) Temporality of perspectives.** Many studies on children/youth in public space in the Global South have vividly revealed how the relationship between them, public spaces and their surrounding social world were characterized by fluidity and temporality. Ursin (2012) depicted how “young men”<sup>50</sup> status in Barra (Brazil) shifted from subordinate to dominant when day turned into night. Abebe (2008) described how children from one instant were business-doers (beggars) to another instant as playing kids in-between public areas in Addis-Ababa (Ethiopia). Reflecting on the divergence of participant’s perspectives to space, I realized that in many cases the same space was perceived differently. This came as a result of change in social elements at space. I would say that children’s perspectives to space, as their sense of identity and status in the referred studies, were also fluid and temporal. Streets atmosphere and parks were perceived nice at daytime but scary at night time due to darkness and desertedness. Temple’s yard was hospitable to them at ceremony-free time but restricted at ceremony-gathering times. Playing in the immediate neighborhood was carefree but became care-full when neighbors started to complain on them. Many public spaces which did not feel safe turned out to be safe and more enjoyable with the presence of their closed-ones. As time and spatial context were not constant, and children’s circumstances while being out were different at times, their perspectives to public space also fluctuated, sometimes to quite opposite directions.

**(3) Public space is perceived mostly through daily life experience.** Last but not least, empirical data has shown that children’s perspectives to public space mostly come from their daily life experience. Participants shared their experience of space, as well as social encounters and experiences of them at places. I did not hear any of the participants comment on the lack of public areas, the limited green covering of space, no walking path for walker, etc. (though I had thought I would since it has been some of the hottest issues of urban public space ). My informants also did not comment on wider social processes that shaped the public spaces nearby their home as how it was, or their right to the space. They shared perspective about public space from what they saw and experienced, some of their perspectives were from the ideas passed onto them through close networks – such as families, friends or home media (television). In that sense, factor of age and gender had also implication on how and what they perceived. The older the participants were, the number of factors of public space they commented on. This was probably because older children had more public spatial encounters,

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<sup>50</sup> The term refer to informants of Ursin’s study, they were youth and young men who earned a living on streets at project site – Barra – Brazil.

especially more of alone or peer-only time in public space. This rendered them to watch-out to their environment more, to judge and to deal with things arisen there in the space themselves. Younger children, as young as 6 were more in-door or with their guardians, they had very few comments on streets or parks, but mostly about supermarkets. As for gender implication, girls expressed more concern about bodily and property safety than boys. It reflected gender-role related fears, as woman feel more likely to be intimidated by men and women are responsible for safeguarding the house/family valuable belongings.

Hart (2008) has suggested that when children express their view from their daily life experience, they are de-contextualizing it. As researcher, we need to position it back in contexts, the larger social process and eco-political forces that impact children's world. This chapter with a look into children's perspectives on public space has revealed some of these forces, which will be further elaborated after my next elaboration on another aspect of children's relationship to public space: their spatial practice.

## 6 CHAPTER SIX: DATA INTERPRETATION - CHILDREN'S PRACTICE OF URBAN PUBLIC SPACE

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses my second main research question: "How do children use urban public space?" The previous chapter has provided the most common themes on how children perceive about public space. This chapter goes on with their spatial practice. Presented data are drawn from most of research tools, including interview with children, guardians, hangouts, observation, description of child's daily activities and secondary data sources.

Activities that participants most motivated to engage in when they went out to public space were playing and entertaining. These were what I most often saw them doing. My field trip was at summer time, participants confirmed to me that they had much more time for these activities comparing to school-season. Other activities for physical needs, or training/working were next frequently seen. Lastly, navigation from place to place for different purposes was what children did on their way to places. For that I would like to discuss navigation as type of activity itself.

I must note that my participants' age range was from 6 to 13. At this age they have different spatial freedom compare to other age groups. At 6 they has just finished kindergarten and prepared to enter primary school, familial supervision is very tight. At 12-13, they have been in the early years of secondary education, familial restriction in term of time and space is loosen. But in general, they do not have as great mobility freedom as teenager group, who can be mostly on their own when they go out, and can reach to further place of the city for activities. The findings presented here reflect spatial practice of a particular group from an area that belongs to city's core, yet not city's centre. As presented in Background chapter, the city centre concentrates more public space (parks, square, etc) and it also offers more activities for children to take part in. Older children group in field area may reach to there, their experience in the city public space might be different to their younger neighbors.

### 6.2 Playing

Playing is the dominant type of activities that participants did at public space. Mouritsen (2002, page 27) stated that: "*Play is historically determined and in modern times particularly associated with children and childhood*". For her, through time play may express in new

modes but it does not disappear. In the past, play was more attached to outdoor nature while nowadays play increasingly takes place indoor. Most of my participants played both in and outdoor. However, they particularly liked playing outdoor. The scarcity/absence of nature area/park/playground in the neighborhoods nowadays together with tight spatial prohibition from adults rendered most children in project area relying on non-play-designated settings for play. Those were areas within or nearby children's neighborhoods, such as alleys, streets, semi-public places or private open spaces left-alone by owners. Cosco and Moore (2002, page 53) has recognized the open space in the neighborhood as a vessel that support childhood culture which is driven by their intrinsic motivation to play. Playing within the common area in the neighborhood was indeed the strongest pattern of children's activities in the field's public space. Boys played mostly football, bicycle and were more numerously observable in public space than girls, especially at places a bit further than the front doors. Girl also played football and bicycle but with much fewer numbers, however more of them played rope-jumping, running-catching or falling-the-can. There were more kinds of stiller games girls liked to play indoor or front door, while boys tended to prioritize active game outdoor.

Sometimes a child did not have a play partner to start with, either when (s)he was in her/his neighborhood or at other public places, but the openness of public space offered chance for children to meet up and become play partners temporarily. Nilsen (2005) has developed the term "*we-ness*" as the temporal and fluid social bonding between children that came to play together for a short while. It is to be together and protect this bond temporarily for maintaining their play, different than friendship which indicates a stable social bonding. Public space enables that "*we-ness*" happening between child(ren) and child(ren), making more types of play possible and children's playing experience in public space more enjoyable.

But playing in a non-play-designated area and an urban neighborhood with a population density of 16,680 person/ km<sup>251</sup> could turn out troublesome at times. As there were many people and activities around them, their play disturbed and were disturbed by others. A girl told me her concerns from own experiences,

Student: When do you play in public places like that [in the alleys of her neighborhood], is there anything you feel concern about?

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<sup>51</sup> According to official website of Labor Alliance of Binhtan district – HCMC - Geographical position and map of Binhtan district (Labor Alliance of Binhtan district, no date).

Nhien (girl, 9 years old): I am afraid to be hit by vehicles, afraid of hitting other younger children and cause them to cry. I also am afraid that because I am so focus on playing that I don't notice things around me and I bang to bicycle and people scold me for that.

Student: Are people who scold you in those cases your neighbors or strangers?

Nhien (girl, 9 years old): They are stranger, they look aggressive.

Student: How about different time of the day? Your concerns of being on public places is the same or different?

Nhien (girl, 9 years old): In the evening if people sleep early, if I play in public space people complain that I am noisy. If I accidentally hit the door of people's house people scold me, and said that "*You kid go away playing!*"

Playing in the public place appeared to cause more problems for children who stayed in a working class area than middle class area. The narrowness of public space, usually alleys, caused them more likely to hit traffic, neighbor's house or people while playing actively and attentively. Their sounds also could be heard easier and felt more disturbing by the others. Children did not like these incidents to happen, but alleys appeared to be the most possible and suitable for their everyday play. There was limited space inside the houses, out from home they were not allowed to go far, especially younger children and girls. Abebe and Kjørholt (2012) has claimed that the general public's judgmental attitude to the presence of children and their activities at public space has missed to question the reason why they are there at the first place. Children playing in public streets and alleys in HCMC were the bearer of that attitude when their ways were not tolerated by others.

It appeared to me that children are more likely to get unfriendly comments if they were without their guardians. General public were not hurry to judge their play in the shared space if they were with their adults. Besides, adults would support and defense for their child's entitlement to play on the street, but less supportive to the same behaviors of someone else's child. One adult participant – a mom –, who usually let her daughter play bicycle and football in the alley, told me how she treated boys playing football on the streets nearby her home:



“Sometimes they kicked the ball to my place, I scolded them. I told them I would not return their ball. They insisted. They cried. But I threaten them that I would not give it back! (Hy, a mom)

She did not mean not to give the ball back, but by scolding and threatening she discouraged them playing there. Public space is entitled to the public, but when participant’s activities in the space were in conflict with adults’ expectation and interest it were adults who had a word on what was wrong with them. Clark (2013) argues that public places has been constructed as adult’s place. At first it was because of concern for child’s safety, children in public space as children “in problem”. But gradually children at public places are constructed also “as problem”. Cities are places of inevitability of conflicts, that Donald (1999, page 139, cited in Massey, , page 155) said that it is more important the question “How do we live together?” than ‘How do I live in the city?’. Urban public space, mostly streets and alleys, has been favorite play venue for children, especially working class children. In the meantime it is the host space to the mass neighbors and passengers. To be together are more likely source of tensions and conflicts. Nonetheless, I have noticed children employed several ways to sustain their play. The most used was to adjust their way: play quieter, be more attentive to the surroundings. This would ease critical attitude on them. In cases the tension was more serious they would call their parents coming to settle thing down with the other adults. In many cases they managed to sustain their play.

### **6.3 Entertaining**

Mouritsen (2002, page 20) argues that “*Where play goes out or friends and "meeting-places" disappear, entertainment comes in. Active involvement and self-expression are replaced by passive consumption*”. This is true to what have been happening in the field area. Participants aspired to play opportunities at the public space, but when it was not possible due to lack of space or co-player, entertainment activities were their alternative. A small note here is that, entertainment is more than just about movies, games or recreational parks - products of the dominant “entertainment industry”, entertainment activities includes sight-seeing, reading book, attending cultural activities as well. Some of them relate to public and semi-public spaces.

As participants conducted play both in and outdoor, they did the same with entertainment. The most common mode of entertainment indoor was watching television or mobile phone. While the most frequent entertainment activities they did at public places was observing

interesting things. Free entertainment options at the public space at field place appeared to be poor. There existed no nature landscape to look at, and the park with scenery settings was from 1-3km away from participants' homes. Only 4 of them reported to go there once in a while. There were very few stated-organized local cultural events to join in. In recent situation analysis of children in HCMC, particularly at the district the field place belonged to, up to 14 over 17 child informants answered "No" to the question "*Do you have chance to participate activities of community?*" (Unicef Vietnam & HCMC People's Committee, 2017). Children and families at field place basically found what available around them for fulfill their entertainment need. Frequent entertainment activities of participants in public space were watching things/people in the alleys, streets and things at short walking distance from their home. This pattern shifted at weekends or when their adults had extra free time, some of children were then brought to further places and fee-based places for entertainment, such as library, bookstore, swimming pool, coffee shop, parks or recreation places. Growing number of entertainment activities these days relates to consumption at pseudo public spaces.

A not so new pseudo-public space, supermarket/mall, has nowadays established fondness from local children in term good and safe place for entertainment. It was accessible, comfortable, clean and cool (HCMC is hot all year round). There were many things to look at and some activities to join for free (try food sample, watching events). Older children could go there by themselves to entertain, while younger children came with adults. My participants mainly looked things, with certain wishes to consume. My observations showed that at the malls many other children and families could purchase a wide range of goods and services, from economy to luxury scale. Some statements from participants related to this space,

I like the mall because it is where I can entertain myself, I can walk up and down the floors, see things and try free food. When my legs are tired I can sit to rest there. (Di, boy, 11 years old)

I like Aon (name of a mall). I adore it. I adore toys and play in Tiniworld (a fee-based playing zone). (Ti, girl, 6 years old)

In term of opportunity to entertainment as children's right, UNCRC (UN, 1989), Article 31.2 stated: "*States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.*" In the latest periodic report of Vietnam to UNCRC, addressing the implementation of this article, Vietnam reported

having implemented a master plan period 2013-2020 to assure that right, including to have “*institutional systems organize activities to meet recreation needs of children as required*” (Vietnam Government, 2019, section VIII, page 40-41). At field place in the summer time, there were a few activities for children, many of those required skills, such as singing, dancing, playing music, and for competitions/movements rather than leisure activities for solely self-enjoying. Limited number of children participated in or heard of those activities. Most children and families self initiated ideas for entertaining themselves. Some of participants were aware of the local park with scenery. However, this park was a bit far from their home which they seldom could visit. Besides, some of them bored of it due to uninterested settings. As a result, people, things happening on the streets, and supermarket’s products and activities were the main thing that children in the field did for entertainment outside of their home. More entertainment options outside home were less frequently experienced by them, these also related to fee-based services provided at commercialized public places.

#### **6.4 Working**

Despite a wide range of concern on the phenomenon of children in the public space and working children, public space have been incontestably shelter and source of income generating for some children in the world, more visibly numerous in the Global South than in the Global North. Child Labor Vietnam report (Vietnam Ministry of Labor & ILO Vietnam, 2014) stated there was approximately 69,000 children engaging in economic activities at streets/ wet markets. During field trip in HCMC – Vietnam, I sometimes encountered children working, staying or sleeping in street environment. A participant of mine was one of them. Lanh was a girl of 13 who sold lottery on the streets but stayed at home with family. She felt greatly about public space as it offered opportunity for her to earn income. Not coming to school but work, she did not feel bad but content for being able to support family. She did not mind the heat at the outdoor space when she went selling at noon time, nor the rain, although she was concern about slow business when it rained. But Lanh’s interest to public space environment was more than barely income opportunity, she appreciated streets atmosphere. She told me that right from the beginning when she had left her countryside and came to install in this city (when she was 11) she already liked streets. There were many interesting things she enjoyed seeing. More than that, she appreciated the opportunity of socializing on streets,

At first times when I went sell, I was a bit scared to invite people buying, but I gradually get used to it. I find going to sell is fun because I can gossip with my aunt [aunt sold with her in evening time] and talk to people on the way. Also, on the way working sometimes I encounter my friends. They stayed in my neighborhood but have moved away. When I go around selling, I can see and gossip with them. (Lanh, girl, 13 years old)

Lanh could be able to sell 200 pieces of lottery per day, with a benefit of 200.000 VND (approximately 9 USD). It was a very good income which she gave all to her family. At her age she could not legally work for a state registered business if she had wished. And working for other individual clients would not yield that much income with that spatial freedom as her work now. Working in the street has been an option for Lanh, her auntie as for some other women and children in parts of the world. Swanson's (2007) study showed that some indigenous women and children in Ecuador worked as selling or begging on the street favored their work there instead working in space of private homes where they were more likely to be exploited/ abused. While, some children who begged in Addis Ababa – Ethiopia - came to beg just for experience and hanging out with friends on streets; some of them switched between work and play during their time there (Abebe, 2008). Abebe (2008, page 271) has concluded that these children's activity in the street can be complex and fluid, with "*spatial-temporal participation in and withdrawal of activity*". Lanh's activity in public space also shifted between work, socializing and playing. At times she broke her economic duty to hang-out with friends she encountered on the streets. She also had chats with other adults she met on the way, when they cared to know about her situation. Public space was as "*space for opportunity*" – as Abebe (2008) conceptualized it – for children's economic and socio-spatial needs.

Besides Lanh's appreciation to public space environment, she also had some concerns. This was very similar to other participants who did not work.

Student: Do you go sell alone or with someone?

Lanh: In the evening I go sell with my auntie. In the morning I can go with her or alone, it depends, in case she sells out all lotteries before me she will head home first, I would continue on my own. It is ok I go alone in the morning. But I do not feel safe to go alone in the evening.

Student: Is there something you feel concern about working on the street?

Lanh: My family told me to beware of stranger. They may cheat or kidnap me... And sometimes the vehicles run so fast. I feel dangerous... Also, I am scared of ghost. It does not matter day or night. I easily feel obsessed.

Lanh's economic duty made her to expose to public space environment longer and sometimes on her own. Having different situation than other participants who did not work, she had yet the same safety concern as others, afraid that strangers would harm her. Her preventive strategy was remaining in the safe zone, such as not selling so far from home or staying close to her aunt at evening time. Lanh was also afraid to get lost at public places, as Duc – a 10 years old boy participant. It was possibly because she has been just two years in the city. Besides, to sell 200 lotteries per day made her roaming to many public places; it increased the risk of getting lost. Her concern of traffic safety was the same as most of participants. Particularly, she mentioned about ghosts which many Vietnamese scared to meet at dessert or dark places.

## **6.5 Other activities for bodily well-being**

A quantitative study from Giang Nguyen (2009) has shown that, HCMC adults aspire of commuting to public space for their physical well-being, with activities like doing physical exercise, or inhaling some fresh air. It appeared to be similar to children group. Children's activity relating to bodily well-being was often seen in HCMC's public space in general and in field area in particular during my field trip. Most regularly seen activities were: having meals, resting and sometimes exercising. But I did not receive much verbal sharing from participants themselves on this aspect. Usually, when I asked about their experiences in public space, they talked about play or entertainment. Therefore the data here is largely based on my observation at project area, literatures on the locality, and some relevant sharing from them.

In "Street Scenes: Practices of Public and Private Space in Urban Vietnam", Drummond (2000) acknowledged that the public space in the immediate front of the house was used for domestic activities such as eating, cooking or bathing. The research was conducted more or less 20 years ago, it is slightly different nowadays. Rarely bathing or cooking happen in front door, however, domestic eating does. Besides, it is also a common practice to eat at places on the streets, especially at the cities; because there exists street food-stalls and street restaurants. In HCMC it is quite normal that people have breakfast at these places, it is affordable and

convenient. Dinner or snack meals in the evening on streets are also popular. Adults would bring children there with them, or children go there themselves. Besides eating on streets, many people nowadays can afford to go to a proper restaurant. Supermarkets/malls also provide dining space, with options suitable to the mass public. They are increasingly favorite options to many urbanite families.

Children also commute to public space for their physical well-being, a recent research from Nho Tran (2009) indicated that, children liked to go front door for some fresh air. They felt their domestic space hot, humid and hard to breath. As I observed, at the working class neighborhoods children stayed front door and outdoor more than at the middle class neighborhoods. It was probably because they have limited domestic space in more densely populated place. To many HCMC families, immediate front door public space is seen to be part of family's living space. They could reach there for their well-being, especially enjoying some fresh air and natural lights. At Buenos Aires, a city of Argentina, Cosco and Moore (2002) also found that, because the houses condition in this neighborhood was small and cramped, neighborhood public and semi-public space has become an extension of children's daily domestic life., and as the fact was so their spatial freedom was than children at high-rise buildings. The presence of people there also encouraged social contact between them, especially children.

While the outdoor of neighborhood was space for bodily wellbeing, children sometimes could go to further public spaces for the same purpose. Some participants of mine occasionally went to the park for fresh air, while other went to the supermarkets for conditioned-air. A few children in the field also went to public spaces to do exercise with their guardians, usually in early morning or late after time when the air was most fresh or less polluted. Obviously the public space condition was not always good for children's physical well-being. As participants complained about dust, noise and smell pollution. But when time and spatial condition turned out to be suitable, many of them stepped out of their home to get a breeze, some natural light, to do some physical movements, or to conduct some domestic activities in the spaciousness of public space.

## **6.6 Navigation**

Navigation between places of children in HCMC is nowadays mostly accompanied by adults in an transportation means (T. N. N. Tran, 2009). Apart from the concern of unsafe traffic, children also concerned about street' air pollution. This came from mass diesel-engine traffic,

and traffic dust. Therefore, urbanites, especially children, would wear mask, jacket and glass to protect them while navigating on main road.

In summer times, children usually navigate within the neighborhood and the connecting area by themselves, on foot or with a bicycle. This mode of navigation faced different challenge. As there were various kinds of activities that both adults and children on streets and pavements in their daily life, this in turn affected navigation. However, it seemed participants found how things existed there as natural, they did not complain about obstruction on their way of navigation at all. They adapted to it. They barely navigated on the same line with vehicles when they had to. Being in close contact with vehicles which sometimes ran fast, they said they felt dangerous.

Another issue of navigation in HCMC was street flood. HCMC has been probably the city that has most trouble with street flood in Vietnam. The flood is not caused from the flood as natural phenomenon itself alone, but from weak drainage system. Some parts of streets in the city get flooded at big rain, or when the river rise up due to monsoon. At these occasions, children just tried to walk and ride more carefully, but some of them would need adult's assistance for their navigation.

Navigation was a daily activity that children did between places. As my observations, children navigated within the neighborhood quite confidently, but they did share their concern on traffic on the main road when they participated in the traffic. Lack of separate path for the walker and the cyler in the city was an obvious different trait when I related Vietnam to other cities in Europe. The pavements as where people could walk on were however highly occupied for different reasons. All these had implication on everyday life of children whose usual mode of navigation was walking and bicycling.

## **6.7 Summing up and reflecting on children's practice of urban public space**

**(1) Public space has multi-purpose to children.** Titman has conceived public space as children's "*place for doing*", meaning place "*which offered opportunities for physical activities, for 'doing' all kinds of things , and which recognized their need to extend themselves, develop new skills, to find challenges and take risks*" (Titman, 1994, page 59). The chapter has revealed that public space in HCMC were indeed for children's multi-purpose doing, such as play, entertain, work, train, relax, eat or navigate. These doings were also done in the context of multi-adversities. These activities confirmed children's position in public

space, as well as in their society, to act within this socio-spatial context in fulfilling their needs. This is in line with other literature on children/youth in public space, although their age and social background, motivation to and activities in public space vary (eg. Abebe, 2008; Clark, 2013; Gallina & Masina, 2002; Ursin, 2012; Valentine, 1997; van der Burgt, 2015). Abebe and Kjørholt (2012) has mentioned how children in many parts of the world has been constructed as being “*out of place*” when they were in the public space instead of school, home or recreation settings. Related to that view there were ambivalent attitudes on them as either “*in danger*” or “*as danger*”. But the authors have critically pointed out that the construction of children as “*out of place*” overlooked the reason why children were in the public space at the first place. They were there for many reasons. Besides activities, they also reached out there for socializing and peer-ship. Studies on children in Sathya Nagar (India), Bangalore (India), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Warsaw (Poland), and Trondheim (Norway) has showed that children appreciated places where they could socialize with peers and be part of interesting activities of the communities. Socializing with peers was amongst the strongest motivation for children in HCMC (Vietnam) commuting to public space, besides playing and entertaining. Noting also that, a small percentage of children prioritize their working activity in public space over others to fulfill their and their family’s needs. Yet, as the same pattern as many other working children in an open space elsewhere in the world they also found public space as opportunity for multi activities, combining work with play or temporarily shifting between these two (Abebe, 2008; Punch, 2003).

Through these activities they were producing childhood culture. While James has defined childhood’s culture as “*a form of social action, a way of being a child among other children, a particular cultural style, resonant with particular times and places*” (James et al., 1998: 90 cited in Punch, 2003, page 286), Beazley mentioned about children/youth culture in term of “*sub-culture*”, which embraces different interests and values as of the formative culture. Many interesting sub-cultures of children/youth has been depicted in literature, such as Indonesia street youth expressed physical appearance and behavior as a challenge to social norm (Beazley, 2003), or street children portray themselves as being naughty and doing bad things (Tobias Hecht, 2000, referred to in Beazley, 2003). Home-based children with different interests and activities in urban public space in Vietnam were also producing their culture. They had a strong interest in playing peer and prioritize this type of activities whenever opportunities arose. Their culture in public space was also characterized by their persistent attempt to claim their places in the realm of public space over others (adults). This is an



aspect of “*peer culture*”, of which main features claimed by Corsaro and Molinari: “(1) *Children make persistent attempts to gain control of their lives and to (2) share that control with each other*” (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008, page 302).

**(2) Public space for self-expression.** As details elaborated in previous sections, public space offer socio-spatial condition for participants to do what they needed and wanted, things they could not fulfill at home space. On the observable, it was multi-activities that they did in and with the space, from internal dimension, it was their likings, passions, capacity, identity, their being-ness that were made possible to express in this space, especially through play in a relative private public space. At times when I observed children playing in the public space in urban Vietnam, there was a prominent expression of self to children’s fullest. They took control of the space, organized their games and engaged seriously in the play. While seeing them playing and interacting between each other’s, it was their unique personhood as how I saw them, not childlike or irrational as some normative discourses on children’s attribute. They acted as autonomy and rational as many adults. They stayed focused, organized, controlled, competed, negotiated, solved problem and managed things. And at the same time they had a sense of pride for their identity – as a valued person not a child. For example during a football game, boys said it was a shame if losing the game to girls, while girls proved themselves to be not less worthy by not doing mouth-debating with boys, they quietly and dangerously stole the ball and scored the goals. All these expressions took place at space without attention and disturbance of adults, where they could be independent to organize their world and express themselves.

Mayall (2009) has reflected that children nowadays are almost in the ever-present supervision of adult. This has implication on their privacy. But in public space where temporal, socio-and spatial condition allow them some privacy, however brief, it enabled participants to be just who they were, they did not have to ascribe with an identity like child, or adult – but a personhood with holistic expression. The Swedish girls (van der Burgt, 2015) shared that sometimes they liked to go to unfamiliar place, even it would entail with more risk, but in turn, being at strange place made them feel more relaxed to express themselves. Rural children in Bolivia made places for privacy in rural nature where they felt they could act and make things happen (Robson et al., 2007). School boys and girls in England found playground at break-time as space of freedom and power expression, as opposite to classroom as controlled space by adults (Epstein, Kehily, Mac an Ghaill, & Redman, 2001). The commonality here is that, public space as when accessible and free from adult’s attention and

control is in many cases a place for children to express themselves freely and vibrantly. This kind of space could be conceptualized as Titman's "place for being", means place "which allowed them to 'be' themselves, which recognized their individuality, their need to have a private persona in a public place, for privacy, for being alone and with friends, for being quiet in noise, for being a child" (Titman, 1994, page 59). Last but not least, self-expression also was presented on aspect of children engaging in economic activities in the public spaces. Abebe and Bessell (2011) in their studies about working children in Africa and Asia has noted that children who are able to supplement family income felt a sense of pride and self-reliance. Children who worked on streets as Lanh also felt proud and happy for acting as capable being who could work as the others, being able to draw dependence from family members through the income they make there.

Playing:



Entertaining:



(a participant sells lotteries on streets)

Working:



Navigating:



Other activities for well-being:



**Photo collection 2: Children's urban public spatial practices**

# **7 CHAPTER SEVEN: DATA INTERPRETATION - SOCIETAL AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS SHAPING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE IN PUBLIC SPACE**

## **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses societal and contextual factors shaping children's experiences in public spaces. To identify these forces, I firstly reflect on what shared by participants. Many of what they shared implied the impacts from their environment. Other research tools such as interview with parents, observations, secondary data review helps with the process. The reflection reveals that family and immediate networks were the closest contextual environment that influenced children's relationship with and experience in public space. Cultural values relating to public space and children were also a part of wider context that shape children's spatial practice. Finally the societal changes, especially through the latest three decades with development and urbanization process have decisively shaped children experience in urban public space as how it is nowadays. All these three dimension of contextual factors will be in turn discussed in the coming sections.

## **7.2 Vietnamese cultural values relating to public space and children**

### **7.2.1 Cultural practices of public space**

According to "The foundation of Vietnamese culture" (N. T. Tran, 1999, chapter 2), as Vietnam is located at the utmost of South-East Asia, it belongs to "*typical agriculture culture*". Agriculture relies on the harmonious combination of nature elements. Therefore the way of thinking from this culture is synthetic and dialectic (1). In relation between each other, agriculture people show consideration for others (2). These two factors lead a way of life which is flexible with the context they are in. However, flexibility has negative aspect - arbitrary. People may act according to what suits and may not strictly abide the rules. This expresses in the relationship between Vietnamese and public space as well. Undisciplined driving is one of the examples. This causes children to feel dangerous. The occupation of pavements and streets for business is another one, making children to walk in the vehicle lines when they navigate between places.

Yet it was also the culture of Vietnamese people to cook in the front yard of their house in the countryside in the past that transform to nowadays urban family to conduct some domestic activities on the pavements. Drummond (2000) argues that the definition of public and private

space is complex, but ideally dominated by the West ideology. Noticing that Vietnamese people conducting private domestic activities at public space (cooking, bathing, eating, napping) and using the immediate front pavement for private household purpose, she suggests the definition must take into account of local context and culture. The context was that urban people mostly live in cramped houses. They need further space for domestic activities and even for privacy due to the house is too small for individual's privacy. On cultural aspect, Vietnamese in the villages in the past cooked and did some activities at their front yard, these activities is adapted to the front-door in urban area, which is the public pavement. Urban family often refers to this space as "yard". In this "yard", Thien and Mai family set up a bench, their neighbors kept some birds and chickens, others laid some construction materials. Everyone in the neighborhood would entitle themselves to use a bit of that "yard" for private and domestic purpose. Nhien told me she played in the "yard", while it was actually the alley. Di was confident about his right to the immediate street in front of his house where he sometimes played football. I asked him "When you play there do you feel concern that vehicles would bang on you?" He replied: "Common. I play in front of my house, not at the middle of the street why must I be scared (of them). If someone bangs to me, it is their responsibility!"

Respecting each other in Vietnam culture also have implication on respecting someone entitlement to using public space. The one who is familiar to the place and the people in the neighborhood have greater entitlement to the neighborhood public area than strangers. If one is local, one is more likely to be accepted with their conduct at place. Stranger to place may risk receiving more critical attitude, even the place is for the public. Children who play within their neighborhood tend to receive more acceptances and tolerances than at other public places beyond.

### **7.2.2 Discourses about children and public spaces**

Them Tran (N. T. Tran, 1999) stated that *culture* has value attribute, this value fluctuate over time. *Traditional culture* is the culture whose value is more stable. In Vietnamese traditional culture, children are perceived as capable, helping with household chore or family economic activities according to their age and capacity. In the influence of Western culture, especially since the recent three decades when Vietnam widely opens its door to the world, ideology of protective, work-free and institutionalized childhood has become part of Vietnamese' new discourses. Besides, nuclear family with only 1 or two children made children more centered of parent's care. Children are now considered as fragile and especially innocent in a

growingly complex society. Parents would try ways to best protect their children from being harmed, especially at public space as growingly constructed as unsafe nowadays. Below is what guardians said:

They are only kids, they are innocent. They are not worried, only we (adults) worried for them. (Hy, mom of Ti – girl - 6 years old)

He must be prudent for himself. He is a child he does not know anything. (Nhan, grand dad of Thien – boy - 9 years old)

There has been rumor on child kidnapping for blackmailing, trafficking or even for stealing their internal organs. Guardians were highly concerned for the risk while children were frightened with the rumors. Apart from parent's spatial control and supervision on them, they had some preventive strategies protect themselves. As shared by them, those were not going so far from home, not being at deserted or dark place, being cautious with stranger, not receiving anything from them, etc. They also thought about how to protect themselves when unsafe situations arise, such as to run, to contact police, or even to try fighting back.

Cultural values ascribed to genders have also implication on children with public space. Female role is house keeper while male role is the house bread-winner. Female should keep manner and act softly while male should be brave, strong and knows about the outside world. These dominant values – which come from Confucius - however, stand alongside with the idea that female is as robust and capable as male from Vietnamese original culture. Yet, for children, dominant values are what parents normally employ to control their children's experiences with public space. Girls reported to have shorter public spatial allowance than boys. They might play inside or nearby front house while boys could wander to the connecting neighborhood by themselves. Girls were advised not to run and jump too much in the public space and not to bath in the rain. Study of youth in another city of Vietnam – Hanoi has noted that girls felt cultural pressure to act softly and have gentle activities in the public space; they were also discouraged to be outdoor at evening time (Boudreau et al., 2015). From the early age, girls are oriented with female manner and role. This impacts their freedom to public space and their way of expression within it.

Last but not least, children in Vietnamese culture suppose to be obedient and respectful to adults, as in some other culture (e.g. Mayall, 2002; Twum-Danso, 2009). This has implication as well on the way they use public spaces where there are adults within. A study

in Hanoi City acknowledged that social norms limit youth ability to claim their space in the public space over the older groups (Boudreau et al., 2015, page 5). Empirical data from younger children group reflected the same, children had never dispute to other adults who shared the same space. When conflict happened they tried to adjust their way so it could be more tolerable, or they went to ask their guardian coming for a supporting word. A good child must be obedient to parents and grandparents, and polite to adults. The older the adults are, the more respect the child should pay. When children come of age and become youth or adults, this expectation still remains. The same study above has reflected that male and female youth were still under control of their parents for their time being outside in the public space.

### **7.3 Family and immediate networks of children**

#### **7.3.1 Family rules on children's relation with public space**

Children commute to public space for various purposes, but mostly for play, to be able to do that, children must set time for fulfilling duties that their guardians give them, such as having meals, napping, studying, doing house chores. This influences their time budget out-door. Many participants expressed their wishes to have more time to play outdoor; even it was summer time when they did not have full day study. Due to concern of strong heat at the mid-day, or rain that could render children sick, parents mostly suggested them to stay indoor these times. This has been a custom practice in Vietnam through generations. Nowadays, public space safety has been added factors that shape the way parents manage their children. In "Relations with parents", Mayall stated,

Two principal fears for childhoods now ran through parental accounts: stranger danger and traffic danger. These together necessitated constant supervision and fear, and also required teaching children to be careful and fearful. (Mayall, 2002, page 55)

This was indeed expressed in the way that guardians limit their children's autonomy time in public space. Usually guardian let children going out from late afternoon to early evening, when they already had returned home from work. That way they could manage their children's safety. When children going out without them, there were rules and advise they give for their children,

Grandpa of Thien: I told him to beware of accident. And they must be careful for themselves. They are children, they do not know things. Nowadays we do not know who is who. I actually do not allow him to go somewhere out of control zone of family.

Hy, mom of Ti: I told her if she goes out she has to ask my permission. Then I told her not to go far, if she go far people will kidnap her and cut her stomach open. She is very scared, so she dare not go far. When she plays in the alley I would have an eye on her, and alert her when there are vehicles. I only let her play outdoor when in the afternoon when it cools down. Daytime she play indoor.

Grandma of Lanh: Let her to go sell like this I am very worried. I told her to beware of strangers. I am afraid they would cheat to take her lottery or money, or kidnap her. I also tell her to stay away from rain. Hide under the roof in front of people house. I am afraid she would get sick when she gets stuck in the rain.

Minh – Auntie of Mai: I told them when going out not following stranger to do “the bad thing”. Especially they are girls.

Grand of Y: I advise them only play nearby home, should not go too far. If someone suggests riding them on vehicle, they should not go, beware of being kidnapped.

Fears from guardians were transmitted to fears in children. Throughout the conversations with participants, they mentioned their fear for danger and stranger, and cautiousness to risks. They also repeated the same rules and ideas that their guardian told them which they appeared to considerate very much,

Interviewer: Do your guardian give advice to you about being out at public places?

Mai (girl, 11 years old): I must ask for my aunt’s permission, telling them where I go to and what time I come back. If my auntie allows me to go I go, if not allowing I stay home to help her cooking meals. She told me also to drive carefully, and not trust stranger, not going with them. I obey what she advised to me.

Thao (girl, 11 years old): If my mom allows me to go then I go. If she does not allow I will not against her because I am afraid that she will smack me. When I go out I must not follow with strangers, even they give me money I must not come with them.

Duc (boy, 10 years old): Parents told me to observe my surrounding and must not take candies and cakes from strangers.

Nhien (girl, 9 years old): Parents told me to stick with my friend when I play outdoor, not to quarrel to each other. And not jump too much to the point I sweat.



Lanh: My family told me to beware of traffic and not go anywhere with stranger. They may cheat or kidnap me.

Ti (girl, 6 years old): I won't talk to stranger ... Stranger kidnaps!

Kidnapping was the greatest scare of guardians to their children. It became child's biggest fear when being outdoor alone as well. Traffic accident was what they were next afraid of. Being cheated for valuable belonging was the third main concern. For girls, they had extra concern on the risk of physically abuse. Participants took their guardian words as much as they could. They mostly just stayed nearby their home if they were by their own or between themselves. Older participants sometimes went out further places, mostly in group. There were also times that they broke the rules, going out without informing family members. That rendered them to be scolded when coming back and get temporarily prohibition for going out.

To sum up, guardian time and spatial restriction were restraining factors for child's approach to public space. The alerted risks that family members told them affected their sense of well-being at public space as well. They were cautious to look around their environment, and they seemed to be worried when strangers approaching them. On the other hand, the presence of their guardians undid this restriction and negative feelings. With guardian's companion, children could go to more public places and feel safe and be happy with activities they did together in public space.

### **7.3.2 Friends and neighborhood companionships**

As mentioned in the previous part, children strongest motivation when stepping out of their house was for active play. Friends were essential for an active play happen. In some cases, they said that it was because of friends that they went out: "Because my friends suggest me to go out then I go out (Mai, girl, 11 years old); *"If friends come to me and suggest me to go with I go straight away!"* (Y, girl, 9 years old). Through friends, their time at public space became more interested. If playing, their play became more dynamic and excited. When there was not space to play, they could also entertain together, such as watching things and gossiping. Di (boy, 11 years old) told me he never wanted to go out alone, he felt lonesome, and he just wanted to go out with companion. Some children was out on their own, but positioned themselves in the same playing field with other children. In this sharing atmosphere they sometimes managed to make friends and play together.

Friends also optimized children's chance to get permission for going out. Parents felt more secure when their child has companion in public spaces as they could watch out for each other's safety and protect each other. Participants told me that they became more confident and happier going out at public places with friends. Even to participants who had tasks to conduct at public space, they found their time more interesting because they could meet and play with friends. Like An, a boy of 6 who had to train karate 3 evenings per week at a semi-public place, said: *"When I think about my training courses, I think about my friends"*. He played with friends before, during and after the training. When his guardian came to pick him up, he insisted to stay longer for playing with friend. Lanh, a girl of 13 who worked on the streets, shared: *"I am happy to sell on the street because I can encounter my friends and talk to them on the way."*

Besides friends, neighborhood network was also appreciated by children. The presence of them consolidated children's sense of safety in the public place. "Crowded" neighbors made participants more confident to wander around the neighborhood. Certainly, neighbors sometimes complained them making noise, or being too active. But with neighbors being around, they were more assured that if something happened they would get help. Besides, to participants, crowded places lowered the chance for bad things happen: *"I find it it better [to have more people in the neighborhood]. We have more neighbors is a better. The more it is crowded, the safer it is."* (Di, boy, 11 years old); *"It is true. The more it is crowded, the safer it is. If we are kidnapped, neighbors would see and tell to our families."* (Y, girl, 9 years old).

In brief, companionship with other children made participants motivated to go out in the public space. Their time and activities in the public space also become more interesting with friend's company. Friends also strengthened their sense of safety, they watched out for each other. Friends in many cases was the reason children went out to the public places, but in turn, the public places also enabled them to connect to friends. As Di put it like this: *"If there was no public space then I would lack of friends"*. The presence of crowded neighbors was also a source for children's sense of ontological security, trusting that bad things less likely to happen when there were many eyes to look at and there more there were people around, the more chance children would get help when needed.

#### **7.4 The societal and material changes through development and urbanization processes**

#### **7.4.1 Structured daily life of modern children and their outdoor time**

Discussing on “the development of childhood”, Qvortrup has drawn on Aries’s discovery that, childhood was developed from the historical time when it did not exist until it became people’s awareness. Through centuries, practice over childhood continued to segregate until nowadays. Modern childhood is characterized by institutionalization and education as a result of changing economy and polity, this change children’s daily life dramatically (Qvortrup, 2009).

Children in Vietnam nowadays have their daily activities highly structured with education schedule. Child education from pre-school to lower high-school is compulsory and full day<sup>52</sup> instead of half day (Vietnam MoET, 2015; Vietnam MoET & UNICEF Vietnam, 2013). Their guardians also have structured work day, and that affects children’s daily routine as well. How daily activities of children are structured these days will be presented in two cases below. Case one is participant having summer break, she had grandma at home to watch her. Case two is participant whose parents both out to work at daytime while she attended kindergarten.

Case one: Daily activity of Y (girl, 9 years old) in summer time, with some inputs from her grandma

Y (girl, 9 years old): In the morning I wake up around 8-9 am, and then I have breakfast at home. Then I will watch tivi, after that I take a shower. I have lunch at home, and then I watch tivi again. From 4-6pm I go to the temple to play football with my brother and other friends in neighborhood. Then I return home to have dinner. At 7pm if there is not rain I come to temple to play a little bit more. Then I return home. I wish I could have more time to play football with friends.

Grandma of Y: In the summer my grandchildren go out and play that much but at school seasons they are busy with studying all day long. They go to school from 7am and return home at 5pm. Then if there is extra course they will go study again until 7pm. Their father gives them a ride to schools and fetches them back.

Case two: Ti was a girl of 6 who was in the transitional summer between kindergarten and primary school. The kindergarten accepted to continue to keep Ti during this transition

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<sup>52</sup> Children studying full day instead of half day is the goal that Vietnam plans to reach, for better educating children. It is an encouragement but not yet an obligation. Besides, due to limited infrastructure and space to accommodate full day attendance of pupils, at some school it is not yet an offer. (Vietnam MoET, 2015; Vietnam MoET & UNICEF Vietnam, 2013)

summer. Her mom's – Hy - unavailability at business hour was partly reason she send her daughter to school in summer time. Hy also sent Ti to extra courses, for she wanted her child to know things.

(Hy - Mom of Nhi - girl, 6 years old): There is no one to take care of her in daytime so we send her to kindergarten... She went to kindergarten the whole day until 4pm. Then we hurriedly feed her. Then we drive her to extra writing class. Then we fetch back home again at 7pm something. Then she needs to do homework. The other evening she learns karate. She does not have time, all the kids like that nowadays. We feel pity for them. But we afraid our child is less good than the other, we force them to study ... All children is in that situation, not only my child. In the past we played and we were not scared we are less good than the others within the country or compare to foreign countries. Now things from foreign countries are imported to here, we are more scared of being less good. We must study so we know what others know and we can progress.

Children's daily schedule heavily focuses on official education program, which usually take place from 7:30 to 16:30 at school. Going to extra courses in the evening is optional, but many children do that. This activity keeps them busy in institutionalized settings. Therefore they have less time for other type of activities outdoor. Their navigation between institutions is usually with guardians' company, mostly on means of motorbike. In Hy's childhood, she studied half day and had free in summers, she did not have extra class and played much during the day. Nowadays children are occupied by tasks they wished to have more time for play. An (boy, 6 years old) got bored of going to kindergarten. Her grandma said he occasionally said he had stomach-ached for skipping school. He also showed frustration to the fact that he had to go to evening trainings, saying: *"Why do I have to train every day. It won't hurt to skip it a day!"* His grandma could look after him if he had stayed home but family members preferred him to go with the schedules, because they themselves had tasks to do in the meantime.

In summary, children's daily schedule was highly occupied by studying or training activities, this peaked at school season when they usually busy from 7:30 to 16:30 weekday. At summers, due to parents same busy at work they tend to register their child to courses from a few hours to whole day. This indeed has influenced children leisure time to do other activities

of their wishes, especially playing and relaxing at public or semi-public space with peers and family members.

## **7.4.2 Transformations of urban public space and its attributes**

### **Physical**

Urbanization involves the switches of agriculture activities to manufacturing and services. Urban development also involves developing of new urban area, and heightening the concentration of population (World Bank & Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, 2016). HCMC was formed as a city more than 300 years ago by the French colony. After the economic reform in 1986, its area was greatly expanded, together with strong migration flows from other parts of Vietnam. From 1990 to 2012, HCMC *metropolitan area*<sup>53</sup> increased approximately 650 km<sup>2</sup> urban land and nearly 3.5 million inhabitants (M. A. Nguyen, 2015). In absolute number, there is larger area of public space during the reform and expansion of the city, but the ratio of public space per capita greatly decreased due to increase of population and construction. Nature area and agriculture land dramatically diminished. Nowadays HCMC leading sector is service, next is industry and construction; while agriculture activity only occupies 0.7% of city GDP. The city's green area per capita is only 1 m<sup>2</sup>/person, amongst the lowest of the world. At the field place, there are no more rice fields and wild places where children in couple decades ago hung out. Public spaces field children experience with nowadays are least of nature but most of constructions, and with significantly lower space area per child.

Another issue of public space these days is the phenomenon of cutting down public space's land budget (T. N. N. Tran, 2009). Since 1986, HCMC has gone through 3 times of land planning. During that process, some planned land for public space (new parks, wider pavements or streets) was diminished or cut. Public land budget were transformed into serving other purpose, such as for benefit-generating projects. Besides, some current public space, like several parks in the city has been partly leased out to business. Phu Lam Park in my field area is one of the cases; it has been cut partly for renting out to restaurant, recreation and plantations business. Nho Tran (2009) also mentioned that facilities for children at public space like parks have been ill-managed and ill-maintained. Public space for children as residential areas were also not a priority in the land budget, it was mostly used for building indoor residential settings. Noting that 98% of interviewed children – even those whose

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<sup>53</sup> Ho Chi Minh city and its surrounding areas

houses had private yard - expressed their need for public space to meet and play with other children, she concluded that lacking of public space for children hindered their social activities and wellbeing.

## **Social**

In term of public space's social attribute, HCMC public space nowadays is not considered so safe for many reasons. As Linh Le's (T. M. L. Le, 2013) study on HCMC residents' perspective on public spaces safety has noted, public place was a place of stranger and communication with others might be potentially harmful. Incident hazards due to heavy and undisciplined traffic, uncivilized behaviors at public spaces and bothersome streets appearance discouraged people communicating to public space. Crimes at public places reported from media frightened people, making them to be very cautious on public space environment (T. M. L. Le, 2013). While Linh Le focused of safety theme, Giang Nguyen (2009) focused on social communication and motivation of HCMC urbanites relating to public space environment. She found out that modest percentage of people were willing to communicate at commercial places and park, while there were still a great number of people go for it at spiritual places (temple, church) or within their neighborhood. Her study also reflected that, the more people staying in the city center, the less of them willing to communicate compare to those at peripheral areas of the city. These findings did not come from children's perspectives; however it reflected adult's view points on the attribute of public space nowadays. Public space's attributes and adults' attitude to it had implication on the way guardians managing their children's relation with the space. Linh Le's study was more recent than Giang Nguyen, the later one reflected greater concern regarding public space than the earlier. This may suggest that concern for public safety is growing over time.

High concentration of population of different backgrounds and motivations obviously render social interactions at public space becoming more complex. Migration to HCMC is strong and dynamic, every year many people leave the city while new people come, making up city population of 13 million people with highly fluctuating components. Rising crime rate reported through media has caused urbanites to feel insecure with people and place they do not know. Children were also aware of that through media and their networks. While public space is ascribed with discourse of risk, there has been also discourse of indifference attitude between people, especially if someone needing help in accidents. Relating to children, guardians were concerned if their child could get help when something bad happening to them

in public space. Some parents in the study of Mayall (2002) also shared the same concern, that there has been no more kind of collective community responsibility as “looking out for children” like in their childhood. Discourse of stranger as potential harmful person to children makes children to be cautious with strangers at public space. Their parents in the meantime apply tighter time and spatial prohibition, in a way that they can be relatively confident that their child is in safe zone. Field participants at age from 9 to 13 could occasionally going out by their own, with limited time-space allowance and mostly had to be in companions of friends; while participants below that age were always in adults supervised environments.

### **Environmental**

As most participants complained on trashes, smell, smoke, dust and wet surface at public places, urban environmental condition was obviously rendered unpleasant experience of children in public spaces. On environmental aspect, the city space has become hotter and more polluted. There has been the decrease of natural surface like fields, plantations, water surfaces and increase of buildings. Industrial, people activities added problem to the air, water and earth surface. Children are more restricted to be outdoor because parents afraid that unhealthy environment to cause them ill. Like adults, most of them put on hat, mask, glass, and jacket when joining in busy road for to filter dust, smoke and smell. Children mostly are not allowed to bath in the rain, as their parent’s childhood, due to their parents’ concern on polluted rain.

HCMC has also phenomenon of street flood. It is not about the flood as a natural phenomenon but about the weak drainage system. The decreasing of natural surface and increasing of concrete surface covering the earth weaken the capacity of the city to drain water when it rain. Some parts of streets in the city get flooded at big rain, or when the river rise up due to monsoon. This causes difficulties for all, especially for children to navigate in the water. Adults would complain about that but less children do. They just try to navigate safely when they had to go outdoor by themselves. Yet, similar when it was strong sun, heat or rain, street flood was added element that parents concern for their children’s going out, they restrict that except in necessary situations.

### **7.4.3 The commercialization of and the consumption in public spaces**

Together with the decline of public space area, HCMC also witnesses the misuse of existing public spaces for commercial purpose. The nearby park of the neighborhood at field area is an example. A permanent area of it has been leased out for business: conference – wedding

centre, game zone and plantation shop. A mom told me: “Newspaper talks about it, people are against public park being used for commercial purpose. But the [responsible] people say, like, their wage is low, and budget for maintaining the park is lacking, they must lease partly of it out to cover the lacked budget”. This cut of public space does not happen only at the park in this field area, but several parks in the city<sup>54</sup>. Another type of semi-public space being commercialized for inappropriate purpose was the Children House. Children House is a governmental premise installed in each districts in the city. It has the responsibility to organize public activities (educational, cultural, scientific, sport, entertainment and play) to attract and satisfy the needs, hobbies of mass number of children in the area<sup>55</sup>. However, there has been a growing phenomenon on commercializing a part of Children Houses for investor’s business. The Children House in my field area is one of the cases. It leased out a part of its yard to investor who built on it a mini football ground for hourly rent. The rent rate was VND220,000 (approximately USD10) per hour. As I observed, mostly adults played there. The commercialization of Children House’s yard has made children’s entitlement to Children House space limited. Free based activities/infrastructure at this place – such as playground and library - was also poorly invested. I could see the play ground in the Children House was ill-maintained and dark in the evening. For library, a staff at the place told me it was closed most of the time, because there was no human resource to supervise that. The book collection was few as well due to lack of budget. Media reflected that the reason for commercializing of Children’s House space is mainly due to lack of governmental budget for staffs and infrastructure maintaining<sup>56</sup>.

Lacking of satisfactory *free* public space for activities, urbanite families has become more drawn to *fee* privatized public space. A mom shared to me about the transformation of *free* to *fee* public space mode and the reason for it as follow:

In the past everything is *free* and now everything is *fee*... But we must follow the modern age. We need improved infrastructures and modern things so we can play

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<sup>54</sup> According to several articles on this issue: Nguyen Tan Dung - Prime Minister of Republic Socialist of Vietnam - Web Page – Law and Society: Recuperation of land for park (Nguyen Tan Dung - Prime Minister of Republic Socialist of Vietnam - Web Page, 2018); and Businessmen Saigon online – Forum – Issue – Reportage/Chronicle – Lifestyle: HCMC: Occupying land of Phulam park for restaurant business (Businessmen Saigon online, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> According to Decision 09/2000/QĐ-UB-VX on Feb.15, 2000 by HCMC People Committee (HCMC People's Committee, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> According to several articles on commercializing land of Children’s House irrelevant to its function and responsibilities: Youth e-newspaper – Youth: There is nothing to play at Children’s House (Youth e-Newspaper, 2011); People’s Police online – Society: HCMC: Many Children's House were built but left inactive (People's Police online, 2010).



more. The park, according to policy, the park is free. However, as you can see, the free park has nothing to do or play. And the fee-parks have more things. Such as Dam Sen recreational park, there are many interesting games. It cost a lot but you can play more... For ordinary free park such as Phu Lam (public park at field area), you just go there for a walk in fresh air and then you go home. And the nearby parks here (residential small parks), it is dark (at evening time), dare you go? (Mom of Ti - girl, 6 years old)

Drummond's study about Vietnam in 1990s has noted that many Vietnamese urbanites used streets as place for leisure and self-expression. At that time there were few fee-based entertainment places, if any those places were owned by the State. Alongside, she recognized that pseudo commercialized public space started to develop. Nowadays in HCMC, pseudo-public spaces are dominantly present compared to free public spaces. Development and the global market have enabled new features of pseudo public places to serve Vietnam's market. Meanwhile local people have been strongly constructed as consumers of the global and local economy. In "Childhood as consumption", Buckingham and Tingstad (2010) have discussed how children and tweenies were the key focus of modern mass marketing which lured children in consummation culture on the pretext of "empowering" children. The authors asserted that far from being "*empowered*", children were "*powered*" by the consumer culture (Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010, page 1). In HCMC- Vietnam where pseudo public spaces are now abundant and traditional public spaces are declining and degrading, the former ones have become regular and favorite venues of urbanite families. Although the access is free, being there evokes the need to buy and the shame of not being able to buy. My participants mostly went to the mall/supermarkets for free entertaining options, such as looking things, and experimenting free things. In some cases they felt ashamed they could not consume at the place. Sense of self-worth at public space and the enjoyment of public space have indeed growingly depended on family's purchasing power. This even have stronger impact on children's experience in public space because they are more likely to stick with free options, as they do not generate income and are financially depended to guardians.

## **7.5 Summing up and reflection on societal and contextual factors that shape children's experience in city public space**

The chapter has discussed the societal and contextual factors that shaped children's experience with urban public space nowadays. From closest network to them – family – they

are under control of guardians for their commute to public space. Underline forces for this parenting practice is the changing of public space attributes socially and physically. Economic-driven way of life characterized by full day working or studying also gives little time for family members enjoying outdoor space. On the other hand, Vietnamese custom of spatial practice as long as norms on age, gender has also been a factor shaping how children use and behave in public spaces.

Along with discussing structural factors, children's agency to navigate within contexts to fulfill their needs also was acknowledged. Structure obviously had strong impact on children's life circumstance. However, what constraints children's positive experience with space was also resisted and reworked, while the unchangeable adversities were adapted by them. Structure and agency appears to oppose one another. However, they are interrelated. Giddens's structuration approach claims that structure gives both constraint and enablement to agency (Giddens, 1984/1993, referred in Nilsen, 2017, in lecture). Reflecting on the findings, it does reveal that through the structural circumstances children expressed their agency in navigating their experiences with spaces, and through their agency these structure conditions were either persisted or transformed. Children's adapting to their environment somewhat consolidated the structure, while their persistence to claim their places and positions in spaces altered some structural values. Recognizing the strong and inevitable influence of structural conditions on children's life, structure elements should be what mostly worked toward a more favorable environment for children's enjoyment of public space. Amongst structural factors, economy is the strongest influencer. HCMC public space has radically changed throughout three decades of employing development trajectory together with urbanization as a part of this process. Children live in a modern city with rich provision of material choices, but there is too little for them on free basis. Chawla (2002a, chapter 10) said that a development model applied to all must be reconsidered. Adults and children have different needs. What children need is a safe community and space. Development policy must aim for preserving sources of community satisfactions. As HCMC is planning to be the first city in Vietnam to implement the UNICEF's program "Child-friendly City", shouldn't structural constraints for children's better experiences in city's public space be also addressed based on children's perspectives?

Local way of using public spaces:



Modern children's structured day of study and train, guardians picking them up in evening:



HCMC traffic's intensity and disorder:



Unsafe public space discourse: public camera surveying crimes, and advertised course "Skills for self-protection at public space":



Commercialization of Children House (for football ground) and park (for coins-op game):



Malls as trendy and attractive pseudo public space:



**Photo collection 3: A few illustrations on contextual factors and on children's experiences with urban public space.**

## 8 CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

### 8.1 Key findings

**Children's perspectives about urban public space.** Children had contrasting view points and feelings towards public spaces, with the prominent and contradictory themes: like-dislike, hospitable-unwelcoming and safe-risky. They liked the public spaces' spaciousness and beauty, which they thought made it comfortable and enjoyable. On the contrary, they disliked spaces with displeasing appearances and when they experienced unwelcoming manners from other adults to them. For perspective on risks, dangerous traffic was of great concern to the children at the times when they moved about or played on the streets. Being kidnapped, especially, was their greatest fear when being out in the public space without their guardians. Oscillating between the fears with the need of going out for activities, they employed spatial strategies of staying mainly within the immediate neighborhoods, and in close presence of friends/guardians. This consolidated their sense of ontological security, allowing them to enjoy activities in public space environment.

It was also reflected that children's perspectives to public space were not static but greatly fluid, they altered depending on the situations the children were in. Time of the day, social encounters, companionships and opportunities for activities were potent variables that shaped their perspectives. The same public space was not perceived with the same attributes when temporal and social conditions shifted.

Lastly, it is noted that public space were perceived mostly through children's direct experiences, although close networks such as family or home media were also influential. In that sense, factors of age, gender and family background additionally impacted the perspectives' production. The older the participants were, the greater the number of perspectives they shared. It was probably because they had more direct encounters with public space, especially without supervision compared to the younger ones. Girls tended to address their perspectives on public space with safety concerns first (for their body and their valuable belongings), whereas boys started with comments on the space's appearance and conflict situations. It is suggested that their perspectives reflected gender related cultural aspects: women have to prudently safeguard themselves, their family and its valuable belongings, while men must learn and be critical about the outside world to become efficient bread-winners of the family. Likewise, children living in working class area had more to say about

free-based public spaces than children from better off families, as it was observable that they spent more time at these types of space than their middle-class counterparts.

**Children's spatial practice.** Children commuted to urban public space for multiple purposes, be it playing, entertaining, navigating, or other activities for wellbeing. Amongst these activities, they were most motivated coming to public space for playing with peers. On the other hand, a small percentage of Vietnamese children have had work as their prioritized activity in urban public space, yet they also switched to play when possible, as in public space they had more chance to encounter playing mates.

Public space was also space for children's self-expression when they were somewhat liberated from adult's supervision or attention, acting out their ways freely and managing their activities autonomously. The children also expressed their selves through claiming areas for themselves using different strategies, despite various adversities in doing so. That could be acts of adaptation to the environment they were in, or persistence to keep their spaces and activities even when facing rejection. This reflected children's situational agency - the ability to navigate within preexisting or spontaneously-arisen situations to fulfill their needs. Through children's activities and expressions they challenged the mass public's dominant ideas on the meaning and purpose of public space. Subjective perception and distinctive practices of children on HCMC public space has been contributing in production of HCMC public space's culture.

Children's spatial practice was also found to be impacted by gender, age and social class. Younger children and girls were more prudently protected; their guardians suggested them to have activities within the area of front door or at observable distance from their home. Boys and older children tended to have greater spatial freedom; they could wander outside their neighborhood without supervision. The older they are, the more they conducted activities with peers. The younger they are, the more they spent time in public spaces with their guardians. Children in working class areas tended to have various types of activities at non-monetized public spaces, especially at the immediate neighborhood; meanwhile middle class children had more chances to spend time at commercialized public space for entertaining and consuming options.

**Contextual factors shaping children's experience in public space.** The societal changes through Vietnam's recent adoption of development trajectory have altered family's way of life. Most parents and children have their day busily structured at institutions or workplace and only have free time at late evenings. The economic-driven lifestyle has limited time for

family members to enjoy themselves, especially children enjoying play in public space. Urbanization, as a part of development ideal, has brought about some negative transformation to HCMC public space. On physical feature, public space area per capita has declined: green space per urbanite is only 1m<sup>2</sup>, which is among the lowest in the world. Environmentally, public spaces have become highly polluted due to intense industry, construction and human activities. The decline and degradation of public space has limited opportunity for children to access and enjoy the space. Accordingly, guardians were more likely to limit their child's time in public space, concerning that physical condition of public space unfavorable for children's physical well-being. In addition, public space has been increasingly associated with risks: traffic incident, cheating, crime, child kidnapping. The perspective on risks also coupled with the discourse of distrust: distrust of people's honesty and kindness. Parents taught their children to be cautious to strangers, and restricted their children in safe zones. All these socio-economical and physical contexts have confined children's public spatial freedom and enjoyment.

On cultural aspect, the way of Vietnamese people using a part of public space for domestic or business purposes also infringed children's navigation, making them feel danger while sharing the space with vehicles. Vice-versa, children were also amongst those who benefited from the custom, as they used their immediate front-door, alleys, pavements and streets for various personal and domestic activities as well. In another aspect, traditional culture also has implication on the way children express and behave in public space. For gender, the culture values female tenderness and domestic-ness, leading girls to be expected not to spend much time outdoor, and to behave tenderly in the public. Social norm on age suggests children to be obedient and respectful to (grand)parents, and polite to other adults in general. This suppresses their agency to claim their space over adults. Last but not least, since Vietnam widely opened its doors to the rest of the world, discourse of ideal childhood (Rousseau's romantic perspective) has become a new value of Vietnamese culture. There have been growing conscience and practice on keeping children in a nice and protective environment, away from the complexity of public space.

Lastly, it is strongly noticeable in HCMC that while free public space is on decline, pseudo-public spaces blossom. Without satisfactory free public spaces available, many families and children switch to commercialized public spaces. Although they can enter these spaces for free, a consumer identity is constructed which can be difficult to escape from. Public spaces with free options lose ground to pseudo-public spaces with consummation choices. The trend

has been making children's activities at public spaces further from the free regime and gradually closer to fee regime with acts of consummation.

## **8.2 Recommendations**

This research project came into existence for two reasons. Firstly, it was the practice of applying perspectives and methodology of Childhood studies which I have learnt from my Master program. Secondly, the chosen topic was at the time unexplored, with knowledge on the theme lacking. My project, even if it is small, has already yielded substantial insights about children's relationship with public space and their rich experiences in it. The work has also proved how children were the essential contributors in the process of producing knowledge about their lives. It would be necessary to have further and more in-depth research on the theme of children's experience with urban public space, because public space includes such a vast number of settings which are experienced ambivalently by children. An in-depth study in a detailed aspect of children's relationship with space could be very interesting and may reveal multi-facets of children's perspectives and experiences. Besides, I would recommend researchers and policy makers to incorporate Childhood studies' perspectives and methodology for their studying about children or issues affecting them.

Finally I suggest the knowledge constructed by this study to be considered by policy makers and authorities, civil organizations, and the mass public for better understanding of children's needs of public space and facilitate a better public space environment for them. Doing this would be part of realizing society's responsibility to enable children to thrive their best in an urbanizing world.



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## 10 APPENDIX A

### Detail background of participants

No.	Fictitious name	Background
1	An, boy, 6 years old	He is single son, stays at mom's place at night time and grandma's place at daytime. His mom goes to work at daytime. His father works in at a rural province and comes back to him every weekend. He will attend first grade at elementary school this autumn. It is summer time but he still goes to kindergarten, from 7:30am to 3:30pm. He also trains Karate and basketball at Children Cultural house every evening.
2	Thọ, grandma	She is grandma of An as above. Every weekday morning she drives grandson to kindergarten and pick him up at 3:30pm. She keeps him at home until 5:30 then she delivers him to training place until 7:30pm. She returns the child to her daughter in law after that.
3	Ý, girl, 9 years old	She stays with dad, grandma, brother and relatives. No information about her mom. She will attend grade 3 when this summer ends. She does not attend any summer course. She often plays football with brother and neighbors in nearby temple. She also likes to watch tivi at home and play in-door with neighbor. She is not allowed to play or go far from home unattended by adults.
4	Di, boy, 11 years old	He is brother of Ý as mentioned above, and stays at the same place as hers. He is going to grade 6 when this summer ends. He often plays football in the nearby temple with sister and neighbors; he plays more hours than the sister. He has a bicycle and he is allowed to go a bit further from home, to neighboring quarter alone if he has errand to do or when he wishes. However he would not want to go play far alone without having his friends to be with, for he finds it is not fun to be outdoor playing alone. His passion is football.
5	Hiền, grandma	She is grandma of Ý and Di as mentioned above, she assists her son to look after these grand children, because the son needs to be away to work some times during the day. She stays home all the time so she can have an

		eye on the grandchildren. She is self-employed, has a small beverage shop just at the front part of the house.
6	Lành, girl, 13 years old	She migrated from a rural province to this city since over a year now. Every day she sells lottery in the neighborhoods in the evening and morning, mostly with her aunt but sometimes alone. Her mom works at seafood factory everyday including weekend and seldom takes a Sunday off. Her dad is a construction worker. She lives in a small rent room with mom, dad, a 1 year old brother and grandma. Free time from work she looks after sibling, or play with neighbors.
7	Phúc, grandma	She is grandma of Lành as mentioned above. She stays home and looks after the house, prepares meal for the family. She also has an eye on the two grandchildren when the parents are away for work.
8	Thảo, girl, 12 years old	She migrated to this city from Cambodia – neighbor country of Vietnam. She stays with aunt and aunt's family members, and helps aunt with housework. Her parents remain in the countryside. She is often together with Mai, another relative girl of the same age, migrated alone to this aunt as well. When she is free from helping with aunt, she goes playing many places around the neighborhood. She enjoys going to the market and occasionally go to the park.
9	Mai, girl, 12 years old	The same as Thảo above, she migrated here alone and stay with aunt, helps aunt with housework. Her dad passed away, her mom works somewhere far and seldom visits her. She likes to go to the park the most among public places because there are things at park that uplift her joy.
10	Minh, auntie	She is aunt of Mai and Thảo above. She has a good house and run a home business (paper folding).
11	Thiện, boy, 9 years old	He stays with parents, grandfather and uncle. Parents go to work at day time so he is with grandfather who also works nearby home. He helps with doing housework and makes lunch himself. When he is free at daytime he goes out playing, in the evening he stays indoor with family. He likes going to supermarket.
12	Nhân, granddad	He is granddad of Thiện above. He is a construction worker for a house building project just a few steps from his home. He has an eye on nephew at daytime when his children work away.

13	Đức, boy, 10 years old	He stays with grandparents and auntie. His parents stays at other place with his younger brother, they do not come to his place to visit but he himself come to visit them at their place occasionally. He attends a summer course in the morning time. He often hangs out with neighbor Thiện above; they sometimes bicycle to the park.
14	Ti, girl, 6 years old	She is a single daughter, stays with parents who are inherent resident of this city. She will go to primary school at first grade when this summer ends. She attends karate course at local Children Cultural House 3 evenings per week, each time 2 hours. She is a very active trainee but she always wants to go home immediately after course and not lingers a little bit at Children House as some other kids.
15	Hỷ, mom	She is mom of Ti. She works in a shoes factory. She always comes to children house with daughter and serves daughter drink at break time. She also enjoys watching the whole class training and gossiping with other guardians who also accompany their kids to this training place.
16	Nhiên, girl, 9 years old	She stays with parents and a toddler sibling, all of them migrated to the city from a rural province. They stay in a small rent room. Her dad works, her mom looks after her and the younger child. She also has 2 other 2 siblings who remain in countryside attending university. She often plays in neighborhood with a cousin and neighbors
17	Nhi, girl, 6 years old	She migrated from countryside to here with parents and lives at a rent place. Her mom runs a small miscellaneous shop just in front of the rent, her dad goes to work. Nhi often plays on the pavement in front of the house. She attended kindergarten and will go to first grade this autumn. She and her mom withdrew from study due to being busy.

**Table 7: Participant's background information**



# 11 APPENDIX B

## Photo collection 4: Three different scenes of neighborhoods' public space

(Photos taken at three neighborhoods located just within half kilometer away from one other at field area. It comprises working class self-built neighborhood, middle class stably-established neighborhood, and middle-class newly developed neighborhood)



# 12 APPENDIX C

## Receipt from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services, page 1 of 3.



Tatek Abebe

7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 13.06.2018

Vår ref: 60586 / 3 / PEG

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

### Vurdering fra NSD Personvernombudet for forskning § 31

Personvernombudet for forskning viser til meldeskjema mottatt 01.05.2018 for prosjektet:

60586	<i>Children and public space in the majority world: Children experience of urban public space in Vietnam</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Tatek Abebe
Student	Chau Nguyen

### Vurdering

Etter gjennomgang av opplysningene i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon finner vi at prosjektet er meldepliktig og at personopplysningene som blir samlet inn i dette prosjektet er regulert av personopplysningsloven § 31. På den neste siden er vår vurdering av prosjektopplegget slik det er meldt til oss. Du kan nå gå i gang med å behandle personopplysninger.

### Vilkår for vår anbefaling

Vår anbefaling forutsetter at du gjennomfører prosjektet i tråd med:

- opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon
- vår prosjektvurdering, se side 2
- eventuell korrespondanse med oss

Vi forutsetter at du ikke innhenter sensitive personopplysninger.

### Meld fra hvis du gjør vesentlige endringer i prosjektet

Dersom prosjektet endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å sende inn endringsmelding. På våre nettsider finner du svar på hvilke [endringer](#) du må melde, samt endringskjema.

### Opplysninger om prosjektet blir lagt ut på våre nettsider og i Meldingsarkivet

Vi har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet på nettsidene våre. Alle våre institusjoner har også tilgang til egne prosjekter i [Meldingsarkivet](#).

### Vi tar kontakt om status for behandling av personopplysninger ved prosjektslutt

*Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.*

## Receipt from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services, page 2 of 3.

Ved prosjektslutt 30.06.2020 vil vi ta kontakt for å avklare status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Se våre nettsider eller ta kontakt dersom du har spørsmål. Vi ønsker lykke til med prosjektet!

Marianne Høgetveit Myhren

Pernille Ekornrud Grøndal

Kontaktperson: Pernille Ekornrud Grøndal tlf: 55 58 36 41 / [pernille.grondal@nsd.no](mailto:pernille.grondal@nsd.no)

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Kopi: Chau Nguyen, [tmnguyen@stud.ntnu.no](mailto:tmnguyen@stud.ntnu.no)

## Personvernombudet for forskning



### Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

---

Prosjektnr: 60586

According to your notification form the sample will receive written and oral information and will give their consent to participate. The information letter we have received is well formulated. However, we ask you to inform the sample of how long you are going to store the photos. Also, you will have to change the date for deleting the data material from June 30th 2019 to June 30th 2020, as according to the notification form, you will conduct follow up studies until the latter date.

We remind you that children themselves must consent to participate, even if their guardians have given their consent. Children should receive age-appropriate information about the project, and you must ensure that children understand that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time if they wish.

The Data Protection Official presupposes that you will process all data according to the NTNU internal guidelines/routines for information security. We presuppose that the use of a personal computer/mobile storage device is in accordance with these guidelines.

According to your notification form you intend to publish personal data. The Data Protection Official presupposes that you will gain explicit consent from each participant to publish their personal data. Furthermore, we recommend that participants are given the opportunity to read through their own information and give their approval before publication.

The estimated end date of the project is 30.06.2019. According to your notification form/information letter you intend to store the collected personal data 30.06.2020 for use in follow-up studies/further research, specifically for writing articles representing findings of research.

## 13 APPENDIX D

Information letter to participant, adapted from NSD's form – Vietnamese version

### Thư mời tham gia nghiên cứu

## "Trẻ em và không gian công cộng: Trải nghiệm của trẻ em về không gian công cộng thành thị ở Việt Nam."

#### Mục đích

Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu về trải nghiệm của trẻ em về không gian công cộng ở thành thị tại Việt Nam: trẻ em sử dụng nơi công cộng chung quanh nơi mình ở như thế nào, và trẻ cảm nghĩ như thế nào về những trải nghiệm đó. Nghiên cứu này là một phần của chương trình cao học về Trẻ Em Học, được giảng dạy bởi trường Đại học Khoa học và Công nghệ Na Uy.

Người tham gia vào nghiên cứu là những trẻ em trong độ tuổi từ khoảng 6-11 đang sống tại thành phố Hồ Chí Minh và có ít nhiều trải nghiệm với không gian công cộng ở khu vực mình đang sống. Phụ huynh của những trẻ này cũng được mời tham gia chia sẻ quan điểm về việc sử dụng không gian công cộng của con em mình. Em/Anh/Chị/Bác được mời tham gia vào nghiên cứu vì mình có những đặc điểm như trên. Sinh viên nghĩ rằng các Em/Anh/Chị/Bác am hiểu về chủ đề mà sinh viên đang nghiên cứu và mong rằng các Em/Anh/Chị/Bác hỗ trợ bằng cách chia sẻ những trải nghiệm và quan điểm của mình về chủ đề.

#### Tham gia vào nghiên cứu nghĩa là gì?

Là người tham gia, Em/Anh/Chị/Bác sẽ tham gia 1 hoặc vài phương pháp nghiên cứu như phỏng vấn, chụp ảnh, chỉ trên bản đồ khu phố những nơi công cộng mà mình biết, v.v. Mỗi phương pháp cần khoảng 30-120 phút, và được thực hiện tại địa điểm và thời gian do Em/Anh/Chị/Bác đề nghị. Tham gia vào nghiên cứu là không bắt buộc, Em/Anh/Chị/Bác có thể tham gia ít, nhiều tùy ý, và chấm dứt tham gia bất cứ lúc nào mình muốn và sẽ không có bất cứ trách nhiệm gì với sinh viên. Khi tham gia, những gì Em/Anh/Chị/Bác chia sẻ sẽ được ghi lại bằng cách ghi vào sổ tay, ghi âm, chụp ảnh, v.v. Nếu Em/Anh/Chị/Bác không muốn áp dụng hình thức ghi chú đó thì hãy đề nghị với sinh viên.

#### Thông tin sẽ được dùng và lưu trữ như thế nào?

Thông tin cá nhân về Em/Anh/Chị/Bác sẽ được phân tích và lưu trữ một cách bảo mật, chỉ có sinh viên xem được thông tin này. Sau khi phân tích thông tin, sinh viên sẽ viết một bài luận văn, tên và những thông tin mà có thể truy ra Em/Anh/Chị/Bác là ai sẽ được thay đổi để bảo mật danh tính của Em/Anh/Chị/Bác. Một vài hình ảnh của nghiên cứu mà có liên quan đến Em/Anh/Chị/Bác sẽ được giới thiệu trong luận văn, nhưng chỉ khi nào Em/Anh/Chị/Bác cho

phép. Ngoài ra, đến 30/06/2020, 1 năm sau khi nghiên cứu kết thúc, tất cả hình ảnh, dữ liệu mà Em/Anh/Chị/Bác chia sẻ sẽ được xóa hoàn toàn.

### **Tham gia tự nguyện**

Tham gia vào nghiên cứu là tự nguyện, Em/Anh/Chị/Bác có thể ngừng tham gia bất cứ lúc nào mình muốn mà không cần giải thích lý do với sinh viên. Nếu Em/Anh/Chị/Bác ngừng tham gia, thông tin liên quan đến danh tính Em/Anh/Chị/Bác cho đến thời điểm đó sẽ được thay đổi để bảo mật danh tính của Em/Anh/Chị/Bác.

Nếu Em/Anh/Chị/Bác đồng ý tham gia hoặc có câu hỏi liên quan đến nghiên cứu, xin liên hệ: sinh viên Nguyễn Thị Mỹ Châu, Điện thoại : 01246.130.583, Địa chỉ: 38/21 Nguyễn Trọng Trí, phường An Lạc A, quận Bình Tân, tp.HCM, Email: tmnguyen@ntnu.no

Nghiên cứu này đã được đăng ký với Cán bộ bảo vệ dữ liệu nghiên cứu, thuộc Trung tâm cơ sở dữ liệu nghiên cứu Na Uy.

### **Đồng ý tham gia nghiên cứu**

Tôi đã tiếp nhận thông tin về nghiên cứu và đồng ý tham gia. Tôi cho phép sinh viên ghi lại thông tin liên quan đến những hoạt động của tôi ở nơi công cộng và quan điểm của tôi về chủ đề nghiên cứu bằng hình thức: (đánh dấu chọn X vào hình thức mình muốn áp dụng)

- ghi chú trên giấy,
- ghi âm,
- chụp ảnh.

Tôi cũng cho phép sinh viên sử dụng những thông tin này để phân tích và viết luận văn.

Ngày: \_\_\_\_\_ Chữ ký của người tham gia: \_\_\_\_\_

Chữ ký của phụ huynh cho phép con em mình tham gia (áp dụng cho trường hợp người tham gia là trẻ em từ 0-15 tuổi): \_\_\_\_\_

**Information letter to participant, adapted from NSD's form – English version**

## **Request for participation in research project**

### ***"Children and public space in the majority world: Children experience of urban public space in Vietnam."***

#### **Background and Purpose**

This research aims to explore children's experience of urban public space in Vietnam: how children use public space in their neighborhood and how they feel about it. This research is in scope of International Master program of Childhood Studies by Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

Participants are children age 6-11 years-old living in Ho Chi Minh City and encounter with public space in their daily life to some extent. Parents of these children are also included to share their perspectives on their child's use of public area. You are invited to take part in this research because you are one of them. We think that you are expert about the topic we are researching and we hope you would help us by sharing experience and perspective of public space of your neighborhood.

#### **What does participation in the project imply?**

As participant, you will join research activities such as neighborhood walk, photographing, interview, mapping, etc. Each activity lasts about 30'-120' minutes, and will be organized at place and time suggested by you and your participating neighbors. How much time you spend for activities will be up to you. You can withdraw your participation at any time you want without bearing any responsibility to us. What you shared will be recorded in form of note, audio, photo, etc. and you can request us not to apply some of these forms if you wish.

#### **What will happen to the information about you?**

All personal data about you will be treated and stored with confidentiality, and only researcher has access to it. In the research report, your name or information that could be traced back to your identity will be changed to ensure your anonymity. Some photos of you (if any) might be used in report for illustrating the discussed topics, but this is done only if you authorize for that. Apart from the photos, by the time of project completion at Jun.30<sup>th</sup>, 2020, all your personal data will be made anonymous.

#### **Voluntary participation**

It is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw, all your personal data will be made anonymous.

If you would like to participate or if you have any questions concerning the project, please contact: Thi My Chau, Nguyen, mobile number: 09.4949.2578, address: 38/21 Nguyen Trong Tri str., An Lac A ward, Binh Tan dist, HCMC, Vietnam.

The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

## **Consent for participation in the study**

I have received information about the project and am willing to participate. I authorize researcher to record in forms of noting/audio-recording/photographing my activities at public space, my shared opinions about research topic, and to use materials generated by me for analyzing and reporting.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's signature (applicable if participant is a child from 0-15 years old): \_\_\_\_\_



# 14 APPENDIX E

## Interview plan for child/ adult participants

### Interview plan

For the child participant

(Adapted from Sample Interview topics and questions, Driskell 2002)

#### Residential history

- How long have you lived in the area?
- Did you live somewhere else before? Where?

#### General perceptions about the area

- How would you describe the area where you live to someone who had never been there before?

#### Place knowledge and use

- Please tell me all the places you know in your area? (use map if needed)
- In which of these places do you usually spend your time?
- What do you do there? (Probe for specific activities if child wants to share)
- Are there places in the city but outside your neighborhood that you have been to?

#### Favorite places/ special places

- Which of the places you listed is most important/ favorite to you? Why?

#### Un-favorite/ Avoiding places

- Are there places that you don't like? Why?
- Are there places that you are not allowed to go? Why?
- Are there place that you cannot get into? Why? Do you wish you could?
- Are there dangerous places in your area? Why it is dangerous?

#### Place ownership

- Are there places that feel like your own?
- Are there places that you feel you are an outsider when being there?

#### Place changes

- Has your area (including public space) changed in your memory?
- Has the area become better or worse? Why?

### **Support network**

- Who live with you in your home?
- Who else staying in this area that you often meet or like to spend time with?
- Do you spend time with them at public places? If yes, for which activities?

### **Leisure time**

- What time during the day and the week do you usually have as 'free time'?
- What are your favorite things to do during these times? And where?
- Do you spend these time with other people or alone? Why?

### **Daily schedule**

- Please tell me about your daily schedule, normally what do you do in a day, at what time, at which place and with whom?
- (If the child has not mentioned about school/ work) Do you go to school/work? Can you tell me about its schedule?

### **Perception and feeling about neighborhood**

- How do you feel about your neighborhood, your city? Why do you feel that way?
- For public space at areas you mentioned above, what about them that you like and don't like? Why?
- Does your feeling to those places unchanged or varying when circumstance changes (such as change of time, season, atmosphere, or when you are alone/ with adults/ with peers)?

### **Closing**

- Is there anything else you would like to share more about your experience of public space?
- If you have questions or suggestions to us, please ask or tell us. (Wait for the child to share if he wants to and response to him).

### **End of interview.**

## Interview plan

For the parent participant

(Adapted from Sample Interview topics and questions, Driskell 2002)

### Interview

1. Can you share about your child's daily schedule?
2. Does your child encounter with public places in his daily activities? If so, what are those places, what does he do there and with whom?
3. Do you think those places suitable/un-suitable for him? Why?
4. Are any of child's activities in public places that you feel unsafe/ improper/ wasteful? Why?
5. Do you have instructions/ regulation on how your child should do when approaching public space?
6. How would you prefer your child's time be spent?
7. How much of the area that your child know? How far (s)he is allowed to go either alone or with friends?
8. Where in the city do you take your child? Why? How often?
9. What do you wish public space could be in the future?
10. Please tell me about what it was like when you were a child? How does that compare with the place your child is growing up today? Is it better or worse? Why?

### Closing

1. Is there anything else you would like to share more about your child's use of public space?
2. If you have questions or suggestions to us, please ask or tell us. (Wait for the parent to share if he wants to and response to him).

**End of interview.**