

**Redefining Public Space in Hanoi:
Places, Practices and Meaning**



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Sandra Kurfürst

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For Nils

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Preface

“It’s the same story all over the Middle East. In Libya’s capital city of Tripoli, people express their aspirations and face bloody reprisals in Tripoli’s Green Square and Martyr’s Square. In Bahrain, they boldly march in Pearl Square in the capital city of Manama. In Yemen, protests have taken place in public spaces near the university in Sanaa, which students renamed Tahrir Square. Kept out of the central Revolution Square in Tehran by the repressive government, Iranian dissidents gather in Valiasr Square and Vanak Square [sic]” (Walljasper 2011).

In times where the “abstraction of space” is a common theme of scholarly works, the recent developments in the Middle East once again allude to the relevance of physical public space as a forum for dialogue and social interaction between citizens.

Since the early beginnings of the Greek *agora* in the Western hemisphere, the ideal of public space has incorporated free accessibility while offering an arena for discussions about the common good.

In light of the increasing use of information and communication technologies worldwide, it is crucial to consider physical and digital public space in relation to each other.

The Internet’s digital space allows communication and social interaction within a non-physical environment, thereby generating new forms of publicity and privacy. Yet, what at first glance appears to be untraceable and unlinked to any physical location, still remains bound to physical space as the means of communication such as mobile phones and computers are identifiable and traceable. The interconnectedness of the concrete and the virtual becomes even more apparent with respect to social mobilisation and the articulation of citizens’ interests. Peoples’ gatherings in the national public spaces of Cairo, Sanaa or Bahrain have, for the most part, been organised in digital space. Information on the time and venue for the protests was spread through social networks, e-mails, text messages, etc. However, the actual demonstration used as a means to voice people’s opinion and to be heard by governments needs to take place in the physical public space of the city, to be visibly seen and to encourage participation.

“The influence of the new digital commons in democratic uprisings from Tunisia to Egypt to Bahrain has been chronicled at length in news reports from the Middle East, with Facebook, Twitter and other social media winning praise as dictator-busters.

But the importance of a much older form of commons in these revolts has earned scant attention—the public spaces where citizens rally to voice their discontent, show their power and ultimately articulate a new vision for their homelands” (Walljasper 2011).

“Whatever course history will follow [sic], the momentous changes in North Africa remind us that our world is shaped by its cities. The poorer and less democratic parts of the planet have become increasingly urban and that makes change, full of hope and fear, inevitable.

That recent uprisings have been assisted by electronic technologies like Facebook and Twitter only reinforces the point that technological change is making cities more, not less, important.

Cities aren’t just places of economic productivity and cultural innovation. For millennia, they have also been the epicenters of dramatic political upheaval” (Glaeser 2011).

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1 Introduction

“The values attaching to public space are those with which the generality of the citizenry endows it. Citizens create meaningful public space by expressing their attitudes, asserting their claims and using it for their own purpose. It thereby becomes a meaningful public resource” (Goheen 1998: 479).

The introduction of the economic reform program, *Doi Moi*, in 1986 opened the door for private sector development in Vietnam, as well as the country’s integration into the world economy. As Hanoi is the national political centre, it occupies an important role in Vietnam’s transformation process. The capital has become a major hub for socio-economic development. Whereas “Hanoi was renowned for its quiet streets in the 1980s” (Drummond 2000: 2382), nowadays it is characterised by its bustling street life. Public spaces, such as streets and sidewalks, are appropriated by private individuals for mostly small-scale economic activities. Existing green parks are privatised in order to cater to the growing demand for leisure space. At the same time, official spaces like Ba Dinh Square or Ly Thai To Square are occupied by Hanoi’s residents for sports and gatherings. Thomas (2002: 1621) regards this a contestation of the state-defined landscape by local people. In other words, the state’s defining power for the urban image is challenged by a multiplicity of spatial producers.

This thesis focuses on the development of public spaces in Hanoi. Using the frame of an emic reconstruction¹, major themes such as changes in power relations between state and society and their reflection in the city’s physical environment are explored. Embedded in the discipline of urban sociology, this thesis aims to contribute to the discussion about the correlation between the public sphere as a sociological/political category and the materiality and practices of public space. According to Sennett (2008), the public sphere is a crucial element of urbanism. Furthermore, as Eisenstadt and Schluchter (2001: 12) indicate, there is a strong relationship between the public sphere and civil society, along with political and economic liberalisation. Therefore, the question remains whether public spaces in Hanoi are an expression of a public sphere or a prerequisite for its development.

In his work, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Jürgen Habermas (1987) focuses on the political function of the “bourgeois public sphere” in 18th/19th-century Europe. For Habermas (1987: 42), the “bourgeois” public sphere consists of private individuals assembling to form a politically reasoning public. The basis of this public sphere is the city.² Habermas argues that the main prerequisite for its development is economic liberalisation or, more precisely, the emancipation of both commodity exchange and social work from state directives. Considering private and public as two interrelated spheres, Habermas (1987: 14) declares: „Die Öffentlichkeit selbst stellt sich als eine Sphäre dar – dem privaten steht der öffentliche Bereich gegenüber”.³ Accordingly, “private sphere” denotes freedom from regulations established by

¹ According to Evers and Korff (2003: 16) the objective of an emic reconstruction of the city is “the attempt to reconstruct the constructions of meanings of those living in the city”.

² Habermas (1987: 69, 93) depicts that in 18th/19th-century Europe, citizens assembled in salons and coffee houses to discuss what they had read in newspapers and novels. Accordingly, the public sphere is often referred to as the ‘literary’ public sphere.

³ Likewise, Sennett (2008: 183) explains that private and public sphere are two atoms of the same molecule. However, in current literature the dichotomy of private and public is prevalently discussed as a constructed one. The poles of public and private are categories created to serve the purpose of analysis. Yet, at the same time as they facilitate the study of socio-political processes, they also restrict thinking beyond such binaries, thereby hiding power differentials. The main critique towards this dichotomy is expressed by the feminist strand of social theory. The differentiation between public and private is considered to relate to the distinction between male and female. In her assessment of the bourgeois public sphere, Joan B. Landes illustrates the invalidity of universal access as a “fundamental requirement” of the public sphere. Her argument is grounded in the exclusion of women in the modern public sphere as introduced in the French Revolution (Hohendahl 2002: 18).

authorities. It designates individuals' power to dispose freely capitalist functioning property (Habermas 1987: 95 f.).

Although the development of private sector economy is a crucial element in Vietnam's transformation process, major premises associated with privatisation, such as freedom of private business from state control and private property rights, are not yet granted. On the contrary, the state maintains a strong presence both in the economic sector and in public life. According to government statements, state-owned enterprises (SOE) account for 40% of the country's gross domestic product (Bloomberg 14.01.2011).⁴ Equations of former SOEs is slow and still SOEs have much better access to loans from state banks than private companies. In addition, the party-state's presence in the private sector is exemplified by the establishment of party committees in private enterprises (Thayer 2008: 3). The recent introduction of price regulations for basic consumer goods by the state is another example of state intervention in the economy.

Furthermore, the city – that Habermas depicts to be the centre of the European public sphere – is stricken with icons of the Socialist state. Until recently, the party-state was the dominant influence that shaped the city's physical environment (Thomas 2002: 1621; Ho Tai 1995: 273). In this context, Allen (2006: 445) remarks that design and layout are both instruments of power, limiting people's interaction and movement within space. Bourdieu (1991: 27) adds that architectonic space is an integral part of the symbolism of power. The physical arrangements of place are the result of political decision-making, economic rent-seeking and cultural domination. In Hanoi citizens' movement within urban space is limited and controlled through the exact planning and design of physical structures by the party-state. Consequently, so-called "public spaces", such as squares and monuments, are governed by state dispositifs. The state employs these spaces for its self-inscenation. State performances are staged in public to demonstrate and symbolise state power (Scott 1990: 45). In this context, it appears to be more appropriate to designate these places "official" rather than "public" spaces.

In sum, Habermas' concept⁵ of public sphere as a sphere of political reasoning and will formation is difficult to apply to Vietnam, where the three sectors of state, economy and civil society frequently overlap.⁶ In particular, an association of public sphere with civil society appears to be problematic.

⁴ However, *The Vancouver Sun* (17.01.2011) reports that state-owned companies would only produce 25% of the GDP, but absorb 40% of the capital invested in the country.

⁵ Habermas' theory has been subject to much critique. It is mainly criticized for its "eurocentrism" and distinct focus on 18th-century Europe's public sphere. More precisely, Fraser (1992: 115) locates the problem in the failure to additionally examine other competing public spheres apart from the liberal one. However, in his later work *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* Habermas (1981) employs a different approach in the way that he chooses a linguistic grounding for the public sphere. By de-emphasising the historical relevance of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas paves the way for the recognition of competing public spheres during the 18th and 19th century. Accordingly, Fraser (1992: 123) suggests to talk of "subaltern counterpublics" when dealing with stratified societies, "to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs". What is crucial, is the acknowledgement of a multiplicity of publics on the one hand, and their situation in one "single 'structured setting' that advantages some and disadvantages others", on the other (Eley 1987 cited Fraser 1992: 125).

⁶ The term "sector" is applied in reference to Wuthnow's (1991) distinction between the state, economy and the voluntary sector.

Although Norlund (2007: 68) argues that civil society in Vietnam is of considerable size comprising a multitude of organisations, this associational sector remains highly interwoven with the state.⁷ Moreover, organisations' scope for activities is somehow limited with regard to the legal framework. Most associations viewed as part of civil society engage in the field of poverty alleviation rather than seeking political participation.

In this context, Eisenstadt and Schluchter (2001) offer an alternative approach. They suggest that the concepts of public sphere and civil society ought not to be joined, declaring that "civil society entails a public sphere, but not every public sphere involves a civil society, whether of the economic or political variety" (Eisenstadt and Schluchter 2001: 12). They reason that the concept of civil society, as it is referred to in contemporary social sciences, is historically rooted in continental Europe in the 18th/19th century, particularly in German society (Eisenstadt, Schluchter 2001: 9 f.). In German, the term has two meanings: On one hand it is "synonymous with bourgeois society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*)", on the other it connotes "society of citizens' (*Bürgergesellschaft*)" (Eisenstadt, Schluchter 2001: 11 f.). In this sense, "civil society is not an unequivocal term" (Eisenstadt, Schluchter 2001: 11). Whereas the first interpretation of the term is closely linked to economic modernisation, resulting in "rational capitalism in Max Weber's sense", the latter is related to political modernisation leading to "participatory democracy" (Eisenstadt, Schluchter 2001: 12). Bourgeois society thus refers to institutions connected to economic liberties, for example private property and contract. In contrast, society of citizens connotes political liberties like freedom of speech, the right to assemble and the right to form associations (Eisenstadt, Schluchter 2001: 12).

Moreover, Schiel (2007: 88) remarks that the "Great Transformation", stipulated by Polanyi (1978), not only led "to a private economy with the market as the base for self-organisation of the *bourgeois*, but also to the public state, which enabled in the long run the formation of democratic institutions as the base for the self-organisation of the *citoyen/citizen*".⁸ Schiel (2007: 88) remarks that both processes occurred a-synchronously, as the "disembedding" of the economy resulted in faster changes than the disembedding of the state (Schiel 2007: 88). Moreover, Eisenstadt and Schluchter (2001: 12) declare that both meanings described above overlap, and thus, it is often not evident which meaning is at stake.

Finally, Eisenstadt and Schluchter (2001: 12) contend that in every civilisation with some complexity and literacy, a public sphere is likely to evolve, but not necessarily of the civil-society type. In an attempt to prevent an imposition of "European patterns on other civilisations", they propose to analyse state-society relations in non-European countries, taking into account the concept of public sphere rather than the one of civil society.⁹

⁷ This is not to say that civil society per se fails to exist in Vietnam. The Civil Society Index Project based on a common methodology developed by the research NGO CIVICUS, applies the following definition of civil society to Vietnam: "*the arena outside of the family, the state and the market where people associate to advance common interests*" (Norlund 2007: 72). The CIVICUS approach not only examines the forms of organisations, but also their functions. Thus, in addition to the associative sector, it includes all attempts to improve citizens' well-being, also recognising informal groups (Norlund 2007: 72). Consequently, mass organisations or socio-political organisations are also considered an integral part of civil society.

⁸ In his analysis of the state in Southeast Asia, Schiel (2007: 86) supplements Polanyi's (1978) concept of the disembeddeness of the economy with the disembedding of the state. He argues that the "Great Transformation" not only resulted in the disembedding of the economy, and thus the development of a private sector economy, but furthermore in the establishment of a public administration.

⁹ Habermas (1987: 155) explains that the historical context of the "bourgeois" public sphere is based on a separation between state and society. He declares that private individuals assembling to form a public openly claim the political sanctioning of society as a private sphere. Correspondingly, Eisenstadt and Schluchter (2001: 11) indicate that the idea of private interests serving as a basis for the "pursuit of public interests" seems to be rooted in Europe.

In their definition of the public sphere, they supplement the dual relationship between private and public with a third sphere, the official.

“The concept of a public sphere implies that there are at least two other spheres from which the public sphere is more or less institutionally and culturally differentiated: the official sphere and the private sphere. The public is therefore a sphere located between these two. It is a sphere where collective improvements (the common good) are at stake. While this also holds for the official sphere, in the public sphere this business is carried out by groups that do not belong to the ruler’s domain. Rather, the public sphere draws its personnel from the private sphere: (...)” (Eisenstadt, Schluchter 2001: 10).

Thus, the term “public” not only connotes the existence of arenas autonomous from the political order, but also the accessibility of these arenas to diverse social groups. Located in between the official and private, the public sphere is the sphere where the common good is at the centre of attention. Therefore, public spheres play an integral role in processes of institutionalisation. In Wittrock’s (2002: 49) understanding of modernity as a “new set of promissory notes”, the “promise of a better life”, political institutions are what makes this promise of a better life. However, a better life for the community can only be reached through the participation of the individual. Therefore, different ideas of a better life need to be integrated into public spheres, and thus made public in order to be recognised. Consequently, Wittrock (2001: 23) defines the public sphere as “arena for the formation of new collective identities and where new forms of political and cultural order are made possible”. By offering a forum for debate, as well as mediation between subjects and rulers, and citizens and governments (Wittrock 2001: 22), the particular function of the public sphere is to legitimise institutions.

By defining urbanism as specific forms of institutionalisation that deal with how to cope with heterogeneity and multiple diversities, Korff (2002: 4) outlines the essential role of the public sphere for urban life. Lefebvre (1990: 95, 186) describes urbanised space as an area where different strategies collide, and thus conflicts are expressed. Furthermore, Evers and Korff (2003: 6) argue that the city “is reduced to a form and can thereby become the point of articulation” of diverse social groups and their visions of the future.

“The dynamic of Southeast Asian urbanism, accordingly, results from the struggles of different actors, who are trying to shape the city in a conscious effort, or who simply put their stamp on the city through their everyday life within it” (Evers and Korff 2003: 6).

These contrasting ideas about the city are communicated in the public sphere. Moreover, they are concretised in the architecture of urban public space.

In his semiotic¹⁰ approach to architecture, Eco (1972: 307, 312) differentiates between the first and second functions of an architectonic object; the former refers to “denotation” and the latter to “connotation”. In general, the denotation is the immediate reference that is evoked in the receiver of a message. In contrast, an object’s connotation consists of other signs that are associated with it (Eagleton et al. 1997: 110; Eco 1972: 103). With respect to architecture, denotation depicts an object’s primary use or “utilitas” function, whereas the connotation designates its symbolic communicative function. First and second functions are dynamic, and therefore subject to continuous redefinition. Thus, a whole range of differing, even conflict-

¹⁰ Semiotics examine cultural processes as processes of communication. The underlying assumption is that culture is communication (Eco 1972: 38). Eco (1972: 69 f.) distinguishes between three different terms. First, the *significans*, which means symbol. Second, the *referens*, which is a sign’s object. And, third the *significat* of an expression, which constitutes a cultural entity (Eco 1972: 75). The *significat* can only be determined in the context and the conditions of communication that it is based in. Moreover, one *significans* can connote diverse *significats*. With respect to architecture, Eco (1972: 296 f.) argues that in order to be able to interpret architectonic structures’ functions according to aspects of communication, the architectonic code needs to be transformed into an iconic one. In fact, he regards architecture as a system of signs.

ing, meanings can be identified when viewing public spaces as urban symbols¹¹. Different social groups or individuals attach diverse meanings to one place. According to Nas (1993: 15 f.), the communicative function of urban symbols serves as the basis for social cohesion, government legitimacy, and nation-building. Due to their symbolic function, public spaces can become spaces of contention and renegotiation (Goheen 1998: 479). Accordingly, Goheen (1998: 487) points out: “Public space continues to be redefined by publics whose values and demands are in competition in the political arena that is the city”.

The idea of public space being the material location of the public sphere is based on Hannah Arendt’s (1958) theory of public space. The Arendtian concept of public sphere is distinguishable from the Habermasian due to its focus on an “ocular public”, rather than an “auditory public”, where the former refers to *demos*, a group of human beings facing each other, being well aware of the others’ presence. Conversely, Habermas is primarily concerned with an auditory public which derives from impersonal contacts through means of communication such as print media (Benhabib 2006: 311 f.). It is precisely the conception of public space as a “space of appearance”, which makes Arendt’s model interesting for an analysis of the development of public space in Hanoi. Arendt draws her conclusions from the Greek *agora*. She depicts the public realm, in comparison to the private realm¹², as “the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men” (Arendt 1958: 200). In her work, *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1958: 25) outlines the specific role of “action” for human politics. In the ancient city-state the *bios politikos*, the political “good life”, was constituted by action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*). In the Greek polis, “political” meant that everything was decided upon through speech and persuasion (Arendt 1958: 26, 36).

In her analysis of Arendt’s work, Benhabib (1992: 77) suggests to differentiate between the two types of public space presented by Arendt, namely an “agonistic space” and an “associational space”.¹³ According to the “agonistic view”, the public realm is a competitive space characterised by competition for recognition and precedence. It is “that space of appearance in which moral and political greatness, heroism, and preeminence are revealed, displayed, shared with others” (Benhabib 1992: 78), for example the Greek *polis* or the Roman *res publica*. In contrast, the “associational view” postulates that public space evolves where men act together in concert. This “action in concert” is critical as it produces power. For Arendt (1958: 200), action and power are fundamental constituents of the public realm. Power arises, where people act in concert and it disappears the moment people leave. Power keeps the public realm in existence. It needs to be constantly actualised, otherwise it is likely to dissolve (Arendt 1958: 244). Thus, public spaces are considered to be “sites of power, of common action coordinated through speech and persuasion” (Benhabib 1992: 78). In the associational view, the quality of

¹¹ Nas (1993: 14, 61) defines a symbol as a form to which a certain meaning is ascribed. Thus, symbolism is understood as the “attribution” of meaning. Urban symbols are public symbols.

¹² For the ancient city-state, Arendt (1958: 28) states that the private and public realm were two separated entities; the “distinction between a private and a public sphere of life corresponds to the household and the political realms”. The term *oikia* refers to the private sphere of the household. The private sphere is grounded in the necessities of life, as men have to work to provide nourishment for the family and women give birth. Conversely, according to Aristotle, the “good life” meaning the *bios politikos* was determined by freedom from labour and work as well as independence from the biological life process (Arendt 1958: 36 f.; Arendt 1978: 117). Only those who were considered Athenian citizens possessed freedom from labour, and thus leisure time. “As living beings, concerned with the preservation of life, men are confronted with and driven by necessity. Necessity must be mastered before the political ‘good life’ can begin, and it can be mastered only through domination. Hence the freedom of ‘good life’ rests on the domination of necessity” (Arendt 1978: 117). Yet, with the emergence of the modern nation-state, and the “rise of the social”, the distinction between the private and public realm was blurred (Arendt 1958: 28).

¹³ The distinction between “agonistic” and “associational” space is made along two of Arendt’s major works, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and *The Human Condition*.

power outweighs the topographical quality of space, a critical aspect for an analysis of public space in Hanoi.

Correspondingly, Mitchell (2003: 34) argues that:

“Implicit in much theorizing about the public sphere is the assumption that the provision of an adequate space (or in some renderings, an adequate technology) will perforce create a vibrant public sphere. The proliferation of and perhaps democratic control over places to meet, gather and interact (whether these places be town squares, electronic communities, television chat shows, or the ‘media’) are often seen as sufficient to the creation of a public sphere”.

Likewise, Drummond (2000: 2380) qualifies the assumption of a correlation between public space and public sphere by stating that “the ideals of the public sphere and the realities of public space often do not coincide in Western societies”.

Zukin (1995: 45) defines public space “as places that are physically there, as geographical and symbolic centres, as points of assembly where strangers mingle”. Sennett (2008: 38) adds the attraction of several activities in one place to this definition. Yet, Mitchell (2003: 5) remarks that the idea of public space as space of interaction and the co-mingling of strangers was never guaranteed, but “won through concerted struggle”. This point, made by Benhabib, Mitchell and Drummond, is most crucial to the study of public spaces in Hanoi. This thesis argues that a multiplicity of public spaces is emerging in Hanoi, yet differing to the degree of being “public”. As Mitchell (2003: 35) outlines:

“(…), what makes a space *public* – a space in which the cry and demand for the right to the city can be seen and heard – is often not its preordained ‘publicness.’ Rather, it is when, to fulfil a pressing need, some group or another *takes* space and through its actions *makes* it public”.

In this light, the focus of research lies on the social production of public spaces in the city rather than taking their mere existence for granted.

Löw (2001: 190, 194) states that space is produced and transformed within and through action. The constitution of space is accompanied by negotiations of power relations.

Furthermore, Lefebvre (1991: 33, 129) declares that social realities only become real and concrete if they are inscribed in space.¹⁴ In other words, relations of production are manifested in space in the forms of buildings, monuments, or works of art.

¹⁴ Bourdieu highlights the significance of the distribution of resources and commodities for an analysis of space, identifying the possibilities of the appropriation of resources as an important factor. Bourdieu (1991: 27) distinguishes between physical and social space. Despite this differentiation, like Lefebvre, he emphasises the interrelationship between the two. For him, social space is a structure of co-existent social positions. Social space consists of social subspaces or so-called “fields”. The structure of these fields is based on the unequal distribution of different kinds of capital. Therefore economic, intellectual, and art fields, etc., evolve. Social space is almost completely realised within physical space. This realisation of social space in physical space is manifested in the distribution of commodities, services, actors, and groups, as well as in their different possibilities of appropriating commodities and services in physical space (Bourdieu 1991: 29). Yet, social and physical space are not identical. Reified concretised social space equals appropriated physical space. The capability to dominate appropriated space through the symbolic or material appropriation of distributed commodities relies on the specific capital. From the position of a social actor in physical space, conclusions can be drawn about his position in social space (Bourdieu 1991: 26).

In his work, *The production of space*, Lefebvre (1991: 11) ceases to regard space as the “passive locus of social relations”, but considers it to have an active “operational or instrumental” role itself.¹⁵ The result is a relational conception of space, a tripartite system of spatiality. Within this system, he distinguishes between three spatial moments: “spatial practices”, “representations of space”, and “spaces of representation”.¹⁶ Lefebvre regards the three spheres dialectically inseparable from one another.¹⁷

Spatial practices concern the space of everyday production and reproduction. It is space that is perceived to be real. “Perceived” space is that materialised empirical space that is directly sensible. It has always been the traditional focus of all spatial disciplines (Prigge 1991: 106; Soja 1996: 74). Spatial practices of society dominate and, at the same time, occupy space. Soja (1996: 66) considers these practices to be “the process of producing the material form of social spatiality”. Spatial practices ensure continuity and a certain degree of cohesion (Lefebvre 1991: 33).

Representations of space comprise ideologies of the political technical domination of space and are tied to the relations of production, and consequently to knowledge, signs and codes (Lefebvre 1991: 33; Prigge 1991: 106). They are “conceived” spaces (Soja 1996: 67). Finally, representations of space are to mediate between the space of the individual and the larger social and historical realities. Lefebvre describes this level as architecture, urban planning, nation building and social engineering (Wegner 2002: 14 f.).

In contrast, spaces of representation comprise dominated and experienced space; in fact, it is the “lived” space of “inhabitants” and “users” (Soja 1996: 36). It is distinct from the other two moments of space, while at the same time it encompasses them. Moreover, embodying symbolism, it is closely linked to the clandestine of social life and to art. It refers to space that is experienced through the accompanying images and symbols. Finally, it superimposes physical space by making symbolical use of its objects (Soja 1996: 68). Spaces of representation are spaces of expression supplementing spatial practices and representations of space. This aspect of space has the capacity to undermine the dominant order and discourse, and to imagine other spaces. Those resistant spaces that scrutinise existent social conditions might be found in spaces of art, mythical, or pre-modern spaces (Lefebvre 1991: 33; Löw et al. 2008: 54).

“Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time” (Lefebvre 1991: 42).

In sum, Prigge (1991: 106) locates the significance of Lefebvre’s conception of space in its recognition of all three moments of space, in contrast to most other urban sociological approaches that remain restricted to the first and second moment. All three-spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation-share the common characteristic that they are all shaped by the workings of power (Soja 1996: 87). A further crucial aspect is the concept’s emphasis on the role of communication and social interaction in the production of

¹⁵ Both, Lefebvre (1991) and Foucault present a relational conception of space. For Foucault (1994: 178) space is no longer perceived as an empty container or void, but contemporary space is an ensemble of relations, which define emplacements. Emplacements are constituted by relations of proximity between elements and points. Formally, these relations are described as grids, trees or series (Foucault 1994: 177 f.).

¹⁶ This tripartition of space refers to Lacan’s distinction of “the real”, “the symbolic” and “the imaginary”. With his recognition of the complexity of imaginary and symbolic processes embedded in space, Lefebvre introduces a completely new approach to the analysis of space (Prigge 1991: 101).

¹⁷ Although Lefebvre (1991: 40) stresses the necessity of the interconnectedness of the three moments of social space, he adds that they only constitute a coherent whole under favourable circumstances, the establishment of a common language, a consensus and a code.

space. Whereas representations of space are dominated by profit-seeking interests, meaning that space is structured by market principles, spaces of representation are reliant on communication and social interaction between users and inhabitants. Furthermore, being lived spaces, they are constituted by practices of everyday life. De Certeau (1984: xiv) regards practices of everyday life as modes of resistance, evading discipline from within the sphere it is exercised from. Through practices of everyday life, users are able to re-appropriate space governed by the “techniques of sociocultural production” (De Certeau 1984: xiv).

In his work, *The right to the city*, an obvious reference to Lefebvre’s *Le droit à la ville*¹⁸, Mitchell (2003: 129) contends that public space actually evolves out of the dialectic between representations of space and spaces of representation. Mitchell links the two spatial moments to the two prevailing views of public space; that is as “a controlled and orderly *retreat* where a properly behaved public might experience the spectacle of the city” (Mitchell 2003: 128) on the one hand, and a space open for social interaction and unconstrained from coercion on the other. Here, he succeeds in constructing an empirical analogy. According to Mitchell, representations of space correspond to the controlled and ordered, whereas spaces of representation are “appropriated” spaces, thereby becoming sites of oppositional political action. Consequently, public spaces are spaces for representation, from which the demand for the right to the city can be expressed and become visible (Mitchell 2003: 129).

In fact, Mitchell follows up on Arendt’s conception of public space as a space of appearance. In this context, Benhabib (2006: 313) particularly stresses the relevance of face-to-face interactions. Public space makes communication and interaction among private individuals possible, enabling them to form a public. Furthermore, it allows a formed collective to make itself visible in the public arena of the city.

In conclusion, Arendt’s emphasis on the spatial location of public spheres implies the existence of plural public spaces¹⁹, an essential element for identifying a multiplicity of public spaces in Hanoi. Moreover, focus is placed on understanding public spaces as socially produced entities, including the practices as well as the symbolic communicative function of public space. Additionally, Habermas’ conception of public sphere, deriving from impersonal contacts through means of communication, becomes most relevant with regard to the formation of public opinion in virtual/digital space.²⁰ Although government ministries, the party and/or other official organisations own print media and digital press in Vietnam (Kerkvliet 2001: 251), increasingly articles and letters to the editor critical to local politics are published.

Based on empirical data, the thesis will illustrate that a multiplicity of public spaces is evolving in Hanoi, of which some become ‘associational’ or ‘agonistic’ spaces, while others-public in Zukin’s and Sennett’s definition-are primarily used for leisure and social or private economic activities. Yet, this does not mean that the latter cannot be transformed into public spaces in Arendt’s sense. The main premise is that public space is constantly redefined.

¹⁸ According to Lefebvre (1996: 173), the “right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit”. Thus, Mitchell (2003: 6) concludes that the right to the city is defined by debates about the accessibility of public space as well as forms of exclusion.

¹⁹ According to Howell (1993: 317) the acknowledgement of “competing notions of the common good” of diverse communities, and thus Arendt’s emphasis on localism rather than on universalism is exactly what distinguishes Arendt’s understanding of politics from Habermas’.

²⁰ Habermas (1987: 225) in particular, points to the communicative function of the print media in the 18th/19th century. It communicated and enforced the reasoning of private people assembled to form a public. He contrasts the print media to today’s mass media, which instead of communicating reasoning shapes it. „Während die Presse früher das Raisonement der zum Publikum versammelten Privatleute bloß vermitteln und verstärken konnte, wird dieses nun umgekehrt durch die Massenmedien erst geprägt“ (Habermas 1987: 225).

Places of economic profit-making like the streets and sidewalks – the so-called “pavement economy” (Forbes 1996a: 62) – or leisure spaces like Thong Nhat Park can from time to time be turned into spaces of “concerted struggle” as well.²¹

1.1 Data collection and analysis

The data presented in this thesis were collected during a one year field research from September 2007 until September 2008. Two additional short-term visits were conducted in March and December 2010. The required data were assessed through a triangulation of qualitative, mainly ethnographic, and quantitative methods. Major methods of data collection were participant observation, semi-structured and narrative interviews, expert interviews, newspaper analysis, as well as a review of literature.

To date, research on public space by Vietnamese scholars has primarily focused on the transformation, as well as the usage of public space within housing units. Most studies deal with public spaces such as playgrounds and courtyards in public housing estates established during the Socialist urban planning period.²² However, rather than taking the social production of public space into account, these studies look at public space as an object of planning. The Vietnamese term for public space *khong gian cong cong--khong gian* literally meaning space and *cong cong* public--hints towards a rather technocratic approach. The term is mainly adopted from the field of urban planning and architecture. Another translation of public space is put forward by the Vietnamese architect Pham Trong Thuat. He introduces the term *khong gian sinh hoat cong cong*, which besides space (*khong gian*), also denotes living activities (*sinh hoat*) in public (*cong cong*) (Pham Trong Thuat 2002: 98). However, the problem remains that both terms are not used colloquially. This was also one of the main experiences during the fieldwork; when asked about their usage of public space, respondents simply did not know what was being referred to. Instead, it needed to be asked where they liked to go to during their free time (*di choi*). A frequent answer was that they enjoy to “go out on the street” (*ra ngoai duong*). In these responses, an emic distinction between private and public is immanent since “public” appears to be associated with “going out”. Other interviewees answered more precisely by naming a specific form of public space like a “park” (*cong vien*) or the “lakeside” (*bo ho*).

Participant observation was carried out within four “public” spaces at the municipal level, and several local public spaces on the ward level. The samples were selected following an operationalisation of public space according to Zukin’s (1995: 45) definition “as places that are physically there, as geographical and symbolic centers, as points of assembly where strangers mingle”. According to these criteria, the following four places were identified at the municipal level: Ba Dinh Square, Ly Thai To Square, Lenin Monument, and Thong Nhat Park. During field research, minutes of observation and photos of the examined places were regularly taken at different times of the day.

²¹ Benhabib (1992: 80) criticizes Arendt for her “phenomenological essentialism” in the way that she assigns work and labour to the private realm alone. In this manner, all struggles and negotiations linked to topics of work and labour become ultimately excluded from public space. Benhabib argues against this that work and labour will become a topic of public discourse if they are subject to “asymmetrical power relations” that are disputed and challenged. Again, the reference to power is critical. Activities of labour and work are always linked to power differentials, and therefore can become public spaces or more precisely sites of public spheres, where negotiations take place. It is in this sense, that the pavement economy in Hanoi is turned into a public space. In the case of the pavement economy, work and labour have been set on the public agenda of the city.

²² See for example the works by Pham Trong Thuat (2002), and Tran Hoai Anh and E. Dalholm (2005).

Adopting the method of *thick description*²³ the collected data was brought into “an inspectable form” (Geertz 1973: 19) and therefore an image of the studied places could be drawn comprising diverse activities and events occurring in a specific space at a particular time.

A further part of the fieldwork consisted of a case study on the practices and materiality of local public spaces in the urban ward of Ngoc Ha. Comprising a whole string of former village communities, public spaces in this foremost residential area consist of sacred spaces such as communal houses, Buddhist pagodas, and temples, as well as local markets and lakesides. Here, again the method of participant observation was applied. In addition, semi-structured and narrative interviews with residents of the urban ward as well as semi-structured and open interviews with members of the management boards of Ngoc Ha, Dai Yen and Huu Tiep Communal Houses were conducted.

Information on the history of the studied places was obtained from the review of documents in National Archive No. 1 as well as in the National Library Hanoi. Most of the data acquired there stem from the colonial period.

In addition, expert interviews with sociologists, social anthropologists, historians, geographers, and architects of the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences and the Vietnam National University Hanoi were conducted.

With respect to the role of the media in the course of political will formation, newspaper analysis was applied as a further method. The main focus was on two daily newspapers: *Thanh Nien* and *An Ninh Thu Do*. *Thanh Nien*, literally meaning “youth”, is the official organ of the Vietnam National Youth Federation with its head office in Ho Chi Minh City. *An Ninh Thu Do* is the official Hanoi police newspaper. Furthermore, *Tuoi Tre*, *Tien Phong* and *Ha Noi Moi* Newspapers, and their digital versions and internet platforms such as *VietNamNet*, were also analysed. Additionally, platforms for debate such as letters to the editor or digital discussion fora were of major concern for the analysis.

Quantitative data was acquired from secondary sources such as newspaper articles, World Bank reports, and reports by the United Nations. Quantitative data on the usage and amount of area of public space in Hanoi was attained from the Comprehensive Urban Development Programme in Hanoi Capital City of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (HAIDEP 2007a, 2007b) prepared by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in cooperation with the People’s Committee of Hanoi.

²³ In his semiotic approach to culture, Geertz (1973: 14) depicts culture as “interworked systems of construable signs”. Consequently, culture constitutes a context, in which events, institutions, behaviour, etc., can be thickly described. These symbol systems can best be accessed by studying events, as cultural forms are articulated through social action (Geertz 1973: 5, 17). According to Geertz, the advantage of *thick description* lies in its generalisation within cases as compared to the generalisation across cases. Thus, the primary objective is not the codification of abstract regularities, which is the task of theory building, but ethnographic description is rather microscopic (Geertz 1973: 26). Nonetheless, the anthropologist has to face the same “grand realities” as political scientists, sociologists, historians, etc., do, albeit in a smaller or more “homely context”, where the anthropologist has “extended acquaintances with extremely small matters” (Geertz 1973: 21). These so-called “grand realities” comprise power, change, faith, authority, violence, prestige, etc. “It is with the kind of material produced by long-term, mainly (though not exclusively) qualitative, highly participative, and almost obsessively fine-comb field study in confined contexts that the mega-concepts with which contemporary social science is afflicted – legitimacy, modernization, integration, conflict, charisma, structure, ... meaning – can be given the sort of sensible actuality that makes it possible to think not only realistically and concretely about them, but, what is more important, creatively and imaginatively with them” (Geertz 1973: 23).

2 Hanoi's Urbanism

According to Wheatley (1969: 8 f.), modern urban theory has neglected to date the “genre of urbanism characteristic of the traditional world”. Most studies focus on the modern industrialised city as it exists in America, Europe and Japan, and only few are concerned with the “cosmo-magical symbolism” inherent to the traditional city. This pre-industrial urban form mediated between the mundane and the sacred and it is exactly this linkage between the profane and the sacred that determines Hanoi's urbanism.

2.1 Early State Formation

In his assessment of early state formation in Southeast Asia, Wertheim (1980) differentiates between inland states and harbour principalities; he distinguishes the first as entities that are closely linked to the sacred, while the economic base of the latter is built on trade and commerce. Early state formation in Vietnam followed the principles of inland states. After gaining independence from China in the 11th century the Ly Dynasty (1010-1225) introduced a centralised administrative system that allowed for control over territory and population in the Red River Delta. In 1054, Dai Co Viet was renamed in Dai Viet (Taylor 1991: 281). Political centralisation was recognised as a necessary means to maintain independence from China. The territory included fertile lands favouring wet-rice cultivation and consequently the centralised state's source of revenues was agricultural production. In 1010, King Ly Thai To installed the royal capital of Thang Long along the banks of the Red River. Geographically, the area represented the centre of the kingdom's territory; later it became the cult centre from which the territory was controlled and towards which the state was oriented (Wheatley 1971: 264).²⁴

According to Wheatley (1969: 9), the capital was able to mediate between the sacred and profane worlds. He explains that in religions where human order emerged at the creation of the world, cosmogony was dramatised through the creation of a “reduced version of the cosmos” - or, in Eliade's (1957: 26) terms, an “*imago mundi*” - on earth, which usually found its physical expression in the state capital (Wheatley 1969: 10). Thus, the capital was a ceremonial site establishing a cosmo-magical symbolism. Accordingly Wheatley argues:

“... the representative capitals of the traditional world were *axes mundi* where it was possible to effect an ontological transition between the worlds, quintessentially sacred enclaves within which man could proclaim the knowledge that he shared with the gods and dramatize the cosmic truth that had been revealed to him. As such they were more often than not constructed as *imagines mundi* with the cosmogony as paradigmatic model, islands of sacred symbolism in the intrinsically hostile continuum of profane space. They were theatres for the performance of the rituals and ceremonies which guaranteed man's liberation from the terrors of the natural world” (Wheatley 1969: 26 f.).

Apart from its mediating function, the capital also held a redistributive function as well. In fact, it was a sacred centre of re-distribution. Wheatley (1971: 264) asserts that the appropriative role of the centre consisted of its rights over the disposal of specific goods.²⁵ This development was made possible through the generation of a centralising power whose authority

²⁴ In his work *The Birth of Vietnam* Keith Taylor (1991) provides a balanced view of the early history of Vietnam by drawing on both Chinese and Vietnamese sources.

²⁵ Wheatley (1971: 265) presents the impressive example of Angkor, where foundations of temple steles indicate that precious commodities such as gold and silver, sandalwood, diamonds, etc., as well as thousands of people were offered to shrines in order to worship the gods. Most data stems from the period of Jayavarman VII., a follower of Buddhism.

was acknowledged by formalised sanctions and the evolution of new social institutions (Wheatley 1971: 267).

In his work, *Oriental Despotism*, Wittfogel (1957) introduces the concept of a “hydraulic society”, which is characterised by a strong centralised state bureaucracy. He argues that the need for organisation and management of large irrigation systems results in the evolution of a powerful bureaucracy that assumes coordinating functions. This “hydraulic bureaucracy” was able to mobilise the maximum labour force through hydraulic corvee²⁶, allowing for an expansion of agricultural production in order to attain socio-economic development. Wittfogel contends that rule over water finally resulted in a “total and despotic” government (Wheatley 1971: 289 f.). However, Wittfogel’s theory met diverse criticism. In particular, Wheatley (1971: 289) challenges the “analytical value of a theory which is so generalized that it tells us little more than that all these rulers were despotic (however, that term be defined), and that they ruled with the aid of corps of bureaucrats”. Moreover, he criticises Wittfogel’s single criterion of comparison, which is “the evolution of Western-style institutions”, in combination with despotism, which is a “sociologically unacceptable concept” (Wheatley 1971: 291). Furthermore, Eberhard (1954 cited Wheatley 1971: 292) illustrates that large-scale hydraulic constructions in China were built mainly for transportation. The labour force for these edifices was mobilised through cooperative action at the local level or by a district official rather than the central government. It is under the influence of this extensive critique²⁷ that Wheatley (1971: 297) concludes:

“In the light of this consensus we have no choice but to deny irrigation the role of an autonomous causative factor in the emergence of primary urban forms. At best it can have been but a component in an extremely intricate network of cause and effect. As for the large-scale hydraulic systems to whose managerial requirements Wittfogel ascribed the power of generating coercive bureaucratic controls, they appear to have been more a result than a cause of the emergence of state and urban organizations. This is not to deny, however, that irrigation was often one of a group of functionally interrelated factors operating to augment agricultural productivity, and thus to facilitate the realization of a social surplus whenever a locus of power had crystallized out in society”.

In sum, although Wheatley does not deny the requirement of a superordinate authority to mobilise large numbers of the labour force, he determines that for such constructions an authority was presupposed, not the other way round. Consequently, ceremonial centres qualify as urban forms as they symbolise the transformation from a predominantly reciprocative structure to a “superordinate redistributive mode of economic integration”, resulting in the formation of “effective economic space”. Overall, the city was a “sacred space, the sanctified *habitabilis* of a group integrated politically, socially and economically by the reallocative functions of the central shrine” (Wheatley 1971: 389).

²⁶ In Northern Vietnam, hydraulic corvee was used to maintain the dyke system of the royal capital. As Thang Long was constructed below the level of the Red River, there was already a network of dykes called La Thanh erected in the 8th century.

²⁷ With respect to Vietnam, Wheatley (1971: 296) asserts that the lower Mekong valley is almost the only area of nuclear urbanism that does not completely contradict Wittfogel’s thesis. Chinese annals report of a kingdom in the first century AD called B’iu-nam which had hydraulic systems of considerable size. Yet, as the history of the kingdom still is elliptical, it is unclear how these systems chronologically related to the formation of cities in the lower Mekong region. Furthermore, prehistoric remnants of small-scale hydraulic systems were found in the Gio-Linh uplands of Quang Tri Province, but then again a state apparatus was not involved in the organisation of labour force.

2.1.1 The Vietnamese ruler: sacred and profane authority

According to Wheatley (1969: 18), Asian capitals “were the material instruments of a particular political theory”, and therefore established a relationship between the political system and its urban form. In Vietnam, the overall power of the ruler was represented in the highly centralised administrative system as well as in Hanoi’s outstanding position within Vietnam’s urban system.

The Vietnamese ruler was called *vua* or *vuong*, corresponding to the Chinese term for king, *wang*. The king was a tributary of the Chinese emperor, which might explain why he was not referred to as “emperor”. The king’s responsibility was to mediate between the transcendental and the secular. In this sense, he had to fulfil two major functions. First, as he was the chosen one, he was to guide his subjects to moral action. He was responsible for the maintenance of social justice and order. Second, in his role as high priest, he had to make oblations to deities in order to achieve peace and prosperity for his followers (Chapuis 1995: 197; Cima 1987).

In reference to Weber’s definition of domination, the political theory of precolonial Vietnam can be regarded a composition of both “traditional” and “charismatic” domination.²⁸ The traditional character of domination was built on the common belief in the sacredness of the “mandate of heaven”. The ruler’s legitimacy was based on his virtue. In turn, his virtuousness constituted the foundation for charismatic domination. His subjects obeyed his rule because they believed in his morality; only a virtuous ruler was deemed capable of preventing his people from suffering.

Although it was not until the 15th century that Confucianism officially became state doctrine, Confucian ethics exerted great impact on the institutionalisation of power relations in Vietnam.²⁹ Vietnamese society was structured along the following “three bonds” (*tam cuong*): first, the subject’s submission to the ruler; second, the child’s submission to the parents; and third the wife’s submission to the husband (Woodside 2001: 196). At the top of the social pyramid was the king followed by princes, courtiers, military commanders and civil officials, who all expected obedience from common subjects (Marr 2004: 28 f.). Woodside (1976: 29) remarks that in principle, the emperor and mandarins cared little about the people’s livelihood and the people in turn “knew nothing about the inner business of the imperial bureaucracy”.³⁰

The organisation of society along the three bonds resulted in the pre-eminence of vertical relationships. This stands in sharp contrast to the mandala ideologies of other Southeast Asian inland states. In the mandala structure, power radiated horizontally from the centre in concentric circles. By contrast, in Vietnam political ideology functioned along vertical ties institutionalised in an administrative hierarchy extending from the capital down to the village (Marr 2004: 47).

²⁸ In many works on the history of Vietnam, the term “feudalism” is applied to describe the political system during dynastic rule. However, Lockhart and Duiker (2006: 133) remark that “generally speaking the model of feudalism is not a comfortable fit for much of Vietnamese history”. The only period that bore “some resemblance to European feudalism” was the reign of the Tran Dynasty, during which large estates were owned by members of the royal family and nobles, thus controlling land and man power.

²⁹ Although the rise of the Ly Dynasty marked the development of an empire independent from China, it must be noted that the Ly kings maintained many of the political and social institutions introduced by the Chinese. In particular, political institutions were built upon Confucianism (Nguyen D. Chi 1996).

³⁰ Woodside (1976: 29) contends that the concern of “society” and the workings of the “nation” were actually disassociated from each other.

2.2 Administrative system during dynastic rule

On the local level, the rural village (*xa*) was the basic unit of administration. The specific characteristic of the village lay in its position as both an administrative unit and a social entity.³¹ The social structure of the village consisted of family clans. Village lineages were to preserve the survival of the family line (Phan Huy Le 2006: 28). Beyond family authority, the ruling authority in the village was the council of notables (*hoi dong ky muc*).³² It consisted of male elders who supervised internal affairs according to customary rules (*tuc le*). The village head (*ly truong*) was usually a young man aspiring to belong to the notables one day. The main responsibility of the village council was to protect the village's interests against the outside world (Marr 2004: 29). Accordingly, the specific tasks of the village officers and notables were divided into internal and external affairs. Internal affairs comprised the periodic reallocation of public land, resolution of intra-village disputes, punishment of villagers for minor crimes, and the collection of fees for the maintenance of local facilities. Conversely, external affairs included the organisation of the protection against outside thieves, communication with neighbouring villages, as well as the interaction with higher administrative levels. In the decision-making process, the council was not the only organ of power but also maintained a participatory attribute through the council's consultation of other village organisations, like the literati association, lineage councils, brotherhoods and neighbourhood groups. In sum, the village society arranged itself according to hierarchical principles, while searching for elite consensus (Marr 2004: 30 f.).

Above the village was the commune. The commune head was chosen by the village elders in approval with the district mandarin. Beyond this was the canton (*tong*), often comprising fishing villages, tenant housing on estates, artisan clusters, and guild quarters.³³ The canton chiefs were elected by the district or prefecture mandarins from a list passed on from below. Canton officials acted as intermediaries between the villages/communes and the district level. They informed the higher levels about the villages' difficulties and aspirations. Additionally, they were to assist the district mandarin in collecting taxes, conscripting soldiers, and organising corvee labour for public works. The district magistrate (*tri huyen*) was in charge on the district level. He represented the emperor's power in the province. His tasks included the enforcement of quotas set by higher levels, dispensing social justice, monitoring economic conditions, as well as looking for signs of unrest (Marr 2004: 33). In order to supervise the villages, district magistrates travelled from place to place by palanquin or boat to make allies and to exchange favours (Marr 2004: 34). Although some districts were the site of a market place or artisans' settlements, Marr (2004: 34) maintains that the district did not bear the same functions of a town.

³¹ Before dynastic times, villages used to be autonomous entities headed by a male leader called *gia lang*. His leadership was legitimised by his experience and prestige. The monarchy made use of this natural community to form the basic administrative unit of *xa*, which denotes village. Under the Le Dynasty the so-called *xa* finally became the organisational template at the bottom of the state ladder (Marr 2004: 32; Phan Huy Le 2006: 32). Marr (2004: 32) remarks that most of the communities kept on referring to itself internally as *lang*, *thon* or *ap*. Phan Huy Le (2006: 28) adds that the actual Vietnamese term for village (*lang*) was mainly used in folksongs, proverbs and vernacular literature.

³² Großheim (2004: 55) reports that the Ly Dynasty tried to exert direct rule over villages by appointing mandarins (*xa quan*) on the village level. Their main tasks were the collection of taxes, the recruitment of villagers for the corvee and military service. In 1280, the annals first mention the existence of councils of notables (*hoi dong ky muc*) that officials had to consult.

³³ Marr (2004: 33) remarks that the canton often was less a functioning government unit than a satisfaction of the local elites' demand for official titles.

A collection of three to five districts formed a prefecture (*phu*).³⁴ During the rule of the Le (1428-1788) and Nguyen (1802-1945) Dynasties, the prefecture had a predominantly administrative function. The walled compound comprised a mandarin hall, the official residences as well as the warehouse where taxes were stored (Marr 2004: 34). Thus, even within the prefecture a segregation was evident between the sphere of officialdom and the sphere of commoners.

Unlike the canton and district, provincial capitals of the 19th century exhibited distinct urban qualities, often including a citadel which served as a military site, shops, and leisure spaces such as tea houses and ateliers. The population of provincial towns rarely exceeded 5,000 inhabitants (Marr 2004: 35). Moreover, Marr (2004: 35) remarks that there was a functional division between the official and economic sphere introduced by the emperor. He argues that “[w]here commercial centres did exist, it seems that the emperor chose to position the provincial capital elsewhere to avoid pollution by merchants, money lenders and foreigners”. The ruler’s fear of commercial elites gaining political power and contesting his rule was certainly one reason for this preference. A further explanation may relate to the low-level reputation of traders in Vietnamese society rooted in Confucianism. Traditionally, society was divided into four strata; scholars (*si*), peasants (*nong*), craftsmen (*cong*) and traders (*thuong*) and accordingly, traders were viewed as subordinates to society.

In conclusion, during the pre-colonial administrative system, larger settlements existed but only few were to develop urban features like the provincial towns. The concentration of administrative functions in these agglomerates is striking. Moreover, the spatial exclusion of specific social groups, such as traders, already hints towards a critical element of Hanoi’s urbanism, the exclusiveness of space associated with officialdom and sacredness.

2.2.1 Vietnam’s urban system

The first Vietnamese succession settlements documented by Vietnamese archaeologists are settlements along the northern and western fringes of the Red River and Ma River Delta dating from the 3rd millennium BC. The largest of these settlements is associated with the site of the ancient capital of the Hung kings. The Hung kingdom of Van Lang is believed to have ruled from 7th century BC. Around this time the different cultures of Northern Vietnam were united under “the influence of the oldest bronze-using culture”, marking the beginning of the so-called Dong Son Culture (Taylor 1991: 4). However, the first recorded kingdom is the Au Lac kingdom (258 B.C. - 207 B. C.). Under its reign, Co Loa, located thirty-five kilometres north of present day Hanoi, formed the centre, the first reported fortified Vietnamese city. Keyes (1977 cited Douglass et al. 2002: 1-8) refers to this kind of city as “garrison city”, a construction that was also maintained by the Han military administrators during the Chinese occupation in 32 BC. They founded small garrisons in the populous northern and western fringes of the Red River Delta, next to ethnic Vietnamese settlements along important transport routes. These prefectures served as barracks for troops, centres of administration, entrepôts, and market places, as well as points for cultural and religious exchange (Douglass et al. 2002: 1-9). This early stage of urbanisation in Vietnam provides evidence of urban features as proposed by Weber (1978: 1213 f.), who defines the city as an administrative as well as an economic centre whose core is constituted by the market place.

In the 5th century, the Chinese founded a military station in the province of Tong Binh at the estuary where the To Lich River flows into the Red River. In the 7th century, this settlement was made the capital of the Vietnamese protectorate, which was at that time called Annam.

³⁴ Marr (2004: 34) argues that in the 19th century, the prefecture duplicated the role of the district, especially in South-Central and Southern Vietnam.

Subsequently, in the 9th century, the fortification of the citadel was enlarged and the site was named Dai La. After the defeat of the Chinese in 938 A.D., Ngo Quyen reinstalled the capital of his dynasty in Co Loa. However, his reign only lasted thirty years. In 968, he was overthrown by Dinh Bo Linh, a local chieftain, who then renamed himself Dinh Tien Hoang. He brought political unity to the country, naming it Dai Co Viet (Great Viet) (Taylor 1991: 281). Dinh Tien Hoang shifted the capital to Hoa Lu (968-1009), far away from the Chinese border and about 100 km south of present-day Hanoi (Waibel 2002: 52). To guarantee independence from China, he sent a delegation, as well as triennial tributary payments, to China thereby accepting its suzerainty (Cima 1987). Finally, in 1010 King Ly Thai To installed the royal capital of Thang Long close to the site of the former Chinese Dai La citadel, thereby determining the location of present-day Hanoi.

Except for the royal capital of Thang Long, there is not much evidence of any other large urban agglomerations during medieval times. Under the rule of the Ly and the Tran Dynasty (1225-1400), Thang Long remained the royal capital. It was only in 1400 that the capital was periodically transferred to Thanh Hoa Province. In 1407, Thang Long was returned to its former status, as result of the invasion of the Ming Dynasty from China (Nguyen Vinh Phuc 1995: 45). It is reported that under the rule of the Le Dynasty some urban settlements in the north, as well as in the south, emerged as economic and political centres. Pho Hien, Vi Hoang, Phu Xuan, Thanh Ha, Hoi An, Tran Bien and Ben Nghe are the major cities that came into existence during this period. Except for Phu Xuan, present-day Hue, and Hoi An, these cities never had the potential to severely challenge Hanoi's dominant role as political centre. It was only in economic terms that the new cities were able to contest Hanoi's hegemony. In particular, the harbour city of Hoi An, located in Central Vietnam, took on an important role in the entrepot trade between China and Japan. It competed with other Asian port cities, such as Macao (Nguyen Thua Hy 2002: 281; Wheeler 2006: 165). In the 17/18th century, the Nguyen lords were able to form an opposing power in the South based on Hoi An's commercial potential. Charles Wheeler (2006: 167) marks that foreign trade was a crucial point in the Nguyen's opposition to the Trinh clan reigning in the Northern city of Thang Long.³⁵ Through the establishment of mercantile links, the Nguyen were able to obtain weapons, revenue and information about their adversary's activities. The port of Hoi An was attractive to merchants because of the court's guarantee to provide a haven where merchants could "safely gather".³⁶ The ruler himself did not reside within the harbour principality of Hoi An, but in Cham Garrison founded in 1602. This garrison was located away from the sea and Hoi An, overlooking the local riverside market of Sai Giang. The location of the religious centre, consisting of Long Hung Monastery and a temple on Buu Chau hill, a sacred space for the Cham³⁷, indicates the Nguyen's political focus on the hinterland (Wheeler 2006: 171 ff.). Notwithstanding this contestation of its function as political and sacred centre, Thang Long remained the capital of the Vietnamese kingdom until 1802, when the newly established Nguyen Dynasty shifted the royal capital to Phu Xuan.

Overall, the centralised political system with its basis in the royal capital did not leave much room for the rise of other cities with a political function. Comparing urban development in Vietnam and Europe during medieval times, the absence of anything coming close to the sort

³⁵ The Le Dynasty formally ruled the country, after a short period of Chinese domination, from 1428 until 1788. The political power of the Le Dynasty was diminished by conflicts between the Trinh lords in the North and the Nguyen lords in the South, which lasted from the 16th century until 1788 (Cima 1987).

³⁶ This is also the literal meaning of Hoi An (Wheeler 2006: 167).

³⁷ Up to the 10th century, the region around Hoi An, present-day Quang Nam Province, comprised the political and religious centre of the Kingdom of Champa (*Chiem Thanh*). The Champa Empire was based on Hinduism and Sanskrit. In 1471, the kingdom of Dai Viet under King Le Thanh Tong conquered the Champa territory. In reaction, the Champa kingdom took refuge in the South. Its final collapse is dated much later in 1832 (Wheeler 2006: 174).

of “Free Cities” that existed in Europe is recognisable. The only kind of settlement discussed in the literature that could have been classified autonomous was the Vietnamese village.³⁸ Corresponding to the motto, *Stadtluft macht frei* (“city air makes you free”), the Vietnamese believed in the adage, “the laws of the king are less than the customs of the village” (*phep vua thua le lang*). In general, Phan Huy Le (2006: 32) argues that village-state relations were characterised by both cooperation and confrontation.

In terms of autonomy, there was no constitution determining the ruler’s interference in village affairs. However, in practice, the king’s rule over the whole territory permitted the confiscation of land. This ambiguity is best demonstrated by the two more or less contradicting sayings, “the laws of the king are less than the customs of the village”, in contrast to “[t]here is no land under the vault of heaven that does not belong to the king” (*pho thien chi ha, mac phi vuong tho*). On one hand, villagers were well aware of the fact that what was granted by the ruler could easily be taken away. On the other hand, kings refrained from intervention into village affairs because they anticipated that compliance to royal edicts was low and could not be sustainably enforced (Marr 2004: 32). Consequently, rulers in Vietnam had to face problems similar to those of Southeast Asian mandala states. However, whereas within the mandala state, power vanished at the periphery, the central authority of the Vietnamese king diminished at lower administrative units, and hence along vertical lines.

2.2.2 Spatial enclosure: the sacred and the profane

A typical feature of both urban areas and villages was the replication of power differentials in space. Physical boundaries in the form of walls, fences, moats, etc., indicated different spheres of power. The distinction made between community and strangers, the sacred and the profane found its spatial manifestation in the demarcation of territory. The result is an exclusiveness of spaces associated with officialdom.

In urban areas the citadel was a crucial characteristic. The most common form was the aforementioned garrison city, a fortified settlement (Douglass et al. 2002: 1-9). Analogous to the garrison city, physical boundaries defined the village territory. Most often this limitation consisted of a bamboo hedge, sometimes amended by an earth wall or moat. The hedge was regarded a common property resource, therefore its maintenance was integrated into village statutes. A further similarity to cities is the orientation of the four gates towards the cardinal points. Access to the village was controlled. At night gates were closed and watched by guards. In front of these gates there was usually a banyan or kapok tree planted. In the trees’ shadow, tea and cake stalls were set up to serve refreshments to villagers returning home from fieldwork. The main lane consisted of a larger path leading into the village, which then split up into smaller alleys, which narrowed the deeper they went into the village (Nguyen Khac Tung 1993: 13 f.).

Villagers’ private space was also protected against outside intrusion. The concrete delineation of a family’s land hints towards the early conception of private property. Comparable to Chinese settlements, lots were marked by stones laid out on the four corners of the territory. Furthermore, the lot was surrounded by a fence or wall (Nguyen Khac Tung 1993: 16). Geomantic principles dictated that a private house would never face a road, dike or another house perpendicularly. The shape of the house signified the wealth of the owner. Rich people tended to build their house in a U-shape with the main house comprising two wings and a courtyard in the middle. Mandarins sometimes built H-shape houses. Among farmers it was common to construct L-shape dwellings. The main edifice had to face the south or southeast, as it was

³⁸ For elaborations on the rural village in Northern Vietnam see Phan Huy Le et al. (1993), Großheim (1997, 2004), Endres (2000), Nguyen Quang Ngoc (2009).

believed that evil powers could enter from the north with the cold wind in winter (Nguyen Khac Tung 1993: 17). The private house was surrounded by a veranda. This veranda designated a “transition space” between the house, which was considered an artificial space, and its natural surroundings (Nguyen Khac Tung 1993: 19).

Apart from the market, villagers’ social interaction mainly occurred within sacred spaces. These comprised the Buddhist pagoda (*chua*), the temple (*den*), the communal house (*dinh*), and the temple to worship scholars (*van chi*). Both the Buddhist pagoda’s and the communal house’s construction were financed by villagers’ contributions. In the communal house, the tutelary deity is worshipped, whereas the temple is used to honour a national hero or beneficent deity. A smaller temple which is dedicated to other genii is the *mieu*. Unlike the other sacred spaces of the village, it often lies in “out-of-the-way places” like a hillside, riverbank or the village’s outskirts. The *van chi* serves the cult of Confucius as well as “the manes of laureates of mandarin competitions who were natives of the village” (Nguyen Khac Tung 1993: 14). It is often centrally located, for instance next to the main gate, with an open terrace on which a raised platform serves as an altar (Nguyen Khac Tung 1993: 15 f.).

In this system of sacred spaces, the communal house is unique due to its incorporation of overlapping spheres of power during pre-colonial and colonial times. On one hand, the communal house represents a sacred space where the village deity was, and still is, worshipped on specific dates of the lunar calendar. On the other, it formed an official space, namely the administrative centre of the community, where the village council assembled and taxes were collected. Moreover, it was an exclusive space, where access was granted based on gender and social reputation. Endres (2000: 29) determines that so-called “strangers” (*ngoai tich*) or “non-natives” (*dan ngoai*) were only accepted as members of the village community after having lived in the community for three generations. Only then they were granted access to assemblances in the communal hall. The semiotics of the communal house and its redefinition over time will be elaborated on in Chapter 4 which discusses the correlation between sacrality and public.

In conclusion, different categories of space determined by their degree of accessibility seem to have existed from the earliest settlements in Vietnam onwards. A distinction between private and public spaces was both inherent in urban areas and in villages.

2.3 Thang Long – mediation between the mundane and the sacred

According to the founding legend, King Ly Thai To saw a dragon rise into the sky when he approached the citadel of Dai La (Logan 2000: 26).³⁹ Therefore he chose to locate the royal capital on this site and gave it the name Thang Long, which translates into “ascending dragon”. Additionally, Pedelahore (2001a: 42) notes that the location of Thang Long was selected based on geomantic principles, or more precisely the trilogy of harmony between heaven, earth and human. Likewise the royal edict on the capital’s foundation states:

“Furthermore, Dai La citadel that is the ancient citadel of Lord Cao Bien is situated in the space between Heaven and Earth, in the location where the dragon is coiled and the tiger crouching. The capital is laid out on North-South East-West axes and is favourably situated with regard to the mountains and river. The site is large and flat, the fields high and well enough exposed. The population is protected against high water and floods. Everything there flourishes and prospers. It is a most beautiful site where men and rich-

³⁹ Dai La citadel was built by the Chinese governour Kao P’ien according to geomantic principles (Mardolle 1923: 16).

es from the four cardinal points converge” (Tran Quoc Vuong, Nguyen Vinh Long 1977 cited Logan 2000: 34).

Unlike the Theravada-Buddhist centres of other inland states in Mainland Southeast Asia, Thang Long was built according to the Chinese conception of urban space. Wheatley (1971: 423) states that the Chinese city was surrounded by a high wall. The city’s gate-towers were used to project the ruler’s authority, with reference to the four cardinal points. Overall, the city was characterised by a centripetal orientation denominating a symbolic focus on the centre (Wheatley 1971: 426). Accordingly,

“[t]he city gates, where power generated at the *axis mundi* flowed out from the ceremonial complex towards the cardinal points of the compass, possessed heightened symbolic significance which, in virtually all Asian urban traditions, was expressed in massive constructions whose size far exceeded that necessary for the performance of their mundane functions of access and defence” (Wheatley 1969: 16).

In the spatial outline of the city, the North-South axis played an important role. It presented the the symbolism of “an ominous, threatening north opposed to a benign, auspicious south” (Wheatley 1969: 17). The more important official buildings were arranged along this axis, facing towards the south.

In contrast to the cities of ancient Hindu and Mahayana Southeast Asia where temples were located at the most sacred site formed by the *axis mundi*, in China the seat of the secular authority, or more specifically the royal palace, was erected on this site. Wheatley (1969: 12) argues that this difference is due to the concern in Chinese culture “with the ordering of society in this world rather than with personal salvation in a future life”. In the imperial Chinese capital, the royal palace corresponded to the Pole Star (*Pei-Ch’en*), which was believed to be “the residence at the axis of the universe whence T’ai-i watched over the southerly world of men” (Wheatley 1969: 13). For the royal capital Thang Long it is difficult to determine whether it was a temple that followed the Hindu/Mahayana principle or the royal palace according to the Chinese conception that constituted the *axis mundi*. In all probability, it was the *dien* that was situated on this site. The problem lies with the English translation of the Vietnamese term because it bears two connotations. First, it can be translated as “throne room”, thereby clearly connoting the authority of the ruler, and second as “temple” which refers to the sacred sphere.⁴⁰ That the *dien* must have been of overall importance is supported by the fact that it is reported to have persisted throughout the reign of the Ly, Tran and Le dynasties. This implies that it was an edifice that was important to all dynasties, as it did not vanish despite attempts at redefinition.⁴¹ In general, the royal citadel hosts a concentration of buildings linked to sacred and mundane authority, such as the king’s palaces, temples and administrative buildings.

⁴⁰ Nguyen The Ninh (2006: 64) gives a description of the *dien* that lacks the religious connotation. The *dien* is depicted as the king’s working room where he holds meetings and welcomes guests.

⁴¹ The *dien Kinh Thien* is a major edifice within the royal citadel that many sources report. Although most sources refer to it as a temple, the above mentioned correlation between state and sacrality appears to be immanent. According to a French source stemming from the beginning of the 20th century it was under the rule of the Le Dynasty that the main palace was modified and called *dien Kinh Thien* (*Palais céleste du Dragon*). Furthermore, it is reported that it primarily functioned as a temple of the royal family (Madrolle 1923: 18).

Overall, the royal capital Thang Long was characterised by a dual structure; the royal citadel, or the so-called “City of the Emperor”, (*hoang thanh*) and the “City of the Commoners” (*kinh thanh*). An additional area consisted of the so-called 13 farms (*thap tam trai*)⁴². These were villages located within the administrative boundaries of the city that provided the citadel with agricultural products. The emperor’s city was separated from the commoners’ city by a 4-5 m high wall called Long Thanh or Phuong Thanh. The wall was also surrounded by a 10-12 m wide moat (Nguyen The Ninh 2006: 50). This separation between the king’s residence and its profane surroundings corresponds to Wheatley’s (1969: 12) assessment of the capital’s cosmo-magical symbolism, in which he declares that it represented a “sacred territory within the continuum of profane space”.

In 1029, an even more exclusive space was created within the walled compound of the citadel. During the Ly Dynasty’s rule the Forbidden City (*cam thanh*) comprised the king’s palace and temple as well as the women’s palace, thereby separating members of the royal family from courtiers, bureaucrats and military commanders. Initially, the Forbidden City had been surrounded by earthen walls which were later enlarged and replaced by brick walls. The spatial configuration was characterised by a rectangular structure. The relevance of the North-South axis is presented in the dominance of the southern gate. In contrast to the practice of marking the other three walls with only three gates, the southern wall had five gates. A large road passed through the southern entrance. On this road mandarins were able to access the Forbidden City when they travelled to it for audiences (Logan 2000: 35).

Similar to the Chinese concept of space, the outline of the royal palace displayed the geomancy immanent dualism of mountain and water. The front faced the Red River, whereas the back was protected by Tan Vien mountain in particular and the Northern mountains in general (Tran Quoc Vuong 2001: 39). Furthermore, the king’s palace was erected on an artificial mound called Nung Son (“Hill where the dragon sits”) (Logan 2000: 35). Once more, this indicates that the palace determined the *axis mundi*. The area outside the Forbidden City comprised temples and palaces, courtyards, the pagoda, the house for teachers as well as places to hold festivities (Nguyen The Ninh 2006: 52).

The rectangular wall that surrounded the Forbidden City heightened its exclusiveness.⁴³ While the citadel’s walls and the capital’s overall fortification had been adjusted to the topography of the area, the Forbidden City showed a clear geometric form (Waibel 2002: 54). Similar to the precise planning and placement of churches in European medieval cities, the holiness of the place was emphasised by its distinctness from its secular surroundings. Sennett (1991: 27) reports that the living quarters of commoners in European medieval towns were characterised by narrow meandering alleys. In contrast, the sacred centre determined by the church was well calculated and impressive due to its architectural greatness.

Ultimately, the royal citadel formed a site of mediation between the sacred and profane worlds. It was a “territory exclusive to the king and high mandarins of the central administration” (Logan 2000: 35). In this context, Pedelahore (1986 cited Logan 2000: 37) points out the “creation of rather exclusive spaces whose differentiation was not based on criteria of urban functions, but on the identification of a social rank and an activity”. Although the citadel is sometimes referred to as the “imperial city”, Logan (2000: 35) also argues that “while everything gravitated around the emperor, clearly at this stage it did not look much like a town”. Likewise Nguyen Duc Nhuan (1984 cited Logan 2000: 37) states that the royal citadel ap-

⁴² According to Papin (1997: 52), the Vietnamese term *trai* indicates a makeshift settlement rather than a village. Often it was regarded a first step in the overall foundation of a village.

⁴³ Interestingly, Sennett (1991: 28) makes a comparison to Chinese and Japanese cities which were also defined by sacred places. In contrast to European cities, where sacrality was represented in tangible greatness, in China and Japan sacred place consisted of emptiness. He presents the example of the Forbidden City in Peking which was conceptualised as emptiness, at the centre, and where the profane was absent.

peared to be “an entrenched camp” in the middle of rice fields, garden and ponds, rather than resembling a city.

In contrast, a second area that clearly displayed urban attributes developed outside the walls of the royal citadel. The commoners’ city was characterised by a high degree of functional differentiation, ethnic heterogeneity, and density. According to Logan (2000: 37) this “settlement was the kernel of the real urban agglomeration that was to become Hanoi”. It consisted of markets, guilds and administrative units like communes in rural areas.⁴⁴ This area was commonly referred to as *ke cho* or *thi*, the first denoting “market people” and the second “market”. Markets flourished in front of the citadel’s four main gates; to the east Cua Dong (today’s Hang Buom), to the south Cua Nam, to the west Cua Tay (now Ngoc Ha market), and Cua Bac to the north. There were permanent and periodical markets, but all were controlled by the imperial administration (Logan 2000: 38).

The two sections of the capital were kept together by the outer city wall and the surrounding dyke system. Although they were functionally and symbolically distinct from one another, the two spheres relied on one another. This dependency was mainly based on economic exchange. The rise of the commercial area paralleling the growth of the bureaucracy at the royal court argues for such an economic interdependency.⁴⁵ The increase in the bureaucratic apparatus resulted in higher demands for both everyday products and items related to court rites, as well as rituals performed by the ruling class (Nguyen Thua Hy 2002: 280).⁴⁶ Furthermore, Logan (2000: 38) suggests that the first artisan activities were probably connected to the court. These resulted either from forced annual labour contributions by male villagers or the private workshops opened by retired female servants. The latter included the production of brocades from the 11th century onwards, fans since the 14th century, and silk fabrics in the 17th century. On one hand, craftsmen such as copper founders or silversmiths came to the capital from the surrounding provinces because they were forced to work for the court. On the other, artisans like dyers, turners and mother-of-pearl inlayers seemed to have moved deliberately to the capital. One of the first markets evolving in the 11th century was Bach Ma market located outside the eastern gate. According to Waibel (2002: 55), the axis leading from the market to the military and trade harbour at the Red River was the basis for the development of the commercial area in the 15th century, that is often referred to as the ‘36 Streets’ or ‘Ancient Quarter’. The area united both artisans and craftsmen who were organised in guilds. In the 17th century, both the royal citadel and the market area expanded. This was on one hand due to an intensification of rural-urban trade, and on the other, a result of the “building boom” of the royal administration that occurred during Le kings and Trinh lords reign and required a labour force, raw materials, goods and handicrafts. Thus, in compliance with this demand, a growing number of craftsmen from the surrounding handicraft villages migrated into the city (Nguyen Thua Hy 2002: 280).

Apart from artisans, mandarins, peasants, the Buddhist clergy, and Chinese merchants lived in *ke cho*. In 1688, Dampier (cited Logan 2000: 41) counted 20,000 houses in the commercial district. At the end of the 19th century, under the rule of King Minh Mang, there were 50,000

⁴⁴ More precisely, Nguyen The Ninh (2006: 53) speaks of 61 wards (*phuong*), 13 farms (*trai*) and 4 markets (*cho*).

⁴⁵ Logan (2000: 25) explains that market forces clearly were “an agency of city formation” in Hanoi. However, sources on the redistributive system of the royal citadel, as described by Wheatley, are rather rare. Waibel (2002: 58) states that the first historic records of Vietnam concentrated more on political events or changes at the royal court than on socio-economic affairs. Hence, it is unclear to what dimension the royal citadel really took over redistributive functions. Although there are reports that indicate that during the founding period the king’s residence was provided with agricultural products and handicrafts from the surrounding commercial area, it remains unclear which role this reliance played in the economic flourishing of the market area during later periods.

⁴⁶ Weber (1978: 1215) calls a city where residents are dependent on the purchasing power of the court a “princely city”.

inhabitants reported. Of these, three-quarters were Vietnamese and one-quarter was Chinese (Logan 2000: 57).

The ethnic and professional heterogeneity of the population resulted in a socio-spatial segregation in the commoners' city. Mandarins lived in town houses or had country estates, while Chinese traders lived in two-storey masonry houses on their own paved streets with their own temples, schools, etc. In contrast, European traders were not allowed to live in the city; before 1873 they had to reside outside the city walls along the riverbanks (Logan 2000: 40 f.). Separation along professional lines was most recognisable among the different guilds. Each guild occupied its own particular street, where only the guild's products were sold. In fact, this is evidence of an earlier form of chain migration. Artisans chose the location of their settlement within the city according to their hometown and profession and spatial boundaries corresponded to the community of the guild. Different streets were separated by timber barricades with small gates. At night, gates were closed, so that only the members of the guild were allowed to stay (Azambre 1955: 359). This exclusion of "the other" once again demonstrates the limited accessibility, and hence, exclusiveness of urban space in Hanoi. Social cohesion within the guilds was maintained through a collective reference to traditions and rites from the rural hometown. The village deity, as well as the craft's founding father, served as the main sources of collective identity. Accordingly, each guild constructed its own temple and communal house (*dinh*) (Nishimura, Hoang Huu Phe 2000: 21).

"Espace public, forum des sociabilités paysannes, le *dinh* constitue donc, de par sa présence même, la marque de la ruralité au coeur de la ville" (Papin 1997: 167).

In reality, the socio-spatial segregation within the guilds' area evokes Furnivall's (1939) concept of a "Plural society", which he developed with respect to colonial cities. Although Furnivall names ethnicity as the main determinant of the separation of living quarters, a comparison with Hanoi appears to be reasonable. Both the residents of the ethnic quarters and the guild members of Hanoi shared the common feeling of attachment to their hometown, which was far away from the city, rather than to their urban neighbours. The persistence of traditions, temples and communal houses imported from their rural hometowns indicates that the quarter was a continuum of the village, and thus,

"[u]nlike their contemporaries in Western-European cities, the medieval inhabitants of Thang Long-Hanoi maintained very close and deep relationships and regular contacts with their hometowns. They considered themselves as the true villagers even long after they had moved, with tax responsibility there and other social duties" (Nguyen Thua Hy 2002: 134).

This continuity was reflected both in the social structure and in the city's physical environment. Until the 19th century, outside of brick houses, streets and stores, thatched houses, ponds and gardens, bamboo hedges and fences persisted. Nguyen Thua Hy (2002: 187) notes that the "specialized urban guild areas were carbon copies of the original countryside villages moved intact onto city streets".

Not only did characteristics of the village prevail within *ke cho*, but the commercial area was also regularly penetrated by peasants. On the first and fifteenth of each lunar month, peasants poured into the commercial area to attend the agricultural fair (Logan 2000: 38). A further indication of the persistence of rural life in the capital is the existence of a third functional area situated within the administrative realm of Thang Long. This section consisted of urban villages⁴⁷ that secured the city's supply of agricultural products and handicrafts. The three villages discussed in this thesis, Ngoc Ha, Huu Tiep, and Dai Yen, are part of this agricultural area.

⁴⁷ For a comprehensive study on urban villages in Hanoi see Papin (1997).

Finally, it seems that, as was the case in Furnivall's plural society, markets offered an arena for interaction among the different social groups present in the capital. Logan (2000: 38) reports that the proclamation of royal edicts, the execution of prisoners, as well as the organisation of festivals, took place in the market area outside the wall of the citadel.⁴⁸ In this place, royal edicts were announced and the king's laws were enacted. In fact, the market formed a space of mediation between the ruler and his subjects, and therefore a public space.⁴⁹ Thus, the public space of the market is a distinct constituent of Thang Long's urbanism.

2.3.1 City and Countryside

Presently, most attempts to define Hanoi's urbanism have mainly focused on the city's linkage to the countryside and generally the rural roots of Vietnamese society. Although these approaches aim at an identification of the specificity and singularity of Hanoi's urbanism, at the same time they appear to obstruct the detection of new forms of social configurations and lifestyles and accordingly, they result in a mere listing of what urban life lacks in comparison to rural life. As Drummond summarises:

“Yet, it is a recurrent cultural theme in Vietnam, and one which is often reiterated in popular culture, that urban almost always equals bad, and rural equals good. Urban society is cold, modern and stressful; rural society is warm, traditional and timeless, and peaceful. This characterisation intersects with the perception of urban life as spiritually or morally bankrupt, as lacking a spiritual or ideological centre that would hold urban society together as civilised entity. Rural life, with its close contact with nature, is seen as much more spiritual, more balanced, morally richer and stronger in community feeling” (Drummond 2003: 163).

One reason for this “nostalgia for the countryside” is - as Drummond points out - the fear of a loss of traditional values. This particularly appears to be the case in Northern Vietnam, which has a long history of rural village communities.⁵⁰ Rural villages evolved as a form of social organisation and reproduction, even before the introduction of a centralised administrative system. As shown above, the continuity of the village in the city is also a critical feature of the capital Hanoi. Furthermore, the party-state's legitimacy is also based on the countryside. Independence from the French colonial government was achieved because of efforts in the rural areas. In other words, the northern countryside is the cradle of the current political system. Although the August Revolution of 1945 was set in the city of Hanoi, it only was the culmination of a movement that had begun much earlier in the countryside. Hanoi then became important for establishing counter-symbolism to that of the colonial regime. This is similar to the so-called “Liberation of Saigon” in 1975, when, the war against the USA and the Republic of Vietnam for the most part took place in rural areas, Saigon was made the centre-stage of the victory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam over the Southern Vietnamese regime. Since the two Indochina Wars are major points of reference the maintenance of the image of rural

⁴⁸ A large market and square were located outside the citadel's Southern Gate. Here, princes and princesses as well as the folk came together for New Year's celebrations. Today the area is referred to as Cua Nam (Nguyen The Ninh 2006: 52).

⁴⁹ Since the Vietnamese monarchs followed the principle “familiarity breeds contempt” face-to-face interaction or even verbal communication between the ruler and his subjects were exceptional and only happened on occasions such as rituals or visits to the countryside. Even at court the ruler preferred to address the assemblage via intermediaries who intoned “his edicts with maximum solemnity” (Marr 1995: 223).

⁵⁰ It was only in the 17th century that in the scope of the “March to the South” (*Nam Tien*) the Champa Kingdom, located in present day Central Vietnam, was absorbed by Kinh Vietnamese. Finally, in the 20th century the Mekong delta was fully saturated by Kinh culture (Salemink 2003: 25 f.). That is why historically Northern and Southern Vietnam have different settlement structures.

society serves as a means of national integration as well. Rural society connotes a high degree of social cohesion.

A further case in point is the rather negative connotation of cities after 1945 in Northern Vietnam and 1975 in Southern Vietnam, respectively. Both the Northern city of Hanoi and the southern hub of Ho Chi Minh City had served as political centres for the French-colonial or the US-supported regimes. Consequently, the “cleansing” of citizens who had cooperated with the former regimes from these cities was regarded as a necessary step in the nation-building process.⁵¹ Additionally, urban dwellers were mobilised to move to rural areas in order to build New Economic Zones (*vung kinh te moi*) (Großheim 2009: 72). In Hanoi, this policy resulted in “zero-urban growth” implying a slow but continuous growth in the urban population after 1954 (Murray, Szeleniy 1984: 92, 94). In Ho Chi Minh City, the exodus of the former urban population after 1975 introduced a phase of “deurbanization”. The decrease in the urban population was accompanied by a loss of “urbanism” (Murray, Szeleniy 1984: 95) or, to use Wirth’s terms, “way of life”. This also occurred in Hanoi. Many urban-bourgeois families were sent to work in rural areas, developing uncultivated land for which they actually lacked the skills required. Through this process, space was created for revolutionary cadres from rural areas to move to Hanoi. Cadres from the surrounding provinces of Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh migrated to the city. Their task was to support the formation of a socialist regime in the North. Consequently, the share of these families in the overall urban population increased over-proportionally after 1954. Conversely, the number of families that had lived in Hanoi over three generations declined (Großheim 2009: 73).

Nonetheless, literary public spheres were able to develop in Hanoi during the 1950s and 1960s. Papin (1997: 384) reports that even under colonial rule at the beginning of the 20th century, a critical press had evolved in Hanoi forming public opinion:

“On ne peut pas évoquer Hà Nội au début de siècle sans dire un mot de la presse, non point pour en décrire les conditions de fonctionnement mais parce-qu’elle nous intéresse pour plusieurs raisons précises qui sont liées à la question de la diversité: l’existence d’un public - donc d’individus qui choisissaient leur journal -, l’existence d’une critique sociale et politique et, en filigrane, l’existence d’une *opinion* où du moins de *vecteurs d’opinions*. En effet, à bien consulter la documentation disponible, il n’y a guère que deux types de structure qui, coté vietnamien, semblent avoir joué un rôle vraiment déterminant par rapport au pouvoir les associations et la presse. Les associations n’étaient pas nouvelles au Vietnam, elles n’étaient pas typiquement urbaines et elles ont déjà été bien étudiées par Alexander Woodside lui-même. C’est donc la presse seule que nous mobiliserons pour évoquer l’idée d’une artaire modernité publique de Hà Nội qui laisse entrevoir non pas seulement *l’existence* d’une société civile -car c’est une évidence - mais *l’engagement* de celle-ci”.

In contrast to these public spheres’ concern with colonial rule, the critique of the literary public sphere in the 1950s/1960s concentrated on the consequences and misdoings of the land reform campaign that the Vietnam Workers’ Party⁵² had launched in the period between 1953 and 1956. Many intellectuals had personally witnessed excesses or heard denunciations during land reform campaigns and at that time openly criticized the party’s policy in their writing. Additionally, students of the University Hanoi, specifically of the Faculty of History and Literature, engaged in critical discussions on the pros and cons of the land reform. During Lunar New Year celebration in 1956, the publication of *Giai Pham Mua Xuan* (The Fine

⁵¹ Since 1960 about 6,000 urban residents from Hanoi, Hai Phong and Nam Dinh, who had worked for the French administration, had been forced into compulsory labour (Großheim 2009: 71).

⁵² After its formal dissolution in 1945 the Indochinese Communist Party was refounded as the Vietnam Workers’ Party (*Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam*) in Tuyen Quang, 1951.

Works of Spring) attained great public attention.⁵³ It included the poem “Sure of Victory” (*Nhat dinh thang*) written by Tran Dan. In his poem, the author refers to the chaos of the post-war era in Northern Vietnam (Großheim 2009: 49). In addition, the magazine *Nhan Van*⁵⁴ (Humanism) and the student magazine *Dat Moi* (New Land) addressed the ever-growing restriction of personal freedoms resulting from the party system (Großheim 2009: 53 f.). The party reacted by subordinating all artists, writers and intellectuals under the party. In the summer and autumn of 1958, members of the above named groups, students and members of the university and the Ministry of Culture were sent to the countryside to “get to know reality” (*di thuc te*). Experiencing peasant life, they were supposed to lose their “feudal” and “bourgeois” attitude (Großheim 2009: 61). Again, the linkage between the rural and the urban or more precisely, the confrontation between the two, is apparent. While rural life appeared to be a representation of the right mind-set with a stress on the collective and conformity, the “urban” was associated with diversity of opinions, dissent and the claim for individual freedoms. In other words, rural life was considered superior to urban life. Against this background, it is not astonishing that the idea of rural life as the only authentic image of Vietnamese society still seems to prevail. Drummond (2003: 163) states that “[i]n Vietnamese society in particular, rural society is considered the only purveyor of legitimate Vietnamese culture; ...”.

However, in the scope of the overall objective of modernisation, and its particular aim to become industrialised by 2020, the persistence of rural elements within the urban landscape is now viewed as an obstruction to urban dynamics. After *Doi Moi*, rural-urban migration reached a new peak. Since the 1990s, temporary and permanent migrants have flooded the larger cities in the hope for a better life. With respect to Hanoi, Li Tana (1996: 20) notes that based on chain migration, villagers from the same hometown tend to engage in the same profession. In comparison to the pre-colonial guild communities, migrants settled in the same residential areas. Li Tana refers to this influx of rural migrants into the city as the “ruralization” of Hanoi, stating:

“Traditional, rural values have moved into the city with the migrants and are retained through the spontaneous clustering of their habitat. Indeed, in many ways it is the blurring of distinctions between living at home and living in Hanoi which has served to encourage migration because there is not such a drastic change of lifestyle involved. In fact, this has developed to such a degree that some Hanoians say that it is not urbanization (*thanh thi hoa*) but the ruralization (*nong thon hoa*) of Hanoi” (Li Tana 1996: 45).

Although the “blurring of distinctions between living at home and living in Hanoi” is a factor in rural dwellers’ decision to migrate, it is not necessarily advocated by Hanoi’s urbanites. This duality can be seen in the controversy that surrounded the discussed ban on street trade in the city centre.⁵⁵ Street trade is associated with the countryside and therefore considered a hindrance to the development of a “civilised and modern city” (*do thi van minh hien dai*).

Furthermore, urbanisation is considered a rather new phenomenon for Vietnamese society, for which concepts and practical approaches need to be developed. Officials and investors, so-called ‘place entrepreneurs’ (Molotch 1976 cited Zukin 1995: 7), are preoccupied with practices of town planning based on “the belief that social change can be engineered and directed, produced at will” (Escobar 1992: 132). However, social scientists are in search of new con-

⁵³ In February 1956 the first publication *The Fine Works of Spring* was published, followed by *The Fine Works of Autumn* (*Giai Pham Mua Thu*) and *The Fine Works of Winter* (*Giai Pham Mua Dong*). All three volumes appeared in the same period as *Nhan Van* (Großheim 2009: 52).

⁵⁴ The title expresses the writers’ demand to restore humanism to a country that was plagued by land reform campaigns and the “cleansing” of party members. Altogether only five issues of the journal appeared from September 20th to November 20th, 1956 (Großheim 2009: 52).

⁵⁵ The public discourse on street trade is presented in more detail in Chapter 5.

cepts that denote social configurations emerging within an urban setting that differ from those of rural village communities.

2.3.2 Urbanism: Linkage between Officialdom and Sacrality

It is essential to recognise Hanoi's role as a sacred city since the 11th century when determining the form of Hanoi's urbanisation. The sacred city unites both sacrality and officialdom, with the ruler representing the linkage between these two concepts. The Vietnamese King, due to his mandate of heaven, was to mediate between heaven and earth. The royal citadel comprised the royal palace and temple as well as the administration. However, the profane sphere of agricultural and handicraft production and economic activities was located "*extra muros* in relation to the Royal Citadel" in the commoners' city (Logan 2000: 37). This latter area displayed urban qualities. It was characterised by a high degree of functional differentiation and a heterogeneous population. Different social groups present in the capital mingled in the public space of the market. However, at the same time distinct rural elements prevailed within this "urban" area. In fact, the guilds' quarter constituted a continuum of the village. The construction of the Dai La ramparts in 1587 can be regarded as an attempt to demarcate the territory of the capital and therefore distinguish the urban area from its rural surroundings. Nguyen Thua Hy (2002: 282) remarks that they "were not socio-economic boundaries between the city and the countryside. On the contrary, they even facilitated two-way exchanges between two social units".⁵⁶ Once again, this points to the critical nature of the rural-urban continuum in the definition of Hanoi's urbanism

It is against this background that this thesis will establish a link between the dualism of the city and the countryside and the tripolarity of the sacred, official and profane. From this, a functional and symbolic differentiation can be made between the urban which is associated with sacrality and officialdom and the rural, as it is connected to the profane world. This distinction was spatially manifested in the royal citadel as the residence of the ruler, and the commercial area and villages as the domain of production and reproduction. Thus, it is the interrelationship between the spheres that is an essential characteristic of Hanoi's urbanism.

In conclusion, the linkage of sacrality and officialdom to the city is of assistance for an analysis of state-society relations of both dynastic and contemporary Vietnam. In medieval times, Hanoi's function as the sacred and political centre resulted from the presence of the King's residence.⁵⁷ Nowadays it originates from the seat of government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Despite Hanoi's status as the capital of a secular state, the dimension of sacrality⁵⁸ constitutes a continuum in Hanoi's urbanism. Domination from the centre was, and still is, exerted over an overwhelmingly rural population. In this structure, the administrative staff that formerly consisted of mandarins assumes a mediating function between state authority

⁵⁶ Wheatley (1971: 389) states that with respect to comparable conditions found in other pre-industrial settlements, many scholars feel the need to qualify the degree of urbanism involved. He cites both John Wilson's (1951) account of "civilization without cities" for ancient Egypt or S. W. Miles' (1958) suggestion of "extended boundary towns" as examples of settlements that consist of a central ceremonial complex serving a population scattered in the countryside. However, Wheatley (1971: 389) contends that these forms all shared a single common feature, that they "lacked boundaries altogether – apart, of course, from the frontiers of the territory that they controlled".

⁵⁷ As Logan (2000: 40) argues, "[d]espite the fact that the market town overshadowed the Royal Citadel in size and prosperity, through to the late nineteenth century maps often failed to identify it and only showed the imperial enclosure, its lakes, temples and surrounding palaces".

⁵⁸ Sacrality, or "sacredness" in Eisenstadt's and Schluchter's terms, is understood as linking "the boundary between 'us and them,' not to natural conditions, but to the relation of the collective subject to the transcendental, be it defined as God, reason, progress, or rationality" (Eisenstadt, Schluchter 2001: 15).

and the people. In order to act as mediators they need to have a rural orientation to be aware of people's needs, to maintain legitimacy.

The prevalence of the dimension of the sacred is best displayed in the party-state's reference to the dynastic past. In advance of Hanoi's 1000th anniversary in 2010, the state has intensively engaged in festivals commemorating Hanoi's past as a royal capital. The socialist government is capitalising on the initial aspect of sacrality and redefining it, creating continuity between the pre-colonial past and the socialist state. The Declaration of Independence in the former centre of monarchic and colonial rule, as well as the location of the institutions of the newly found nation-state in Hanoi, resulted in what Eisenstadt (2002: 6) terms the "charismatization of the center", or what Schiel (2007: 95, 100) refers to as the "transcontinuities" of the "exemplary centre".

2.4 Landscapes of Power

The charismatic centre denotes that power over the urban landscape of Thang Long-Hanoi always lies with the state, first the monarchy, then the colonial regime, and finally the party-state. In his account, *Hanoi: Biography of a city*, Logan (2000) elaborates upon the city's diverse cultural layers, explaining that

"[t]o the observer, fragmented impressions soon gelled, making it apparent that Hanoi's townscape was not the product of chance forces, nor even merely the result of architectural and town-planning fashions changing over time; rather, each of the successive political regimes set out deliberately to impose on Hanoi its own set of beliefs about the way in which urban centres should function. Each regime proceeded to design buildings, streetscapes and whole districts to demonstrate those beliefs, and, by so doing, also to demonstrate its mastery of the city and its people. As a result, and perhaps more explicitly than in most other Southeast Asian cities, Hanoi's environment is strewn with political icons" (Logan 1994: 46).

According to Evers and Korff (2003: 17) "urban constructions are concretizations of an urban ideology of élites". The definition of the meaning of the city and its concretisation in the city's physical environment depend on strategic groups' ability to dominate society and their access to resources which are necessary to implement this concretisation. In another attempt to understand the domination of one group in determining the meaning of urban objects, Kong and Law refer to Gramsci's (1973) concept of 'ideological hegemony'. Here, the ruling group presents ideas and values which the rest of society perceives to be 'natural' or 'common sense'. Therefore, landscapes have the power to institutionalise the given order, "thus contributing to the social constructedness of reality" (Kong, Law 2002: 1505). Consequently, an alteration of elites is likely to result in a redefinition of the urban landscape.

2.4.1 Redefining the urban landscape

Initially, Thang Long included only the king's palace, a temple or palace, and 13 farms. The city expanded under the rule of the Tran dynasty (1225-1400). Then, for a short period from 1400-1407, the capital shifted to Thanh Hoa Province under king Ho Quy Ly. During this time, Thang Long received the name Dong Do, the capital of the east. King Ho Quy Ly's reign was disrupted by the Ming invasion from China and the Chinese reinstalled Thang Long as the capital of their protectorate. In 1428, after the defeat of the Chinese, Le Loi, the first king of the Le Dynasty, liberated the city and maintained Thang Long as capital of the Viet-

name empire. Declaring himself King Le Thai To⁵⁹, he renamed the city Dong Kinh, the capital of the east, and installed a second capital in Lam Son called Lam Kinh or Tay Kinh (capital of the west). In 1466, the capital was renamed again, King Le Thanh Tong named the city Trung Do, the capital of the middle, to mark his reign. Apart from this symbolic modification, the Le rulers maintained the *dien* of the Ly and Tran predecessors, while extending the city to the east (Hoang Dao Thuy 2000: 12). In the 16th century Thang Long was rebuilt and enlarged to twice its size (Nguyen Thua Hy 2002: 5). During the struggle between the Nguyen and Trinh lords under the formal rule of the Le Dynasty, Thang Long became the centre of power of the Trinh. In the 17th and 18th century the Trinh undertook major construction works in the city. They erected their own palace complex outside the royal citadel, adjacent to the commoners' city. The Le kings anxious not to offend the Trinh lords concentrated on renovating the Western capital in Thanh Hoa Province (Nguyen Thua Hy 2002: 6 f.). During the Tay Son period (1788-1802) the royal citadel deteriorated (Nguyen Thua Hy 2002: 54).

In 1805, King Gia Long established the capital of the newly found Nguyen Dynasty in Phu Xuan, today's Hue. To demonstrate the beginning of a new era, he demolished the forbidden city of Thang Long and replaced it with a smaller citadel, adopting the 17th-century Vauban-style (Dang Thai Hoang 1999: 10). The citadel was named Bac Thanh, the city of the north. It was surrounded by a wall which was four to five metres high and 16 metres wide, with a gate on each side (Hoang Dao Thuy 2000: 14 f.). Each gate was protected by a second wall, Duong Ma Thanh, to enhance security. In their blueprints for palaces, the Nguyen rulers placed great emphasis on geomantic principles.⁶⁰ Within the citadel the most important buildings like the Kinh Thien Palace, Doan Mon Gate⁶¹, the Ky Dai and the flag tower (*cot co*) were built on the North-South axis (Dang Thai Hoang 1999: 10). The flag tower, referred to as the *Mirador* by the French, had already been used by the Le kings to host the royal flag, but was rebuilt during the 19th century. It was situated on a small elevation, which had been, under King Ly Thai To, dedicated to the planet Mars and the element of Fire (Madrolle 1923: 40). Light played a crucial role in the conceptualisation of the city and three gates were oriented towards the light; in the east Ngenh Huc Gate embraced the early morning sun; in the south Huong Minh Gate opened towards the light; and, in the north, Hoi Quang Gate reflected the light (Dang Thai Hoang 1999: 10).

King Minh Mang changed the city's name to Ha Noi, "located at the river" in 1831. It was recognised as the principal town of the north, and therefore became the seat of government for the viceroy (*kinh luoc*). Four years later in 1835, King Minh Mang ordered that the citadel's walls be lowered beneath the level of those in the royal capital in Hue. In 1848, his successor furthered this by transferring all valuable wooden and stone artefacts from Hanoi's palaces to Hue. The downfall of the royal citadel also affected trading activities in the commercial area. (Logan 2000: 52; Nguyen Vinh Phuc 1995: 45; Phung Duc Tuan 1998: 10).

Under the Nguyen Dynasty's reign, the French-colonial period began in Vietnam. Cochinchina became a French colony, and Annam and Tonking were designated protectorates. In 1873, Hanoi was captured by Lieutenant Commander Francis Garnier and his troops. And in 1887, Hanoi was made capital of the Indochinese Union (Logan 2000: 68 f.). A French city map dating from 1902 shows an overlap of the colonial administrative complex with the area of the royal citadel. Certainly, the most significant change of first and second functions occurred in

⁵⁹ This is an obvious reference to his predecessor King Ly Thai To.

⁶⁰ The significance of geomancy for the constructions of the Nguyen Dynasty is most evident in the emperor graves along the Pearl River near Hue. Most of the graves were already used by the emperors as spaces of retreat during their life time.

⁶¹ Doan Mon Gate still exists today and is proof to the symbiosis of diverse architectonic styles. It shows an inscription of Ly times, as well as a dragon on its top that was carved during Le times (Hoang Dao Thuy 2000: 15).

1873, when Francis Garnier occupied the Kinh Thien Palace and in 1882, when Henri Rivière installed the military services there. In 1887, the palace was replaced with a building serving as armoury (Madrolle 1923: 18). Through these changes, the sacred centre of the Vietnamese kingdom was secularized and incorporated into the sphere of colonial power.

The French compound in the citadel included the Direction d'Artillerie, Casernement de l'Infanterie Coloniale, Infirmerie de Garnison, Casernement d'Artillerie, Service vétérinaires which already borders the Rue de l'Est, probably today's Ly Nam De Street. The southern part, towards the flag tower, comprised the Parc d'Artillerie and Tirailleurs Tonkinois (Anon. 1902). Construction of the Résidence de Gouverneur Général occurred between 1901 and 1906, next to today's Ba Dinh Square. Madrolle (1923: 41) reports that a monument, "la France protectrice de l'Indochine" was installed opposite the palace.

"L'édifice a 12 mètr. de haut. Au pied de la France quatre personnages : des types annamite, chinois, cambodgien, laotien offrent à leur protectrice les produits de leur région. Ces statues sont un mélange de bronze et de grès gris. Le monument repose sur un vaste socle de 8 mètr. de côté où le fleuve Rouge et le Mekhong sont représentés sous la figure de deux femmes comme étant les deux principales causes de la fécondité du pays".

Apart from the administrative complex, the French *mission civilisatrice* found its spatial expression in the construction of a French residential quarter southeast of Hoan Kiem Lake. In the residential area, vast boulevards and villas surrounded by gardens dominated the image of the city (Logan 1995: 330). To complete its civilising mission the colonial administration ordered the construction of prosperous public buildings, uniting diverse architectonic styles.⁶² This mission is represented in the Renaissance style of the *Résidence de Gouverneur Général* and the classicist opera house constructed in 1911 (Trinh Duy Luan 1997: 171; Waibel 2002: 82).

In the 1920s, classicist and Renaissance architecture was replaced by a modern design movement, as the *Art Nouveau Style* embraced Indochina. Typical elements of this style are curved figures like natural plants and Art Deco with mineral crystal figures. This was followed by Modernism in the 1940s. An integration of Vietnamese elements was present in the *Style Indochinois*, which was to represent a "style de synthèse entre l'Orient et l'Occident" (Pedelahore 2001b: 181). This new architectural mode was brought forward by the French architect Ernest Hébrard. Artifacts of this style are the buildings of the Ministry of Finance and the National History Museum. In the *École des Beaux-Arts*, Western methods of design and construction were taught to Vietnamese architects. However, Vietnamese architects later developed their own architectural style (Ota 2006: 76 f.).

The transformation of Hanoi into a *Paris de l'Annam* also witnessed the demolition of Vietnamese dwellings along Paul Bert Street as well as indigenous religious edifices. Among the most important sacred spaces destroyed were the Buddhist Bao An Pagoda situated at the banks of Hoan Kiem Lake and the Bao Thien Pagoda west of the Lake. The Bao An Pagoda was destroyed to provide space for the construction of a new Post Office while the intended redefinition of Bao Thien Pagoda is even more obvious as it was replaced by St. Joseph Cathedral (Azambre 1955: 362; Logan 1994: 53 f.). Thus, the colonial regime not only superimposed its political vision on the urban landscape, but also its religious belief.

Colonial power was expressed in street names as well. For example, the main East-West axis, built by the French in order to connect the residential with the administrative area, was Puginier Street, which turned into Paul Bert Street near Hoan Kiem Lake. Both names refer to

⁶² Ota (2006: 73) remarks that French architecture in Vietnam diverged from French architecture in France.

crucial actors in the colonisation of Vietnam. Puginier, a catholic missionary, had participated in the conquest of Northern Vietnam particularly in the French assault on Hanoi which resulted in the Philastre Agreement of 1874 that assigned a concession of 2.5 ha land located southeast of the commercial area at the banks of the Red River to the French (Hoang Dao Thuy 2000: 21; Logan 1994: 52). It is most plausible that King Tu Duc (1848-1883) hoped to ensure that the French settlement would be located as far away as possible from the former indigenous political and sacred centre. However, he was not successful. In 1882, French troops conquered the citadel and destroyed it completely, with the exception of the northern gate (Cima 1987). Thereafter, Paul Bert became *Résident Général* of Hanoi in 1886 (Logan 2000: 70).

In 1945, Vietnam gained independence from colonial rule. Since then, and particularly since the foundation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976, the urban landscape of Hanoi has been painted with icons of the socialist state. In the context of the Sino-Soviet Shisma, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam decided to orient itself towards the Soviet Union. The relationship between the two nations was officially recognised by the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in November 1978 that assured bilateral economic cooperation. That same year, Vietnam also became a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). Apart from financial support, Vietnam received technical knowhow from the Soviet Union, which also related to urban planning. The Master Plan of 1965 and later, the Leningrad Plan⁶³ of 1984, laid the basis for urban development. The capital was to embody the ideological and economic vision of the Socialist Republic (Logan 2000: 186). The party-state superimposed its own particular architectural layer on the city by constructing socialist representative buildings within the former centre of French colonial power.⁶⁴ Next to French classicist buildings, socialist style office blocks were erected. Additionally, squares and monuments were built, functioning not as public, but rather official spaces which can be considered a manifestation of the new political ideology in concrete. An excellent example of the omnipresence of officialdom in public life is the Lenin Monument on Dien Bien Phu St. The statue of Lenin was erected opposite the flag tower of the citadel at the exact same site where a monument to commemorate the fallen soldiers serving France during the war had once stood. The demolition and replacement of the monument hint towards the dynamics of symbols. Nas (1993: 15 f.) argues that through political, social or economic transformation, former symbols can be devaluated and replaced by new ones. A further case for the dynamics of symbols and the Soviet architectural impact is the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, whose architectural design will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. The Mausoleum was constructed in 1975 with assistance of the Soviet architect Grigorievich Isakovich, using the Lenin Mausoleum in Moscow as its inspiration. Isakovich and other Soviet architects were responsible for many important buildings of that period. As Vietnam did not have enough qualified architects, soviet expertise was demanded to lead the architectural makeover of Vietnam (Logan 2000: 193). Other edifices displaying Soviet architecture are the Soviet-Vietnamese Friendship Palace as well as the Ho Chi Minh Museum. Both were planned and constructed in the late 1980s, when economic cooperation between the two countries had already decreased. In its architectural plans, the Friendship Palace was modeled on the Palace of Labour in Moscow, incorporating

⁶³ The plan was named after the responsible institute, the Institute of Urban Planning of Leningrad. It proposed the construction of a new urban centre comprising high-rise buildings on the southern and south-west banks of West Lake. Five new industrial areas were planned for construction in the city's west. However, due to the economic downturn in both the Soviet Union and Vietnam, the plan was never fully implemented. One of the biggest projects that resulted from the plan was the International Noi Bai Airport (Logan 1994: 62 f.).

⁶⁴ Apart from the colonial administrative complex, the party-state also occupied the former centre of the monarchy. For example, the eastern part of the royal citadel was turned into a restricted area reserved for the People's Army (Waibel 2002: 130). The walled compound is the location of the Ministry of Defence.

features of modern constructivism. One of the last edifices of bilateral cooperation is the Ho Chi Minh Museum which opened in 1990 on the occasion of Ho Chi Minh's 100th birthday.

Like the French before the new socialist government re-designated street names. The former Paul Bert Street and its adjacent park were called Indira Ghandi Street and Ghandi Park. Gambetta Boulevard became Tran Hung Dao Street named after the famous general who had defeated the Chinese invaders in the 13th century. The classical Hotel Métropole received the name Thong Nhat (Reunification) Hotel, while the main East-West axis, formerly Puginier Street, was renamed Dien Bien Phu St. This alteration is the most evident change in symbolism; the name of one of the men responsible for the defeat of the Vietnamese people was replaced with the name of the battle field where the French had been defeated by the Viet Minh⁶⁵ in 1954. Consequently, the redefinition of both the French administrative buildings and the redesignation of street names clearly mark a break with the colonial past. Until the 1990s, this rupture was also inherent to the preservation of Hanoi's cultural heritage. Within the image of the city, Sino-Vietnamese elements predominated, whereas edifices of the French *mission civilisatrice* were left to decay (Logan, 1994: 60; Logan 2000: 183, 216 f.; Trinh Duy Luan 1997: 173).

Korff (1993: 230) explains this process by considering the city as “a container of history and of meanings, which can be selectively activated”. The designation of traditional constructions like pagodas, temples and the tunnel houses of the Ancient Quarter official national heritage (Logan 2000: 233) certainly indicates a selective interpretation of history. Thus, the ruling elite is able to choose from the diverse layers of the city which symbols are suitable for legitimising its power. Through this process, urban planning policies assist in the invention of history and fuel the collective memory.

“Due to the relative persistence and immobility of spatial structures, they play an important role as ‘facts’ for the invention of tradition. The tradition is easily and convincingly verified by reference to remains from history” (Korff 1993: 230).

Logan (2000: 233) explains that it was only in the mid 1990s that a change in the perception of cultural heritage took place. Old colonial buildings, in particular the old villas in the French Quarter south of Hoan Kiem Lake, attracted international organisations as well as companies in search of a location for their headquarters. In reaction, villas, public buildings like the opera, and public parks of the colonial regime were renovated and actively used.

2.4.2 Redefining Ly Thai To Square

One such ‘revived’ park is Ly Thai To Square, which was designed by French urbanists in the 19th century. The location of the square in the traditional heart of the city, east of Hoan Kiem Lake, is particularly noteworthy. According to legend, King Ly Thai To witnessed a dragon rise into the sky on the banks of Hoan Kiem Lake. And therefore he named the royal capital Thang Long. The exact site is also referred to as “dragon’s belly” (*long do*). Since then, the symbolism of Hoan Kiem Lake has been closely linked to the city’s founding legend.

⁶⁵ Viet Minh is the abbreviated name for the Vietnamese League of Independence (*Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi*) which was founded in 1941. The organisation was an association of nationalist as well as communist groups. During the First Indochina War, it functioned as battle troops against the French army. In 1946 General Vo Nguyen Giap was assigned the supreme command.

Additional meanings were ascribed to the lake by King Le Thai To, as he, according to legend, obtained a sword from a golden turtle living in Hoan Kiem Lake, providing him great power.⁶⁶ The French absorbed this symbolism, filling it with new meanings. The newly created complex at the banks of the lake was a representation of the ‘ideological hegemony’ of the French administration over the Vietnamese people. It comprised a public square as well as the colonial town hall, treasury, telegraph office, the Bank of Indochina and the *Résidence Supérieure*. The street separating the square from the town hall was named Dominé Avenue, and the street on the opposite side Chavassieux Avenue (Anon. 1902).

In the beginning the square was the location of the Statue of Liberty in Hanoi. Then, in 1890, four years after Paul Bert had become *Résident Général* and had died in Hanoi the same year, the Statue of Liberty was replaced by a statue of Paul Bert. The Statue of Liberty was shifted onto the roof of the pagoda located on a small island in Hoan Kiem Lake and thus a religious symbol important to the indigenous population was coloured with a political icon of the colonial regime. During this redefinition, even the local press commented on the offensive symbolism of this act (Bourrin 1941: 48 f.).

In the park behind the statue, a pavilion was constructed, and is currently still located there. From 1897 until 1934 the military orchestra regularly held concerts there.⁶⁷ According to Madrolle (1923: 26), it was one of the major public events at that time: “... , le kiosque où la musique se fait entendre chaque semaine, ce qui est une des occasions de rendez-vous du Tout-Ha-nôï”.

After Independence the French town hall was demolished in favour of the residence of the People’s Committee of Hanoi; the centre of the French municipal government was replaced with its new socialist counterpart. Other colonial buildings were redefined as well; today the *Residence Supérieure* houses the government’s guest house and the Bank of Indochina has become the office of the Vietnam National Bank.

Furthermore, the new Vietnamese government renamed the square. Gandhi Square honours the diplomatic relations with India. However, Hanoi’s citizens and scholars protested against the new name. Scholars were especially adamant that a space of such high symbolic relevance, particularly its location vis a vis Le Thai To and Ly Thai To streets, should have a Vietnamese name. They advocated the name of the founder of Thang Long King Ly Thai To. A few years later, a statue of Ly Thai To was erected on the exact same site where the 19th-century statue of Paul Bert had once stood, establishing the sacredness of the space.⁶⁸ This transformation demonstrates the dynamics of the first and second function of the space. On one hand, citizens go there to worship Ly Thai To, to pray for health and fortune. On the other, the square has become a popular gathering point for Hanoi’s youth, who regularly assemble there to practice sports and to dance. De Certeau (1984: 93) refers to these “ordinary practitioners” of the city as “Wandersmänner, whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it”. Accordingly, Hanoi’s youth’s social activities, such as hip hop and break-dancing on Ly Thai To Square, are all part of writing this urban

⁶⁶ Diverse versions of the legend exist. According to Logan (2000: 49 f.), the most elaborate version depicts a fisherman named Le Loi who caught a magic sword when casting his nets into the lake. Thereafter, he established an independence movement and finally defeated the Chinese occupying forces by making use of the sword. After he had become king, he wished to restore the sword to the lake. But when he approached the lake the sword transformed into a jade dragon and disappeared in the lake, and therefore the lake was called the “Lake of the Restored Sword”.

⁶⁷ Data on the usage of the square were obtained from the National Archive No. 1 in Hanoi. According to sources, concerts at Paul Bert Square were held on Sundays. By contrast, Madrolle’s *Guide de Voyageur Indochine* (1902: 188) reports that concerts at Paul Bert Square took place on Thursday evening, whereas concerts at the Botanical Garden were conducted on Sunday afternoon.

⁶⁸ Interview with Ha Huu Nga and Nguyen Hong Quang, 08.05.2008.

text. To use Lefebvre's (1991: 37) words: "the production of space does not imply that cause, effect, motive and implication are perfectly anticipated by the producers themselves". Through citizens' spatial practices, existing places are continuously redefined and urban texts are rewritten.

In conclusion, the assessment of Hanoi's landscapes of power shows that the state, whether pre-colonial, colonial or socialist, used to be most dominant in defining the urban landscape, especially with regards to the physical environment of the city. However, since the urban landscape, according to Zukin's (1991: 18) definition, is a social "microcosm" that incorporates both physical structures and the symbolic representation of social practices, the "ordinary practitioners" of the city, and therefore citizens' everyday practices, also need to be taken into account.

FIGURE 1: DANCING AT LY THAI TO SQUARE



Source: Private Photo (2008).

3 Public Spheres in Vietnam

In her critical article, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy”, Nancy Fraser (1992: 109 f.) criticizes socialist tradition and Marxist tradition for their failure to acknowledge the strength of the distinction between state apparatuses and arenas of public discourses:

“But the conflation of the state apparatus with the public sphere of discourse and association provided ballast to processes whereby the socialist vision became institutionalized in an authoritarian-statist form instead of in a participatory-democratic form. The result has been to jeopardize the very idea of socialist democracy”.

Similarly, Benhabib (2006: 121) points out that totalitarian regimes⁶⁹ consider any kind of self-organisation of society a threat to the established order, and thus they attempt to undermine the capability to create political associations. In other words, they aim for the dissolution of the public sphere as a common world of values, persuasion and orientation (Benhabib 2006: 122 f., 127, 206). The different schools of thought⁷⁰ that deal with state-society relations in Vietnam support this argument,⁷¹ agreeing that the party-state does not tolerate any alternative political parties or social movements. Consequently, activities organised outside of the control of the party-state are considered “anti-state” (Koh 2006: 2).

3.1 The Party’s legitimacy

The ruling Communist Party asserts its threefold “No”; this comprises the rejection of ideological pluralism, formal opposition, and party pluralism (Frehner, Winklbauer 2003: 3). Article 4 of the Constitution⁷² asserts the political monopoly of the party:

“The Communist Party of Vietnam, the vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, the faithful representative of the rights and interests of the working class, the toiling people, and the whole nation, acting upon the Marxist-Leninist doctrine and Ho Chi Minh’s thought, is the force leading the State and society. All Party organizations operate within the framework of the Constitution and the law” (Anon. 2001: 2 f.).

Yet, despite the party’s threefold “No”, Nicholson (2007: 178) regards the passage amendment, “[a]ll Party organizations operate within the framework of the Constitution and the law”, an important step in the composition of a “law-based state”. Here, “law-based” implies that the state is not only source of the law, but is also legally bound by it. Furthermore, Koh (2006: xi) adds that the premise of an omnipresent party-state is not completely valid for Vietnam. He emphasises the party-state’s ability to adapt to change and demands of society as well as to adjust its policies to reality. Consequently, he designates the Vietnamese state a part of the “soft-authoritarian camp”. Since the foundation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, social demands have been repeatedly expressed in public.

In his recent monograph, *Die Partei und der Krieg*, Großheim (2009) illustrates that as early as the years following the First Indochina War in the 1950s and 60s the party’s legitimacy

⁶⁹ Benhabib’s (2006) elaboration on public spheres in totalitarian regimes is based on Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism. Accordingly, Benhabib determines that Arendt’s theory is still relevant today as a political sociology of public sphere.

⁷⁰ The three prevalent schools of thought are the “Accommodating State School”, the “Structural Dominance School”, and the “Bureaucratic Socialism School”. For an elaboration on these different schools of thought see Koh (2006), as well as Chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁷¹ The attribute of totalitarian needs to be qualified for the political system in Vietnam, as it is of the authoritarian kind.

⁷² In 2001, the 1992 Constitution was revised.

was challenged by literary public spheres. According to Großheim (2009: 22), the so-called “*Nhan Van-Giai Pham* Affair” of 1956/57 and the “Anti-Party Affair” of 1967 revealed dissent within the party and were also indicative of conflicts prevailing between the party leadership and intellectuals.⁷³

A critical public discourse was initiated through the publication of the *Nhan Van* Newspaper and the *Giai Pham* publications. Both discussed the restricted impact of the political system on individual freedom and cultural activities. Apart from the call for more democratic freedoms such as freedom of press, freedom of opinion and freedom of assembly, the absence of a comprehensive legal system was openly denounced. Lawyer Nguyen Manh Tuong together with Nguyen Huu Dang, who played an important role in *Nhan Van* Newspaper, openly criticized that it was not the Law that served as a rule, but rather the “right political attitude” and class background (Großheim 2009: 54 f.). This allowed cadres to exert arbitrariness, especially during the land reforms. Furthermore, they condemned the infiltration of the private sphere facilitated by the state. This critique particularly targeted the household registration system, control of private correspondence, and censorship. Accordingly, by the 1950s the demand for the formation of a constitutional state was articulated in public. In his discerning article in *Nhan Van* (20.11.1956), Nguyen Huu Dang argued that although the DRV’s constitution granted basic rights, in practice these were scorned. The party leadership took this article as an open call for protests, and reacted with the official prohibition of *Nhan Van* on the 15th of December, 1956. Subsequently, all critical newspapers were forbidden (Großheim 2009: 54 f.).

In sum, the so-called “*Nhan Van-Giai Pham* Affair” demonstrates that as early as the 1950s, to use Habermasian terms, public spheres were evolving in Vietnam; intellectuals brought these complaints forward, aiming for an alteration of the political order, claiming the necessity of a rule of law-based state. However, through the state campaigns that followed targeting “revisionism”⁷⁴ their potential to attain political change was undermined.

In the 1980s, the party’s authority was once more questioned. At the end of the 1970s droughts, floods and typhoons had destroyed the harvest leading to severe famines. Subse-

⁷³ By tracing the lines of conflict that prevailed in the period between the mid 1950s until the late 1960s, Großheim (2009: 27) identifies three major factions within the party that were struggling for hegemony. The first group, the so-called “Ho Chi Minh-Group”, included Ho Chi Minh, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and Minister of Defense Vo Nguyen Giap. The second group, the “Northern group”, consisted of the head of the party Truong Chinh, the chairman of the Vietnamese Association of Trade Unions Hoang Quoc Viet, as well as Le Van Luong, Le Thanh Nghi and Nguyen Chi Thanh. Their engagement in the party predominantly focused on the Red River Delta. In the 1950s, they took over important positions within the party apparatus and mass organisations. The third group, the “Southern Group”, consisted of mainly high-level cadres, who had revolutionary experience in Southern Vietnam. This included the first secretary of the Central Office for South Vietnam, Le Duan, his deputy in the South, Pham Hung, as well as Le Duc Tho, the second deputy in Southern Vietnam. After the First Indochina War in the mid 1950s, the conflict between the different factions entered a new dimension (Großheim 2009: 24). In this light, the contestation and replacement of the first squad of cadres, who had – like Ho Chi Minh – been trained in the Soviet Union and who had occupied leading positions within the party previous to the August Revolution of 1945, requires particular attention. After the Revolution these individuals either became subject to persecution through the French *Sûreté* or were replaced by other party members who had gained their “Marxist equipment” in the French prisons and were respected for their political activities within Vietnam (Großheim 2009: 26 f.). The configuration of the leadership after the III. Party Congress in 1960 clearly demonstrates that the third faction had succeeded in occupying relevant positions in the politbureau. Großheim (2009: 68) declares that after Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan ranked number 2. Nonetheless, Ho Chi Minh’s symbolic position persisted. Not only did the party bestow the title of “President of the Party” on him until his death, he also enjoyed great popularity among the masses.

⁷⁴ In 1964, the campaign against “modern revisionism”, which finally culminated in the “Anti-Party Affair”, disrupted state-society relations. In 1967, hundreds of intellectuals and cadres were arrested without trial; most of them had opposed the pro-Chinese policy of the Le Duan’s party leadership who favoured a military solution in the South to achieve the country’s reunification (Großheim 2009: 211, 213).

quently, uprisings took place in bigger cities displaying the citizens' dissatisfaction with the leadership. The first anti-hunger uprisings occurred in Hai Phong and Nghe Tinh in autumn 1980. Furthermore, in Hanoi, people openly expressed their discontent with the state's performance; as it became evident that the socialist path to modernisation was failing to deliver the promised goods, this vision of the future became openly disputed. Rural households started to infiltrate the collectivised system by putting greater effort into private household production than in collective farming. Finally, this development resulted in the establishment of an informal contract system (Kerkvliet 1993: 11). In reaction to these developments, the Communist Party launched the reform program of *Doi Moi* at the VI Party Congress in 1986. The party recognised the inevitability of opening the country to encourage socio-economic development. The introduction of economic reforms determined Vietnam's transition from a planned to a market economy. Overall, reforms aimed at private sector development. Initial measures included the payment of wages on a cash basis, permitting private manufacturers to employ up to 10 workers – which was later increased –, and passing a Foreign Investment Law. Export processing zones were also established. In agriculture, a decollectivisation process was initiated, resulting in a primary reliance on household-centred agriculture. Furthermore, state subsidies were abolished and the national currency *dong* was devaluated according to market rates (Turley 1993: 7, 11). Reforms resulted in “state initiated capitalism” implying a reconciliation of the capitalist and socialist system under the guidance of the state (Turley 1993: 9).⁷⁵ Although parallels to the Soviet transformation process are often highlighted, Turley (1993: 2) states that *Doi Moi* should not be confused with the Soviet model of *Perestroika*; *Perestroika* introduced political and cultural reforms first, saving economic reforms for later, while the Vietnamese state tried to balance political and economic development. It seemed that in order to legitimise reforms, mass participation in public affairs was essential. Consequently, initial political reforms targeted the promotion of people's participation. From 1987 onwards, non-party-approved candidates were permitted to run in National Assembly elections. This was a remarkable change, as up until that point all candidates were required to be nominated by the Vietnam Fatherland Front (Turley 1993: 263).⁷⁶ This reform was followed by two new laws concerning people's councils and committees in 1989. The overall objective was to enhance people's participation in these institutions (Turley 1993: 264 f.). However, participation was not understood as the people's involvement in the decision-making process, but rather in the implementation of decisions already made by the party. In this context, Turley (1993: 269) argues that “mobilizational authoritarianism” would be a more appropriate term.⁷⁷ Overall, political stability was recognised as the main prerequisite for the country's socio-economic development. In contrast, political pluralism was not considered to be in line with the dominant ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

Although the rejection of political pluralism is still maintained, a short period of political liberalisation could be observed in advance of the Xth Party Congress in April 2006. The Party Congress coincided with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit organised in Hanoi in autumn 2006 and Vietnam's accession to the WTO in early 2007. Due to these

⁷⁵ More than 20 years after the passing of the economic program, the state still pursues a “socialist-oriented market economy”. This is regarded as a transitional phase in the establishment of a complete socialist economy (Weggel 2001: 398, 404), to develop a stable basis for the overall goal of socialism. In the latest Socio-Economic Development Plan (2006-2010), the government stresses the importance of the country's “socialist-oriented industrialization and modernization” (MPI 2006: 1).

⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that candidates are selected in rounds of negotiations between politicians and social groups organised by the Vietnam Fatherland Front. In addition, public meetings between deputies and their constituencies are also managed by authorities. Citizens invited to these gatherings often happen to be party members or so-called “good citizens”, a glaring example of how an apparent public sphere is mobilised by the official sphere (Salomon 2007: 204, 213).

⁷⁷ This connotes the Leninist perception of citizens' preferential voluntary participation in state affairs through formal institutions dominated by one party (Turley 1993: 269).

events, global public attention focused on Vietnam. At that time, the emergence of a number of pro-democracy movements seemed to indicate the country's political opening. On April 8th 2006, 118 people signed the "Manifesto for Freedom and Democracy", also known as *Bloc 8406*, which calls for a multi-party system. According to Thayer (2008: 14) *Bloc 8406* is foremost an urban-centred network comprising professionals and intellectuals.

Likewise, in 2006, the former Secretary General of the Democratic Party of Vietnam⁷⁸, Hoang Minh Chinh, officially declared that the party would resume its work. Furthermore, several political factions organised by Vietnamese living abroad, such as the *Viet Tan Party*⁷⁹, also started to be active in Vietnam. The popularity of these political associations is verified by the attendance of the funeral of Hoang Minh Chinh⁸⁰ and of one of the founders of *Bloc 8406* by hundreds of activists (The Economist 26.04.08). However, after a short period of political relaxation, the party-state reinitiated a wave of political repression at the time of the National Assembly elections in May 2007. Since then, several activists have been arrested, many of them are sentenced under Article 88 of Vietnam's Penal Code for "spreading propaganda against the Vietnamese state". For example, two lawyers were sentenced for being members of *Bloc 8406* as well as giving legal support to political dissidents (Taz 12.05.07). Another case gaining massive public attention is the trial of two reporters from the *Thanh Nien* and *Tuoi Tre* Newspapers, who had investigated the so-called "PMU 18" corruption scandal in 2006. PMU 18 was a project unit of the Ministry of Transport. The Deputy Minister of Transport of the time was dismissed for betting millions of foreign aid on European football games. The reporters had participated in the exposure of the case and at first were respected for their anti-corruption work. However, in May 2008 the deputy minister was suddenly cleared of the charges and the two journalists were put on trial instead. They were accused of abuse of power in service. Additionally, in January 2009, the editors of *Thanh Nien* and *Tuoi Tre* were informed that their contracts were not going to be extended (The Economist 15.01.09).

In July 2009, a lawyer, Le Cong Dinh, was arrested. Apart from his contact with the overseas *Viet Tan Party*, Le Cong Dinh is known for his critical articles and blogs; he wrote about the misuse of Japanese Official Development Assistance as well as the alleged corruption associated with the award of a bauxite mining contract (Thayer 2009: 57).

Overall, most calls for democracy are expressed by individual citizens. The level of self-organisation by citizens advocating democratic pluralism appears to be rather low - except for associations created by Vietnamese that are abroad. It appears that as long as the party-state is able to deliver the goods, its authority is not publicly questioned. However, the recent downturn in the long-lasting stable economic growth is likely to challenge the party's legitimacy. In the "Vietnam Monitor," January 2009, the Hongkong Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) predicted a cutback in economic growth for 2009 to 5.9%, the lowest growth rate for the last 10 years. Furthermore, 2008 was marked by soaring inflation; in July 2008 inflation hit the 27% mark, food prices rose by 73%, petrol and gas by 46%, while rent and housing increased by 25% (The Associated Press 24.07.08). Largely, low-income factory workers and farmers are affected by the soaring inflation rates and thus, they express their discontent about wors-

⁷⁸ Before 1988, apart from the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party (DPV) existed in Vietnam, representing different political factions. However, these two parties never were able to exert substantial influence on the political system. According to official channels, they finally resolved themselves in 1988 (The Economist 26.04.08).

⁷⁹ Thayer (2008: 16) reports that the *Viet Tan* was founded by Hoang Co Minh, a former Republic of Vietnam Navy Admiral. In September 1982, he established the *Viet Tan Party* that aimed to overthrow the Vietnamese communist government. Vietnamese media depict the party as a terrorist organisation.

⁸⁰ In his position as the Director of the Institute of Philosophy, Hoang Minh Chinh was among the first to be arrested in the "Anti-Party Affair" in 1967 (Großheim 2009: 212).

ening labour conditions through strikes. In 2008, about 762 labour strikes were registered countrywide. In the year before, 541 strikes were recorded. Most labour strikes occur in foreign-owned manufacturing plants, primarily in the more industrialised south (TN 14.01.09). Workers demand higher wages because they are no longer able to cover their monthly living expenses. Foreign investors from South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Japan demand that the government deals with labour protests, threatening to cut back on investments. The government responded with the promulgation of a decree that forces illegal strikers to compensate their employers for losses. According to the current legislation, only trade union units are permitted to organise strikes. Yet, as trade unions are part of the state's mass organisations, strikes are generally not legally organised (Asia Sentinel 04.08.08). Nonetheless, in both 2009 and 2010 various strikes occurred. In just one month, August 2009, Vietnam witnessed 16 labour strikes. Most of the protests took place in the southern provinces of Dong Nai, Binh Duong, and Ho Chi Minh City, as well as in the northern harbour city of Hai Phong. These provinces and cities have the highest concentration of industrial zones within Vietnam (Vietnam News Briefs 07.09.09).

In general, economic liberalisation initiated two processes, both of which pose a challenge to the current political order. First, the state loses its dominant role as employer and provider of goods. Second, the transformation process results in social differentiation. Consequently, low-income employees increasingly claim social services from the state. In addition, a growing middle class consisting of businessmen and intellectuals aims to secure its status and consumption patterns, and thereby demands legal security from the state. Although labour strikes attract political attention, the middle class appears to have more potential to negotiate with the state. Salomon (2007: 206) stresses, referencing Jeong (1997), that businessmen have a higher flexibility for petitioning, a result of their economic power, political and family ties, as well as shared common interests with the political elite. Additionally, the middle class is far better organised than workers. The degree of organisation enhances its capability to enter into a dialogue with the government. Through the establishment of the Vietnamese Chamber of Industry and Commerce (VCCI)⁸¹ and the Vietnam Union of Science and Technological Associations (VUSTA) organisational structures were put in place to assist the middle class with articulating its interests. Political representation is further realised in the National Assembly. For each legislative period, twenty-five senior business managers are elected to the National Assembly to "represent enterprises" (Salomon 2007: 205). Accordingly, the increase in labour strikes, as well as the organisation of the urban middle class, challenge the party's authority. As the economic crisis continues, it will be interesting to see whether the party-state is able to maintain legitimacy. The Economist (26.04.08) offers the following prognosis:

"An economic setback that reverses the recent rise in living standards might make people turn against the party. Or, as they get used to economic freedom and learn more about richer, freer countries, they may hanker after more political freedom too".

In conclusion, Koh (2007: 222) states that since *Doi Moi* an ideological shift has taken place. In the pre-*Doi Moi* era, references to independence and the revolution formed the source of the party-state's legitimacy. Thus, the dominant value in society was the commitment to victory in times of war. This commitment required putting the collective interest before private interests. Yet, with the introduction of privatisation measures in the late 1980s, a shift in values occurred. The result are multiple tensions including those that exist between ideology and reality, between vision and practices, and tensions between the collective and the individual

⁸¹ According to Thayer (2008: 3) the VCCI is a "semi-governmental organization that represents the private sector". Its members comprise state-owned enterprises, private companies and trade associations. Although it is not funded by the state, VCCI belongs to the Vietnamese Fatherland Front which is the umbrella organisation for mass organisations in Vietnam.

(Koh 2007: 234). The former call to work and sacrifice for the revolutionary spirit no longer provides the sole basis for legitimacy. Koh (2007: 234) concludes that a “dominating ideology that provides an operational context for both state and individuals” is missing. He contends that in times of globalisation and economic development the Communist Party seeks to attain legitimacy through economic integration as well as the ordering of state-society relations through a “strong legal footing” (Koh 2007: 235). Consequently, the state pays special attention to the rule of law as well as accountability.

3.1.1 Building a rule of law based state

With the promulgation of the Master Plan for Public Administration Reform 2001-2010, the Vietnamese government has established the framework to institutionalise the rule of law. The rule of law needs to be differentiated from the “rule by law”. The latter implies that governance is exercised on the basis of law; yet, rule of law is both an essential element of an accountable state and a key concept regarding human rights (Buhmann 2007: 238). Since 1960, the Vietnamese state followed the so-called Soviet “socialist legality” doctrine (*phap che xa hoi chu nghia*). According to socialist legality, the law does not stand above the state, but emanates from the state. It was only in 1991 that a “law-based state” was introduced (Gillespie 2007: 143, 148). The 1992 Constitution includes a number of human rights, such as the freedom of movement and residence within the country (Article 68), freedom of opinion and speech, the right to be informed, and the right to assemble (Article 69).⁸² Furthermore, it was the first constitution to put forward a clear definition of human rights. The previous three constitutions had recognised human rights as a branch of the rights of citizens (Tran Ngoc Duong 1999: 141). It was only at the IX. Party Congress in 2001 that the Communist Party officially acknowledged the relevance of human rights. It took another five years for the Central Party Committee to formulate the state’s obligation to institutionalise and implement both citizens’ and human rights in 2006 (Kinley, Hai Nguyen 2008: 9).

The Public Administration Reform primarily targets limitations on corruption, cronyism, as well as other abuses by executive institutions (Buhmann 2007: 241). The basis for the fight against corruption was established through the promulgation of the Anti-Corruption Law and the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Inspectorate in 2006. The government explicitly requests citizens to assist in the revelation of corruption cases.

Decentralisation is another important component of the Public Administration Reform. The promotion of people’s participation in the lowest administrative unit, that is the commune, is emphasised. As early as 1998, the Grassroots Democracy Decree was promulgated. It evokes Ho Chi Minh’s sentiment, “the people know, the people discuss, the people act, the people supervise”. In fact, it is an attempt to reach democratisation through a top-down approach. In 2007, the Grassroots Democracy Decree was replaced by the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance.⁸³ The Ordinance focuses on the duties of official authorities and mass organisations with respect to citizens (Heinzelmann 2007: 15). In fact, citizens’ involvement in affairs con-

⁸² Interestingly, the freedom of expression, publishing, association and meeting, freedom of religious belief, residence, travel inside the country and to foreign countries were already recognised in the 1946 Constitution in Chapter 2, Article 10 (Tran Ngoc Duong 1999: 142).

⁸³ “Ordinance on implementation of democracy at the commune level” (34/2007/PL-UBTVQH11). In particular, the Ordinance regulates people’s participation at the local and commune level in the following fields: 1. commune’s duty to inform the people concerning 11 determined affairs, such as new laws, land use rights, commune’s budget, etc. 2. commune’s duty to consult the people in 5 affairs, such as socio-economic development plans, land use plans, etc. 3. discussion and decision about affairs that concern the public, such as public infrastructure development, all measures concerning the common good of the commune’s and village’s residents in case of percentage excess. 4. Monitoring and Evaluation of 11 defined affairs, such as budgets, land-use, paying and usage of fees, corruption, social policies (Heinzelmann 2007: 15).

cerning the common good could facilitate the development of public spheres. However, what immediately qualifies this assessment is that private individuals need to be mobilised by the state in order to dedicate themselves to the common good. In the same light, Salomon (2007: 202) highlights the structured channels through which people's participation still needs to occur in Vietnam.

In sum, the Ordinance's objective appears to be emblematic of the state's dilemma; after decades of guardianship, the state aims to decentralise responsibilities and thus, citizens are required to take over social and personal responsibility, but only in those fields which are of minor political relevance. Projects on the commune level, such as public infrastructure developments, absorb state power at the local level for decisions of minor relevance for the nation-state. For the party-state, assigning decision-making, monitoring and evaluation to citizens does not represent a great loss of control. Conversely, it makes a great difference for citizens, as it indicates that their interests are being heard and their participation is appreciated.

In recent years, political representation has also gained significance on the national level. Therefore, the supreme legislative body, the National Assembly, is a further object of reform; Koh (2007: 229) refers to an increase in discussions about the constitutionality of legislative acts. Furthermore, there is a rising awareness among deputies of their role as representatives of their constituency. However, the lack of professionalism within the National Assembly remains a critical point for reform. A major problem is that there are hardly any full-time deputies and furthermore, responsibilities overlap. Some part-time representatives work in judiciary and, at the same time, executive bodies, for example the Supreme People's Court or the Ministry of Justice (Salomon 2007: 214). Moreover, the party and state relationship is highly integrated; the National Assembly's top positions are occupied by leaders of the Communist Party (Koh 2004: 44). As a result, a system of checks and balances fails to exist in Vietnam's political system.

Against this background, the identification of a list of criteria that defines a good deputy can be seen as an initial attempt to improve the National Assembly's efficiency. Apart from education and competence, moral values such as honesty and devotion are also required (Salomon 2007: 207). It is striking that legality in Vietnam still appears to be highly associated with morality and ethics.⁸⁴

In conclusion, the increase in new laws and decrees, as well as the amendment of existing ones, indicate the leadership's effort to reform public administration. Nevertheless, Buhmann (2007: 252) argues that the Vietnamese state instrumentalizes the legal reform process rather than enforcing the immediate rule of law:

“The persisting emphasis on legality found in policy decisions and legislation promulgated as part of the public administration reforms focuses on technical rather than substantive legality. This reflects the continued instrumentalization of the Vietnamese legal reform process. Moving from instrumentalization to a more directed focus on rule of law issues will require substantial additional focus on substantive legality, equality, and proportionality, and the independence of institutional bodies to correct administrative errors”.

The limited scope for political organisations to develop outside of the Communist Party and mass organisations signifies that Vietnam still has a way to go until a rule of law-based state can be established.

⁸⁴ This is reminiscent of the neo-Confucianist orthodoxies introduced to Vietnam during the rule of the Le Dynasty (1428-1788). Confucian scholars were of the opinion that laws were unnecessary as long as people were guided by education, social pressure and morals.

3.2 State, Market, Voluntary Sector

Assuming there is a correlation between the voluntary sector and citizens' participation, Wuthnow (1991) questions whether a strong and independent voluntary sector forms a compulsory component of a vibrant public sphere. Often, scholars argue, in reference to Tocqueville, that the voluntary sector assists in the mobilisation of an informed electorate.

In the three-sector model, consisting of the state, the market and the voluntary sector, the state is defined as the scope of those activities that are organised and legitimised by formalised and coercive powers. In contrast, the market comprises a range of activities linked to a profit-based exchange of goods and services. This exchange is determined by a pricing mechanism that obeys rule of price and demand. Finally, the voluntary sector represents a residuum of the previous two sectors. Activities in the voluntary sector neither underscore the principle of coercion, nor the profit-oriented exchange of goods and services (Wuthnow 1991: 5 f.) Thus, the application of the term "sector" allows for a differentiation between diverse social activities according to their dominant principles of association. The three guiding principles are coercion, profitability, and voluntarism. Voluntarism includes the freedom of association for purposes of mutuality, as well as services rendered free of obligation or remuneration (Wuthnow 1991: 7 f.). However, a clear distinction between the sectors is not possible as they often overlap. Thus, Wuthnow (1991: 10) suggests that an examination of the three ought to also consider the sectors' size and interrelationships. Furthermore, he proposes that studies of the roles and relations between the three sectors ought to take into account historical and cultural precedents (Wuthnow 1991: 18 f.). For example, participation in voluntary associations might be considered a common way of satisfying the basic needs of meaning and belonging, and therefore, once it is part of a society's tradition, it is not likely to vanish again. In this light, Vietnam poses an interesting country for research. First, the state sector increasingly retreats from the market, which is made explicit by the transformation from a planned to a market economy. As a result, the sector of the market gains significance. Second, mutual assistance is deeply rooted in Vietnamese society; sacred spaces like pagodas, temples and communal houses are sites where voluntary action evolves.⁸⁵ Additionally, young people are especially involved in voluntary associations. Although Drummond and Nguyen Thi Lien (2009: 178) remark that voluntary actions are often organised by the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union⁸⁶, nonetheless, the diversity of clubs and activities is remarkable. Outside of mass and party organisations, university clubs and international non-governmental organisations recruit volunteers.⁸⁷

This tradition of mutual support may account for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's decision in its early years to tolerate voluntary sector activities. Yet, in 1957, they were officially prohibited because of an increase in civic activity which aimed to criticize the status quo. In particular, the literary public spheres were considered a threat to the current order. After the imprisonment of popular intellectuals and the shutdown of reformist magazines, the state

⁸⁵ In Ngoc Ha ward the office of the Red Cross is located next to the communal house.

⁸⁶ The Youth Union was founded by Ho Chi Minh in 1931. Its main function is to manage and organise activities for children and young people such as picnics, camping trips and volunteer programs. Of course, the overall objective is the creation of political consciousness of the Communist Party among the youth as well as the involvement in mass mobilisation campaigns (Drummond, Nguyen Thi Lien 2009: 180).

⁸⁷ An interviewed student works as volunteer for the French organisation *Solidarité Jeunesse Vietnam* after school. She teaches children from poor families living in the squatter areas along the banks of the Red River. Asked about her motive, she answers that still in Vietnam so many people would need support. Her elder brother is a member of the university's Aikido Club. The club organises the cleaning of the banks of Hoan Kiem Lake. He reports that for the preparation of the capital's 1000th anniversary in 2010 45,000 volunteers will be mobilised to make the city clean and beautiful (Interview with Ly and Anh, 16.05.2008).

promulgated a new Law on Associations in mid-1957, which limited rights to assemble as well as the ability to form civic organisations (Sidel 2008: 142).

Despite the restrictions set by the legal framework, Wuthnow (1991: 12) remarks that even in societies with strong socialist parties and working class movements the growth of commerce and industry, and with it the rise of the middle class, will lead to a growth in the voluntary sector in the form of youth organisations, community improvement leagues, benevolent associations, etc. This helps to explain why, in the early 1990s, Vietnam witnessed a rapid increase in research centres and social organisations. This development was supported by a modification in the legislation. As early as 1989, policy documents had been published with the objective to encourage some voluntary activity under state control. However, in 1990, with Instruction 2 1990, control over social organisations was re-enforced. Not only were voluntary organisations required to register with the state, they also had to obtain the state's approval (Sidel 2008: 142 f.). Notwithstanding the legislation, many organisations continued to operate publicly without formal registration. In 1992, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment created a loophole for these organisations.⁸⁸ Under the umbrella of the citizens' right to organise science and technology, these new organisations received political protection. This was due to the perception, predominant in the Soviet Union and Vietnam, that science and technology were technical and thereby non-political (Sidel 2008: 144 f.). This was followed by the adoption of the Civil Code by the National Assembly in 1995, which formally recognised social and economic organisations, social and charitable foundations, and voluntary organisations as social legal entities (Sidel 2008: 146). In the 1990s, as well as again in 2000/2001, attempts were made to draft a new Law on Associations to replace the 1957 Law. However, these attempts failed because of an initiated debate on sensitive political issues. Instead, in 2003, Decree 88 on the Management of Associations, was promulgated by the government. The decree provides a framework for associational activities. It stipulates that associations need to be approved by state agencies on the local, provincial or national level. Furthermore, organisations must have a charter as well as an office so that the state is able to detect and supervise them (Sidel 2008: 150 ff.). Finally, in 2005, the Law on Associations was released by the Government Office in Hanoi, inviting comments from the public. This law is actually a fusion of the Law of 1957 and the Decree of 2003. It still insists on a system of approval, but mass organisations are exempt from the Law (Sidel 2008: 156). Major concerns with the law were expressed by VUSTA and VCCI, mainly targeting the high degree of state control over the associational sector. In reaction, representatives of the Vietnamese business, trade and professional sector drafted an alternative Law on Associations. They even considered bringing it to the National Assembly for discussion. Sidel (2008: 164) views this a "conflict among elites"; lobbying by businessmen and intellectuals has become too strong for the state to ignore. This process of negotiation between the state and representatives of the voluntary and market sector indicates the competition and cooperation between the sectors, which Wuthnow (1991: 11 f.) has already illustrated. Power relations between the sectors are constantly shifting. For example, the issuance of an official draft version of the revision of Decree 88 by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2009, was also opened by the Ministry for comments on the draft revision on its website until the 17th of November, 2009. However, this deadline was not respected and in summer 2009 Prime Ministerial Decision No. 97 was promulgated. This decision includes a list of 317 topics that scientific and technical associations are permitted to study. It clearly states that all views concerning the party's or state's policies have to be handed over to state departments immediately before publishing. Furthermore, organisations are prohibited from publishing their positions under their own name. Overall, this decision points towards the government's attempt to further curtail any political opposition rising from the associational sector. In reaction to the Prime Ministerial Decision, the Institute of Devel-

⁸⁸ Decree 35 1992, Ministry of Science and Technology 1993.

opment Studies, the only independent local economic think tank comprising a number of Vietnam's most popular intellectuals like Le Dang Doanh, halted its work. In previous years, the Institute had openly reviewed the state's macroeconomic policy, including its economic stimulus plans.

In conclusion, most of the recently established organisations focus on the supply of social services that the state is no longer capable to provide. They are preoccupied with social and environmental issues, including poverty reduction, rather than political activism. With the introduction of the *xa hoi hoa* policy, the Vietnamese version of privatisation, the state officially declares its retreat from social services. Nonetheless, the state still aims to exert control over associations. Despite of a relaxation in the legal framework, the scope for the voluntary sector remains limited. As a result, voluntary organisations in Vietnam are, for the most part, related to or even dominated by the state (Sidel 2008: 141). Yet, in terms of public spheres, the formation of interest groups such as VCCI or VUSTA argues for an institutionalisation of public spheres and their recognition by the state.

3.2.1 Conclusion: scope for public sphere development

Although embodied in the constitution, in practice freedom of speech and assembly are restricted in Vietnam. The Communist Party still maintains the negation of ideological pluralism, formal opposition, and party pluralism. At the same time as the state undermines the development of public spheres, it also exerts control over the private sphere of the home. The administrative structure of the government also allows the state to intrude into individuals' private lives. Moreover, the state sector is still dominant in the economy, despite economic liberalisation (Koh 2006: 2). In Vietnam, there is a lack of a private sector taken care of by private individuals.

In an attempt to apply the structuring terms of private and public to Soviet societies, Oswald and Voroncov (2003: 42 f.) suggest a discussion of these spheres as diverse realms of communication. This assists in understanding the interrelationship between the two. While talks organised by the official sphere were considered "empty speech" in Soviet societies, individual opinion was only expressed in the "private public sphere"⁸⁹ (Oswald and Voroncov 2003: 53 f.). Yet, this was to change during the years of reform in the 1980s. Private public spheres became smaller due to the formation of platforms open for discussion within the "official public sphere". Simultaneously, the state withdrew from the private sphere, thereby assigning a new quality to it (Oswald, Voroncov 2003: 59).

A similar development can be stated for Vietnam. There has been a growth in benevolent as well as professional associations, especially since the 1990s. Through a modification of the legal framework and the integration into global society, it has become possible to establish organisations independent from the state-organised mass organisations. Additionally, advances in communication technology, for example the internet, have opened up new opportunities for the exchange of ideas and articulation of interests. Moreover, the 'official public sphere' introduces platforms for citizens to discuss affairs dealing with the common good in the national print media.

Finally, Rittersporn et al. (2003: 9) maintain that a multitude of different public spaces exists within Socialist states. For them, these public spaces comprise all spaces, where citizens are

⁸⁹ For example, they specify the intelligentsia's kitchen. It becomes clear, that this space was not to be equated with citizens' "private sphere" when considering the high degree of social control that governed people's lives. The enforcement of cohabitation in the early years of socialism rendered the existence of a private sphere, and private space, respectively, nearly impossible. Consequently, the "official" encroached upon the private sphere (Oswald, Voroncov 2003: 46 f.).

allowed to assemble, such as streets, squares, cinemas, shops or stadiums. However, these public spheres do not have much in common with the bourgeois public sphere as depicted by Habermas. Thus, Rittersporn et al. (2003: 10) suggest analysing public spaces dominated by the state as well as people's actions within them.

Similarly, Benhabib (2006: 207) regards the re-appropriation of public space by the public sphere evidence to an alteration in the given order.

“Im Totalitarismus sind die öffentlichen Plätze mit den hohlen Zeichen der Macht des Regimes übersät, aber eine gemeinsame Welt wird an anderer Stelle wiedererrichtet. Wenn diese anderswo geschaffene gemeinsame Welt auf die Straßen, den Marktplatz, die städtischen Plätze überspringt und somit eine alternative öffentliche Sphäre ausbildet, kommen diese Regime ins Wanken“ (Benhabib 2006: 207).

3.3 Cyberspace: the digital public space of the internet

“We won't go to the street, we won't shout anything. We're sitting before the screen, typing and blogging,” (...) “That's how we rebel” (Mr. Cold, student blogger in San Francisco Chronicle 14.12.08).

In Vietnam, virtual and digital public spaces increasingly indicate the potential to become the location of public spheres. Citizens' discussions about the common good more and more take place in digital space. Additionally, they provide new possibilities for self-organisation. Both citizens and journalists make use of virtual public space in the form of print media to express people's discontent with politics. Yet, people's criticism primarily focuses on local-level state-society relations. Conflicts between private individuals and local authorities on the district or province level are openly addressed, whereas national politics mostly remain unchallenged. Certainly, this is due to the high degree of state censorship and thus the non-existence of independent media. As an alternative, the digital space offered by the internet has become a prominent platform for debate and the formation of political will. To comprehend the distinction between physical and digital public space, the concept of virtuality, as Jordan (1999: 1) outlines, is relevant:

“Cyberspace can be called the virtual lands, with virtual lives and virtual societies, because these lives and societies do not exist with the same physical reality that 'real' societies do. With the emergence of cyberspace, the virtual becomes counterposed to the real. The physical exists in cyberspace but is reinvented. Virtuality is the general term for this reinvention of familiar physical space in cyberspace”.

Through the reinvention of physical space in cyberspace, room for action and speech that somehow might transgress the boundaries existing in physical space become available. An important prerequisite rendered by cyberspace is the possibility to create alternate or even multiple identities. New internet identities, *avatar*, allow for a divergence from social identities in the “real” world. According to Jordan (1999: 59):

“The existence of an avatar means someone has used some of cyberspace's resources in ways that result in other avatars recognising a stable online personality. (...) More than one avatar can be created and the relationship between these identities and someone's offline life is complicated”.

In this light, the idea of the existence of an anonymous space of social interaction certainly needs to be qualified. Producers of cyberspace do not remain anonymous, but they are identifiable via their *avatars*. However, Jordan (1999: 78 f.) reminds that *avatars* should not be confused with identities in everyday non-virtual life, which are marked by race, age, sex,

clothing, etc. In contrast, online personalities are constructed through markers such as addresses, handles, signatures, styles, etc. (Jordan 1999: 75). This new conception of space has important implications for previous models of public space whose primary focus was on physical space. For example in Arendt's model of public space, the preconditions under which people come together acting and speaking in cyberspace have departed from the physical space of the Greek *agora* as a space of face-to-face interaction. In cyberspace, it is the removal of "face-to-face" interaction that allows for the construction of alternate or even diverging identities. For this reason, it is necessary to think about new forms of social interaction and self-organisation. In his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Habermas (1987) already anticipated new forms of public spheres formation, as he points towards the transformation of public spheres from a tangible public towards a virtual community based on impersonal means of communication (Benhabib 2006: 312).

While Habermas' elaborations focus on virtual public space, digital public space begins to play an increasing role in Vietnam for the development of public spheres. There has been a marked increase in the number of internet users in recent years. The *BBC* (29.04.09) reports that in June 2008 there were 20 million internet users in Vietnam, out of an overall population of about 88 million people; in urban centres, the number of internet cafés are growing exponentially. For 3,000 VND per hour, access to the internet is affordable to a great portion of the population. In particular, young people and children tend to hang out in internet cafés in Hanoi during the afternoon, where they are frequently observed chatting - especially with *yahoo messenger* - and playing video games.

In anticipation of Vietnam's high growth potential, internet providers like *Yahoo*, and social network providers such as *Friendster* or *Facebook*, have recently entered the Vietnamese market. In spite of an insufficient legal framework vis a vis the usage and investment into internet branches, foreign internet providers are eager to invest in Vietnam. In April 2008, *Yahoo* launched the Vietnamese version of various services like *Yahoo! 360° Pulse*, *Yahoo! News*, *Yahoo! Music* for local users. The service provider has attracted about 15 million e-mail users, and 2 million bloggers in Vietnam, making up 25% of *Yahoo* bloggers worldwide. In addition, the company opened up internet cafés in the main cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to serve business people. Another US-based social network provider, *Friendster*, launched its Vietnamese website in May the same year. Moreover, *Facebook* just recently issued a Vietnamese language version. The usage of *Facebook* by Vietnamese customers was enhanced through the shut-down of *Yahoo! 360°* in July 2009. *Facebook* is reported to have 3 million users, nationwide (Intellasia 21.12.09; The Press Association 17.11.09; VietNamNet 20.06.08). These numbers illustrate that the internet, and in particular personal blogs, are becoming a popular medium of information and communication. On one hand, the internet is used to attain new forms of privacy that cannot be established at home. On the other, the internet provides new forms of self-organisation for social actors articulating political contents. Currently political opposition in Vietnam is for the most part organised in digital space, including oppositional groups such as *Bloc 80406* and the Democratic Party. Additionally, bloggers use the internet as public platform; increasingly, individuals articulate their private opinions on issues of public relevance in their weblogs, including popular topics such as international affairs like the territorial disputes with China over the Paracel and Spratley Islands in the South China Sea, and internal affairs like corruption and religious freedom (BBC Vietnamese Service 14.09.09). In contrast to virtual public space where news coverage focuses on local political issues, in digital space national politics are challenged.

The state observes the growing interest in these new forms of communication carefully as they offer scope for action outside state control. Thus, in October 2008, a new office called the Administration Agency for Radio, Television and Electronics Information was established with the primary function to monitor the internet. In addition, legislation on the internet was

adjusted. On August 28, 2008, Decree No. 97/2008/ND-CP on the provision of information on the personal electronic information page was passed and later amended by a further circular in December 2008 (MIC 2008). The new regulation clearly defines the function of weblogs. In advance, senior officials had already stated that “[w]eblogs should serve as personal online diaries, not as organs to disseminate opinions about politics, religion, and society” (Radio Free Asia 09.12.08; San Francisco Chronicle 14.12.08). What is striking is the official differentiation made between “private” and “public”. Personal online diaries apparently are meant to serve the spread of private or even intimate details about individual’s private life, whereas affairs of major concern to the public, such as politics, religion and society, must not be addressed in weblogs.

Ngo Ngoc Ngu Long effectively outlines this perceived ambivalence of the internet in his article, “The War on the Virtual World” published in *Sai Gon Giai Phong* Newspaper⁹⁰ on the 31st of May 2009 (BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 29.06.09). He outlines the double face of digital space. On the one hand, the internet offers some kind of private space allowing

“Vietnamese young people to move with the world and to show who they are, equal with friends over the five continents. In a world without national borders, people can confidently come together on the limitless level playing field of knowledge. That is the positive side of the internet”.

On the other hand, the author contends that the anonymity of the internet is increasingly capitalised upon to freely express opinions without taking responsibility. He accuses webloggers of not following “the social order which is prescribed for each citizen”. Overall, the internet is considered a threat to the current political and social order:

“The main problem here, however, is that a new front has immediately been developed to make use of this opportunity. Anyone can go on a blog to distort the truth and brazenly challenge state legal authorities while no walls can stop them from so doing. And since then, there are countless numbers of personal blogs with nicknames as V.A., T.K, C.W.N, T.D.K., B.L, S.O.H, L.M.P, T.H, T.V.N, T.G.L, C.D.W, B.L, along with a consistent system of synchronized and simultaneous opinions, raising their voices with a clear and unhidden agenda.

Depending on the level of anonymity, the bloggers display different sabotage methods. But in general they have the same targets. They are to deny historical and traditional values, and provoke young people to protest against the regime” (BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 29.06.09).

A further critical point in the debate is the state’s demand for self-denunciation of the blogger community. The blogger community is requested to immediately report violations against the new Decree to the police. Mr Nguyen Tu Quang of Bach Khoa Internet Security Center explains: “When we create a legal corridor, determining what is legal and what is a violation of Vietnamese law, the blog community will detect such things on its own and will let the government know of violations” (Radio Free Asia 12.09.08). The Deputy Minister of Information and Communication even plans to seek support from internet companies such as *Google* and *Yahoo* to regulate the blogger scene. The debate on internet usage restrictions was enhanced in November 2009, when numerous Vietnamese internet users were not able to access the two *Facebook* websites, apps.facebook.com and www.facebook.com. According to an article in *The Guardian* (17.11.09), the severity of the problem depended on the internet service provider; furthermore, while other popular websites were still easily accessible, only access to Facebook was blocked. Soon rumours about an official block of the website were spread in

⁹⁰ *Sai Gon Giai Phong* is the official organ of the Party Committee of Ho Chi Minh City.

diverse discussion platforms. Although the government did not issue an official statement, employees of the Vietnam Post and Telecommunications and FPT Telecom declared that the companies had been ordered to block the websites (New Jersey News Room 30.11.09).

These rumours are not anchorless as only a few months before, in July 2009, Vietnam's neighbour China had shut down *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube*. It was against this background that a photographed document appeared on *CNN iReport* showing an official dispatch of the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security dating August 27 2009, which indicated that ten Vietnamese internet providers were instructed to block eight websites for security reasons.

“For security reasons and to fight against propaganda activities that oppose the Party and the government, the Department of Professional Technology – Office of Security Administration – Ministry of Public Security – suggest the addressed companies to apply technical methods to block thoroughly these following websites” (CNN iReport 10.11.09 translated from Vietnamese).

The following websites were to be blocked: apps.facebook.com, www.facebook.com, www.ddevn.info, www.phapnanbatnha.net, www.viettalk24.com, www.caotraonhanban.com, www.cuunuoc.org and www.vungguomtritue.com (Radio Free Asia 12.09.09; CNN iReport 10.11.09). However, the document's authenticity is difficult to prove. There is even evidence of its invalidity. It was issued weeks before the first difficulties with accessing *Facebook* occurred. Furthermore, it does not carry the Ministry's official seal (The Guardian 17.11.09). Conversely, the fact that two of the listed websites were not accessible in Vietnam argues that there was an official block. At the end of November 2009, not only was *Facebook* blocked, *Viettalk24* was also no longer accessible. Shortly thereafter, in December, the platform of opponents to Chinese bauxite mining activities in Vietnam (www.bauxitevietnam.info) was also hacked (Washington Post 31.03.10). Furthermore, the spokeswoman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that the state created favourable conditions for the development of the internet, but at the same time, prohibited actions that affect the “morality of society, public order and national security”.

“Lately, many people using the internet in Vietnam seemed pressing because some social networks were taken advantage of to spread information opposing the state of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, violating Vietnamese law, menacing the security of information, exerting negative impact on internet users. The degree of violation will be carefully considered by the functional organs in order to apply the appropriate measures according to the law” (VietNamNet 03.12.09 translated from Vietnamese).

Therefore, even if the authenticity of the document proved to be false, it is necessary to assess the intention behind its publication on the internet. It is plausible that by posting a “hoax”, internet users aim to highlight restrictions on freedom of opinion in Vietnam. The official statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs already indicates the possibility of the government censoring webpages serving social communication. That said, a closer look at the list of websites to be blocked must be taken, as most of them touch sensitive political issues.

Facebook is an international social platform that, as mentioned above, facilitates the self-organisation of social actors in digital space, especially in societies where state control of physical space is high. Thus, disabling of access to *Facebook* assists in hindering people's self-organisation. On first glance, *Viettalk 24* appears to be a platform providing tips and the latest entertainment news. On the horizontal scale of the homepage, themes like “Games”, “Karaoke”, “Radio”, “Film and Music”, etc., appear. However, when scrolling up subjects like “Vietnamese-American Relations”, “Spratley and Paracel Islands”, “Vietnamese-Chinese relations”, as well as “Present Situation of Victims of Injustice”, “Present Situation of Corruption”, “Democratic Voice”, and “Strike and Demonstrations”, pop up on the left vertical scale. Clearly, it also offers a platform for exchanging issues of political relevance.

www.ddcvn.info is the official website of the Democratic Party of Vietnam. The party has issued a statement declaring that the official website was subject to a hackers' attack on the 6th of August 2009. Subsequently, it changed its website to www.ddcvn.info in August 2009. On its new homepage, the Democratic Party requests the socialist government to stop these criminal hacking attacks instantly. Furthermore, the party claims legality for democratic activities from the state. The website is partly available in English language, indicating that the Democratic Party is targeting a public beyond Vietnam's borders.⁹¹

www.phapnanbatnha.net deals with the restriction of religious freedom in Vietnam. The website concentrates on the dispute over Bat Nha Monastery in the central highlands. The members of Bat Nha community in Lam Dong Province are followers of the well-known Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh. After his first return to Vietnam from exile in 2005, Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh was invited to open up a Buddhist centre in the monastery. Nonetheless, at the end of September 2009 about 300 monks and nuns were evicted from the monastery by a violent mob and undercover police officers. Although the government officially states that it is not involved in the conflict - attributing the event to the struggle between two rivaling Buddhist factions in Vietnam - experts suggest that the community was attacked for its involvement in political matters. By October 2008, the national Religious Affairs Committee had declared that Thich Nhat Hanh had distorted Vietnam's religious policies and that some of his followers lacked official permission to live in the monastery. Then, in June 2009 the initial assaults on the Buddhist community occurred. Electricity and water supplies were cut off in order to force the members to leave. Since the first eviction of the members of Bat Nha, the incidence has yielded great public attention. About 180 Vietnamese citizens, intellectuals and party members signed an open letter to the government addressing the conflict as a pressing issue that needed to be resolved in favour of the monks and nuns. Furthermore, the international community became involved. Only recently, Vietnam was removed from the US Department of State's list of countries of particular concern regarding religious freedom. Popular opinion is that Thich Nhat Hanh's first visit to Vietnam after 39 years in exile paved the way for the international recognition of religious freedom in Vietnam (Human Rights Watch 18.10.09; The Wall Street Journal 29.10.09). Moreover, in 2008 the party-state hosted the celebrations of the UN-Vesak Day⁹² in Hanoi. This was an act signifying the country's openness as well as warrant of religious freedom in Vietnam. Yet, the recent occurrences at Bat Nha monastery endanger this acknowledgment, as earlier that year a statement by the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues and Vietnam Committee on Human Rights addressed "religious repression" in Vietnam (Reuters 07.05.09).

A connection to the global community is apparent in the link between www.phapnanbatnha.net and the English language website, www.helpbatnha.org. On the homepage of the English version, another link leads to the homepage of the Chairwoman of the European Parliament's Human Rights Committee, Heidi Hautala. On her website, as of 13th November 2009, Hautala publicly denounces the conflict at Bat Nha prompting the Vietnamese government to immediately stop the persecution of the community. In conclusion, in case of Bat Nha, digital space is deliberately used to reach a wider public; photos and videos are broadcast on the internet by employing mediums such as *YouTube*, and Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh has a personal *Facebook* account which he uses to spread news about the Bat Nha community.

The official website of the International Organization in Support of Humanity is www.caotraonhanban.com. The webpage is linked to the English version, accessible at

⁹¹ While the main statements of the Democratic Party are translated into English, different topics on the vertical and horizontal scale and the related documents are only available in Vietnamese.

⁹² Vesak Day is regarded the anniversary of the birth of Buddha.

www.rallyingfordemocracy.org. It appears that the website is owned by Vietnamese emigrants living in the US, as the address of the associated internet radio, “Rallying for Democracy”, is located in Virginia. A *YouTube* link broadcasts an interview with Doctor Nguyen Quoc Quan about democratisation, recorded in Falls Church, Virginia on the 29th of January 2008. It was broadcast in Vietnamese on *Vietnamese American Television (VATV)*. Accordingly, it seems to specifically target the Vietnamese-speaking community.

Another website that appears to be organised by overseas Vietnamese emigrants is found at www.cuunuoc.org, which translates into “Rescue the country”. Its official address is listed as Little Saigon, USA. According to the website the group’s objective is to disintegrate the “fascistic” system of socialism in Vietnam. The website is also linked to *YouTube*.

The last website that was present on the *CNN’s iReport* scan is www.vungguomtritue.com, which apparently is the homepage of a religious association. Apart from discussing topics related to Buddhism, it also deals with political issues. The list of affiliated organisations and temples hints that the association’s sphere of influence is mainly focused in the US. Once again, multimedia is employed to reach the public; in the category “audio archives” audio pieces on both religious and political issues are broadcast.

Particular characteristics are apparent in the list of websites presented in the *CNN iReport*. First, as domain name is an identification label that determines a certain realm of administrative authority or control, it is interesting that not one of the eight websites uses the domain *vn*, for which registration with the Vietnamese government is required. Half the websites appear to be operated from outside of Vietnam (*ddcvn*, *caotraonhanban*, *cuunuoc*, *vungguomtritue*). Except for the two English-named websites, *Facebook* and *Viettalk 24*, the others all employ Vietnamese names, furthermore, besides the two *Facebook*-associated websites all other webpages use Vietnamese as its primary language, indicating that they are targeting a Vietnamese public. All websites are involved in issues of high political sensibility; most claim democracy, religious freedom or discuss Vietnamese-Chinese relations.

In addition to the appearance of this list on the internet, other incidences also hint at government intervention in digital space. First, the blockade of *Facebook* at the end of 2009 prevented users from disseminating messages, as services such as *YouTube* and *Facebook* assist both users within Vietnam and outside Vietnam to spread information and to communicate with the global public sphere. *Facebook* groups have formed around the most contested political topics, for example the community established in support of Bat Nha monastery, and the group against the arrest of pro-democracy activist and lawyer Le Cong Dinh (Intellasia 21.12.09). Thus, these cases are no longer a domestic affair, but have shifted from the national to the global level. Similarly, Carl Thayer argues that there is a correlation between the self-organisation of activists opposing Chinese bauxite mining in Vietnam through *Facebook* and the ensuing blocking of the website:

“The crackdown against Facebook is part of a larger government drive, led by the public security forces, to control all forms of electronic communication and expression in Vietnam” (New Jersey News Room 30.11.09).

Second, hacker attacks on both the *bauxitevietnam* website and the homepage of the Democratic Party point towards organised interference. Third, as recently as March 2010 *google* detected the use of malware that particularly targeted the Vietnamese-speaking community. The malware had infected computers of internet users downloading a Vietnamese keyboard language software from the website of a California based Vietnamese Professionals Society. It is striking that the Professional Society aims to connect Vietnamese professionals living in the diaspora. As George Kurtz, the chief technology officer of the security software provider McAfee, outlines: “We believe that the perpetrators may have political motivations and may have some allegiance to the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” (Washington

Post 31.03.10). A *google* engineer went one step further by stating that “[s]pecifically, these attacks have tried to squelch opposition to bauxite mining efforts in Vietnam, an important and socially charged issue in the country” (The Wall Street Journal 31.03.10). Soon thereafter, the Vietnamese government published an official statement rejecting any accusations against the state (Business Week 05.04.10; Google Online Security Blog 30.03.10).

Finally, these occurrences suggest that there may be more blockades directed at access to social networks and discussion forums to come. Until recently, the government succeeded in controlling public discourse. Yet, this dominance of the official sphere is increasingly challenged from within digital public space. Digital space poses a new challenge to previously employed mechanisms of control. The recent prohibition of *Facebook* exemplifies that blockades can easily be circumvented.⁹³ Moreover, the case of the *phapnanbatnha* website indicates that the adoption of digital networks results in an involvement in global public spheres. In October and November 2009, both the US Congress and the European Union passed resolutions requesting Vietnam to cease restricting the internet. The *Facebook* blockade was even put on the agenda of the Consultative Group Meeting⁹⁴ in December 2009. The US-Ambassador to Vietnam Michael Michalak declares that “[t]his is not about teenagers chatting online, (...) It is a question of people’s rights to communicate with one another, share ideas and to do business” (Intellasia 21.12.09).

Overall, this points towards a growing potential for self-organisation in digital space. Nonetheless, Mitchell (2003: 145 ff.) warns of overestimating new communication technologies’ potential to create public spaces. He specifically highlights the problematic nature of the accession of the “public” from the private realm and “little public visibility”. Comparing the digital phenomenon to the “commodification” of physical public spaces in the form of privatisation, he identifies the commodification of virtual and digital public spaces through talk-shows and chat rooms. He argues that the main functions of digital and virtual space comprise the facilitation of private communication, publication of news and magazines, as well as the display of commodities. Barney (2003: 117) shares this rather pessimistic assessment of digital spaces’ potential to replace physical public space as the location of public spheres, as digital space “mediates a colonization of the public sphere by powerful private interests whose priorities and practices undermine, rather than complement democracy –”.

However, in Vietnam the case is not one of colonisation of the public sphere through private interests, but rather colonisation of the public sphere through the state. The number of webpages dealing with democracy located outside Vietnam speaks for itself. In contrast, webpages with political content created by self-organised citizens living in Vietnam are rather rare. Inside Vietnam, the scattered weblogs of private individuals prevail. One explanation for this can be found in the high degree of state control. Although the state lacks efficient instruments for internet censorship, preventative measures such as the imprisonment of opponent bloggers assist in discouraging citizens from engaging in public discourse in digital space. This is also linked to Mitchell’s and Barney’s careful consideration of the political potential of digital space.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, it appears that organisation through digital networks facilitates the development of public spheres in Vietnam. The correlation between digital public space and concrete public space is remarkable. Self-organisation seems to be a two-step process. First, social actors interact and maintain relations through social networks and internet platforms. Then, they use these networks to organise assemblages on physical space, thus making

⁹³ Internet users in Vietnam circumvent the official block by accessing the page through the application of proxies (New Jersey News Room 30.11.09).

⁹⁴ The Consultative Group meeting serves as a forum between the Vietnamese government and donor agencies for discussions regarding development policies.

⁹⁵ Although it needs to be remarked that Mitchell and Barney both refer to the commodification of space and the impact of private interests and their ability to hamper democratic developments.

them visible. This counters Mitchell's critique that there is "little public visibility". Furthermore, it corresponds to what Benhabib terms the "holistic function" of public space, a space, where the collective envisions itself. Citizens organise themselves in order to protest against bilateral politics between Vietnam and China, for example in the planned demonstration against China's occupation of the Paracel and Spratley Islands in 2008. Aiming to take advantage of the international attention paid to Vietnam during the Olympic torch rally in Ho Chi Minh City, protestors publicly criticized Chinese policies directed at Vietnam. Logistics such as time and meeting place were arranged in digital space. However, as the network had been watched by police forces in advance, activists were detained from participating through an intense presence of security forces (AFP 29.04.08). Half a year earlier, in December 2007, bloggers had coordinated a demonstration in front of the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi protesting China's Vietnam policy (San Francisco Chronicle 14.12.08).

Political relations between China and Vietnam found themselves on the public agenda once again in discussions about China's planned investment in bauxite mining in Vietnam. In the summer of 2009, two bloggers, Bui Thanh Hieu ("Wind trader") and Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh ("Mother Mushroom"), as well as the *VietNamNet's* journalist, Pham Doan Trang, were arrested for "abusing democratic freedoms". They critically discussed the bauxite mining as well as Chinese claims for the disputed islands on the internet. In addition, they had planned on printing T-shirts with anti-Chinese slogans. Although all three were released soon after their arrest, police confiscated their computers and other personal belongings (Asia Sentinel 21.09.09).

The incidences clearly show that the Vietnamese state does not yet have sophisticated instruments to exert control and censorship over digital public space. Up to now the state's instruments of internet censorship predominantly focus on non-virtual life, and thus on physical space.

"The Vietnam Communist Party and its security apparatus cannot tolerate matters they do not control. Territorial surveillance, bloc wardens and informers work when suspects are territorially based" (Carlyle Thayer in BBC Vietnamese Service 14.09.09).

Since Vietnam lacks the resources and technology to create a program of internet censorship like China, Vietnam's media police adopt state practices from Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. In these countries the arrest of unpleasant bloggers is deployed as a technique to calm them down and at the same time prevent others from becoming involved in public debates about national politics (Asia Sentinel 21.09.09). Again, the correlation between digital and concrete public space is apparent.

In conclusion, in comparison to concrete public space, digital public space in Vietnam is more frequently used for public discourse. The higher degree of anonymity and global interrelatedness encourage the emergence of public spheres in digital space. Despite increasing surveillance and censorship by the state, digital networks serve the organisation of public activities and demonstrations in concrete public space.

With respect to the revolutions in the Middle East, John Allemang (2011) writes:

"The fight for democracy is a public event where numbers really matter. Social networks are only a starting point: It's not about the likes of MySpace but more about Our Space. Twitter's intimacy implies the presence of a like-minded crowd, but technology's quick connections can't compare with the noisy, unpredictable volume of human flesh crammed together in the pungent open air. Dictators have to take notice of what's going on outside their walls – because something so palpably physical and dangerously dynamic can't just be ignored.

Western societies like ours tilt toward a more private and personal view of social life. Where computer networks and consumer comforts suppress outbreaks of dissent, and where protests marginalize into staged and stylized flash mobs, it's easy to forget the public realm's political possibilities.

The city square is the original social medium, the place where power is openly asserted and contested. It's not in itself a generator of democracy, any more than a social-media instrument like Facebook is intrinsically good or evil. But just by being vast and visible, the living embodiment of the networks' electronic claims, these meeting places can make democracy's aspirations more real".

Correspondingly, Mitchell (2003: 148 f.) explains that electronic communication is often a necessary prerequisite for mobilising political activism in physical public space. Nonetheless, he stresses that in the end it is the actual taking and occupation of physical space which is the most effective form of representation.

4 Three dimensional model of public space

Kong and Law (2002: 1505) classify cities as “excellent examples of medium and outcome of power relations”. Cities are socially constructed and therefore politically contested. Conflicts between different groups are likely to arise about the shape of the landscape. This stems from the fact that a ‘unitary culture’ does not exist. In Hanoi, this symbolic heterogeneity was successfully suppressed, at least on the tangible surface which exposes nothing about the tacit symbolism, until economic liberalisation in 1986. With global integration and private sector development, a multitude of spatial producers entered the stage and each of them leaves their very own imprints on the city’s landscape. Multinational and domestic enterprises design the built environment according to their visions for the future, thereby creating new semi-public spaces like shopping malls, amusement parks, etc. Citizens improve their private houses in the form of “popular housing”⁹⁶ or open up private businesses, and thus encroach on public and sacred space. Additionally, citizens make use of former official spaces for leisure and social activities. Thomas (2002: 1621 f.) argues that the latter represents a contestation of the state-defined landscape.

4.1 Dimensions of Public Space

Since the early days of the Dai Viet Empire, a strong link between the mundane authority of the state and sacrality exists. By linking the king to the sacred world of heaven, he was provided both followship and recognition by the commoners; the universal belief that he was divine and sent from heaven to bring prosperity and peace on earth served as the basis for his legitimacy. Accordingly, the construction of sacred spaces, such as pagodas and communal houses, played an important role for the ruler’s function as mediator between the profane and spiritual worlds. Contrary to Western perceptions of public space, open to diverse social groups, in Vietnam there is a strict segregation between the sphere of state authority, and its relationship to sacrality, and the sphere of commoners.

“In brief, then, Vietnam has little history of a public sphere or of public spaces, a social vacuum which has always been filled by the authority of the emperor/state with little place for Western-style public discussion or expression” (Drummond 2000: 2382).

Thus, until recently Hanoi’s built environment was dominantly characterised by official and sacred spaces, with the exception of a few public parks such as Thong Nhat or Thu Le Park.⁹⁷

After Independence, the Socialist state usurped the traditional linkage between sacrality and state in order to achieve enduring legitimacy. However, since the introduction of *Doi Moi* policy, this linkage has ultimately been challenged by citizens. The alteration of the relationship between state and society becomes most obvious in spatial terms through the development of public spaces. On the municipal/national level sacred and official spaces, such as Ba Dinh Square, Ly Thai To Square or the Lenin-Monument, are increasingly appropriated by citizens. In fact, official spaces appear to be “publicised”. On the local level, communal houses, pagodas and temples serve as public spaces for residential areas.

⁹⁶ In reference to Helen Evertsz (2000: 24) this term comprises all housing activities that result from individual decisions and self-initiatives of mainly low-income groups. These activities are not subject to official planning and control.

⁹⁷ Drummond and Nguyen Thi Lien (2009: 176) report that after the end of the US-Vietnam War the Vietnamese government was able to concentrate on social issues like the provision of cities with public spaces. However, it lacked the required resources and the issue of “public space” only entered the public agenda with the introduction of economic reforms in 1986.

These newly evolving spaces bear the characteristics of public spaces as defined by Zukin or Sennett; they are geographical and symbolic centres, as well as arenas for conducting diverse activities. At the same time, agonistic spaces, spaces of appearance in which agents compete for recognition, emerge. Likewise, associational spaces are produced through citizens' acting together in concert. These concepts are based on Western political thought, primarily relating public space to the political/sociological category of public sphere. Although they certainly address the discursive nature of public space, they do not assist in analysing the private appropriation of public space or the dimension of sacrality found in Hanoi.

Thus, this thesis proposes a three dimensional model of public space, choosing a semiotic approach to identify spaces' use function and their symbolic communicative function. Here, spheres of the sacred, official and private are all manifested in space. Often these dimensions overlap, sometimes they replace one another, but they never exist alone in pure form. The level of contestation exerted by the public varies according to the degree of sacrality and officialdom represented within them.

Consequently, the three variables of (1) sacrality, (2) state, (3) privateness ought to be taken into account for an operationalisation of public space in Hanoi.

The variable of sacrality results from an emic reconstruction of public space. From an emic perspective, sacred spaces rooted in village communities, such as pagodas, temples and communal houses are regarded public spaces. Assuming that the dimension of sacrality does not only play a role in the configuration of local public spaces, but also in the emergence of national public spaces, citizens' religious practices in public ought to be analysed and interpreted. These practices include the offering of flowers, lighting of incense sticks, praying, as well as pilgrimages, and the participation in religious festivities. Further indicators for sacrality are architectural structures built in commemoration of national heroes and saints.

The variable of state is most relevant due to the strong presence of the party-state in Hanoi's urban landscape. In contrast to more democratic countries, where public monuments are often the outcome of negotiation between official agendas and local communities, in Vietnam the state exerts direct control over the design, location and budget of public space (Ho Tai 1995: 273). Public space serves the symbolisation and demonstration of state power. That is why this study seeks to examine the history and symbolism of monuments, parks and places' names. The analysis lays a special focus on the official space of Ba Dinh Square.

The variable of privateness represents the blurring of private and public in Hanoi, which has, up to now, mainly been discussed with respect to the conduction of private economic activities in public space (Drummond 2000; Thomas 2002). This private appropriation of the public sphere will be discussed in depth in Chapter 5. For now, the variable of privateness denotes those activities that, according to Arendt's definition, are rendered private, but are carried out in public in Hanoi. The result is an "intimisation" of public space. The anonymity of national public space makes the creation of spheres of intimacy in public possible. Moreover, it favours individualisation and privatisation.

4.1.1 National and local public space

Apart from the introduction of the three dimensions of public space, a further distinction between national and local public space in Hanoi is required. The two categories of urban public space follow the differentiation made between "imitated" modern public space and traditional rural public space by Vietnamese scholars.

The first category of national public space is not indigenous to Vietnam comprising squares, monuments, as well as parks. French urbanists introduced the earliest conceptualisation of

public spaces on the urban or national scale, for example, the previously mentioned Ly Thai To Square. After Independence, squares for military parades or marches like Ba Dinh Square were built. However, these were also considered to be imitations of the Soviet Union. For example, Ba Dinh Square was constructed according to the role model of the Red Square in Moscow. These spaces are highly influenced by concepts of Western urban planning, as indicated by the dominance of the East-West axis.⁹⁸ These public spaces are relevant for the whole urban, or even national, population. Citizens from all over the city or the country come to visit these places, however, it is not only their symbolic function that attracts citizens, but also their use function as they offer an open space in the densely populated city.

With economic development, living standards have risen resulting in a higher demand for leisure spaces. Open green spaces, especially in the centre, are rare. According to the HAIDEP study (2007b: 3-4), the average per capita green space in the four urban core districts-Hoan Kiem, Ba Dinh, Dong Da and Hai Ba Trung-is 1.3 m²/person. This average rate is very low especially when compared to other cities such as Tokyo (3.0 m²), London (26.9 m²), or New York (29.3 m²) (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-4). Although the Building Code of Vietnam⁹⁹ stipulates a minimum land area for parks, the authorities in charge did not monitor these minimum criteria until recently (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-9 f.). Thus, existing green spaces in the city do not cater to the rising demand for public space.

The second category of local public spaces comprises alleys, local markets, pagodas, temples, and communal houses. This study pays particular attention to public spaces located within the former village communities of Ngoc Ha, Huu Tiep and Dai Yen. In the frame of Hanoi's urban sprawl, these villages were integrated into the administrative boundaries of the city. Nowadays, they are part of the broader administrative unit of Ngoc Ha ward, a part of Ba Dinh District. The Ngoc Ha ward was selected for this research because it still bears many characteristics of rural village communities. Traditional public spaces in the form of sacred spaces, as well as the village gate, still exist. In contrast to the public spaces of the first category, the outline of these sacred spaces is guided by geomantic principles. Furthermore, they are predominantly accessed by local residents and are hardly visited by strangers.

Another specific feature of the area is the prevalence of detached houses. Previous studies about communal public space mainly focus on preconceived public spaces in public housing units, such as playgrounds and recreational areas.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, in Ngoc Ha ward planned public spaces almost completely fail to exist. One reason for this is surely the lack of a comprehensive construction plan for the ward. Accordingly, many residents build how they please.¹⁰¹ Often, uncultivated land is encroached upon by individuals to construct private houses. Likewise, the HAIDEP study (2007b: 3-7) highlights that standard layouts for parks at

⁹⁸ One exemption certainly is the Temple of Literature in Hanoi. Although it is of national relevance, it was planned according to geomantic principles, thereby exhibiting characteristics of the second category of public space.

⁹⁹ In general, the Building Code of Vietnam distinguishes between three categories of green urban areas. The first category includes green areas for public usage, such as parks, gardens, and promenades. The second comprises restricted green areas in areas with urban functions such as schools, industrial or residential areas. The third category consists of specialised green areas such as buffer zones and protection areas (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-5). For this study, the first classification of green space is most relevant.

¹⁰⁰ See for example Pham Trong Thuat (2002) and Tran Hoai Anh and E. Dalholm (2005). During the 1960s-1980s the Socialist government adopted the so-called *microraiion* concept from the Soviet Union to serve the rising demand for accommodation in Hanoi. The *microraiion* is an autarc settlement structure that integrates housing facilities and other living amenities like public institutions (schools, kindergarten) and shops (Logan 2000: 206; Phung Duc Tuan 1998: 39; Smith 1996: 75 f.).

¹⁰¹ A phenomenon referred to in Vietnamese language as "salad" (*sa lat*) or "mixed hot pot" (*lau thap cam*).

the neighbourhood level are completely missing. Thus, only limited numbers of small parks exist within residential areas.

4.2 Sacrality: Emic perspective of public space

The traditional sacred space of Vietnamese villages is essential, vis a vis Zukin's (1995: 45) understanding of public spaces as "geographical and symbolic centers". This assumption is supported by expert interviews and a roundtable discussion with Vietnamese anthropologists and architects held at the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences in July 2008. Vietnamese scholars assert that in the traditional rural Vietnamese society public space was a sacred space (*khong gian thieng*).

In the village, sacred space consisted of the communal house, the Buddhist pagoda the Taoist temple, as well as a small temple of literature. Additionally, the market served as space for social interaction and economic exchange.¹⁰² These spaces constituted the centre of village life, where members of the village community, not strangers, mingled. Yet, they were not equally open to all members of the village community. In the past, access to sacred spaces, such as pagodas, temples and communal houses, was highly classified. Determinants of accessibility were gender and social rank (Drummond 2000: 2381). For example women were excluded from the communal house, due to its link to the sphere of profane power.¹⁰³ This shaped the development of a conception of communal space that actually negates the central premise of public space as being accessible to everyone.

"In Vietnam there were never public spaces such as in Western societies. There were always spaces that were only accessible on special dates and to societal groups. That is why for Vietnamese it is nothing special that so many spaces are not accessible" (Nguyen Duc Truyen 24.07.2008).

In spite of its limited accessibility, the communal house (*dinh*) formed the centre of communal life in both rural villages and urban communities. As Papin (1997 : 174) states:

"Lors de sont passage de la campagne à la ville, la première modification du *dinh* est donc simplement liée à sa taille: le *dinh* urbain était un *petit* bâtiment, à l'échelle du petit village dont il constituait l'agora".

Furthermore, the study of communal houses is interesting, apart from its role as the village's *agora*, because it is certainly one of the sacred spaces in Vietnam whose connotations were most greatly altered over time.

¹⁰² Interview with Nguyen Hong Quang, 08.05.2008.

¹⁰³ For a qualified discussion of women's exclusion from the communal house see Endres (2000: 46). Endres (2000: 46) argues that the exclusion of women from the *dinh* was not explicitly expressed in the village law. However, it appears that women were only allowed to enter the *dinh* on the occasion of festivals.

4.2.1 Short history of the communal house

The oldest communal house was recorded during the 16th-century Mac era (1527-1592). However, steel inscriptions prove that communal houses had previously existed in Vietnam but were later rebuilt or restored (Ha Van Tan, Nguyen Van Ku 1998: 70 f.). Another source reports that in the 12th century, the Ly Dynasty issued a royal edict ordering every village to build a communal house. The term *dinh* was adopted by Vietnamese architects from China to denote an open pavilion serving cultural entertainment (Le Thanh Duc 2001: 11, 13). Initially, the *dinh* may have been a resting place for the king when inspecting his kingdom.¹⁰⁴ However, under the rule of the Tran, Le and Mac, the *dinh* became the central institution of the village. In the communal hall the village authorities assembled to deal with communal affairs according to customary rules (Marr 2004: 29). Moreover, it was the place, where residents' taxes were collected. Apart from being the residence of the community council, it also served as a space for villagers' congregations and cultural performances. These performances comprised sports, gymnastics, games, traditional opera, wrestling, dancing, dragon-processions, rice-cooking competitions, etc. (Le Thanh Duc 2001: 17).

Accordingly, the *dinh* not only had one first function at a time, but many overlapping denotations. However, the connotation of the *dinh* as the sphere of officialdom was a common quality throughout pre-colonial and colonial times. Thus, whether it served as a resting place for the king or as an assembly hall for the village council, it was always related to mundane authority. Furthermore, as it was an arena for the village's social and cultural activities, it also connoted a communal space. Nonetheless, it remained an exclusive space because it was not accessible to all members of the community, at all times. Under the Nguyen Dynasty, age, mandarin degree, property and prestige, apart from gender, determined who was allowed to become a member of the council (Großheim 2004: 57).

An additional first function of the communal house, which still prevails today, is the worshipping of the village deity. *Thanh Hoang*, the belief that every citadel needed to have a patron deity, was adopted from China and thus, the history of To Lich, the patron of Thang Long-Hanoi, indicates that he was originally introduced by a governor of the Chinese Tang Dynasty and had already been designated the city's patron in 823. In 1010, King Ly Thai To officially made To Lich *Thanh Hoang* of his capital. Although the idea was transferred from China, the Vietnamese modified it slightly. In Vietnam, not only high-ranking officials were potential candidates for the patron, but also other personalities that had helped the country, regardless of their origin, such as national heroes, legendary deities as well as simple mortals, who had taught a handicraft. Some villages even chose to worship beggars or burglars. Usually, the chosen deity had to receive the king's approval to obtain the status of a *Thanh Hoang*. Naturally, the king denied his approval to deities with minor status, such as beggars or night soil collectors. For this reason, the villagers invented entire false biographies for their chosen saints to legitimise their veneration (Ha Van Tan, Nguyen Van Ku 1998: 101 f.; Le Thanh Duc 2001: 15).

The *dinh* was designated the home of the village deity, and thus added the connotation of sacrality, as originally, the *dinh* used to be the space of secondary worship. For most saints a particular shrine or temple was also dedicated in the village. During festivals in honour of the village saint, the *dinh* functioned as a community assembly hall.¹⁰⁵ Most festivals took, continue to, take place in spring or autumn, most often during the first three lunar months once the harvest is finished and residents have time to celebrate. On these days, the deity's palan-

¹⁰⁴ Endres (2000: 45) declares that many different theories about the origin of the *dinh* exist, of which none has been properly approved.

¹⁰⁵ Endres (2000: 33) adds to this that the prestige economy of the village manifested itself in the *dinh*. Every person that received a mandarin degree or a title needed to organise a great feast in the communal hall.

keen is taken from the temple to the *dinh* and after the ceremony it is returned. In cases where there is no additional temple dedicated to the saint, the deity's statue is carried around the village for everyone to see (Ha Van Tan, Nguyen Van Ku 1998: 110, 112).¹⁰⁶

The outstanding role of the *dinh* in the village structure is not only expressed in its multifunctionalism, but also in its architecture. In comparison to other sacred spaces like the pagoda or temple, the communal house is the largest architectural edifice in the village (Endres 2000: 44). Its pillars are bigger than those of the pagoda. Due to its sacredness, the site for the construction of the *dinh* is selected according to geomantic principles. The ideal location for the communal house is a hill, as, similar to the royal citadel, it should be backed by an elevation and face the water (Ha Van Tan, Nguyen Van Ku 1998: 80). With regards to the connotation of the *dinh*, the manifestation of scenes of everyday life in sculptures is noteworthy. In spite of its reference to the world of saints, as well as its connection to the sphere of domination, a third connotation was added during the 16-18th century. During this period, images of the world of commoners were adopted into the ornamentation of the communal house. For example, *Dinh Phu Lao*, dating from 1688 in Bac Giang Province, had one sculpture that depicted a semi-nude girl sitting on the head of a dragon together with her boyfriend. As the dragon is a symbol for royalty, divinity and solemnity, Ha Van Tan and Nguyen Van Ku (1998: 97) argue that this is "a mockery of the ruling powers by peasants". In that way, the ornamentation of the *dinh* carried a hidden subtext, or in Scott's (1990: 4) terms, can be read as "hidden transcripts", which consist of a discourse taking place 'offstage' beyond the control and observation of those in power. When this is applied as an instrument to critique power, this discourse of subordinates comprises gossip, rumours, folk tales, songs (Scott 1990: xiii), and as I would like to add, ornaments and sculptures displaying images of everyday life. In other words, sculptures mocking the ruler are a further expression of the villages' struggle for autonomy from the emperor.¹⁰⁷ In this sense, the *dinh*; as the communal hall, may well have served as a space that provided subversive activities with an outlet. This claim is substantiated by the fact that, during the rule of the Le and Nguyen Dynasties, both a formal and informal system of domination existed within the villages. The official system consisted of the village head, who was elected by villagers in compliance with government regulations. Additionally, he had to gain approval from the district magistrate. The village head was in charge of the village administration, tax collection, administration of corvee, and military services. In contrast, the informal system constituted the community council, which was the representative organ of the community headed by the premier notable (*tien chi*). Between these two systems tensions concerning village regulations (*huong uoc*) frequently arose (Phan Huy Le 2006: 33).¹⁰⁸

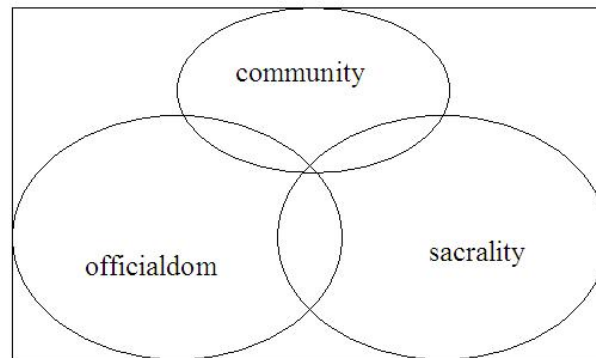
Thus, concerning the connotation of the communal house during pre-colonial times, the three overlapping spheres-officialdom, community, and sacrality-can be identified. These spheres are also reflected in the spatial configuration of the communal house.

¹⁰⁶ This ritual is still present today. In the former villages of Ngoc Ha, Huu Tiep and Dai Yen celebrations on the occasion of the deity's birth day and day of death are held annually.

¹⁰⁷ In the 19th century, the connotation of "hidden transcripts" vanished. Ornaments and sculptures depicting scenes of commoners' everyday life were replaced by motives of nature like leaves and flowers as well as by images of the four spiritual animals (Ha Van Tan, Nguyen Van Ku 1998: 97).

¹⁰⁸ In 1921, this dual system was challenged through the transfer of the communal responsibility from the board of notables to Lineage Heads by the French administration. After immense protests of the local population the French had to re-establish the board of notables again in 1927. The result was a duplicated management system. It was not until 1954 that the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam replaced them with People's Councils. Interestingly, with *Doi Moi* village heads were reintroduced in the mountainous areas of Vietnam. They are referred to as *truong thon*, *truong ban* and *gia lang* (Phan Huy Le 2006: 33 f.).

FIGURE 2: CONNOTATIONS OF THE *DINH* DURING PRE-COLONIAL TIMES



4.2.2 Semiotics of sacred space

For an emic reconstruction of sacred space the science of geomancy is critical. The Vietnamese term for this is *phong thủy*, translating into wind and water. In the Western hemisphere, it is most commonly referred to as *feng-shui*. Geomantic principles were essential in the choice of an edifice's location and outline. Although in the past private houses used to be planned according to geomantic principles, this concept is specifically relevant in the architecture of holy sites such as tombs and temples, which function as a mediator between the profane and sacred worlds. The location of tombs is particularly important; they are believed to have great impact on the life and fate of the offspring's of the dead (Nguyen Ba Dang et al. 2004: 17).

In general, the emic conceptualisation of space comprises three determinants: (1) the dualistic system of *yin* and *yang* (*ly thuyet am duong*); (2) the four "spiritual animals" (*tu thu* or also *bon con vat*); (3) the five elements (*ngu hang*).¹⁰⁹

The dualism of *yin* and *yang* represents shade on the one hand and sunshine on the other. The overall objective is to attain harmony and balance between the two poles. More commonly, *yin* signifies the female and symbolises earth, moon and shadows. Conversely, *yang* represents the male and stands for heaven, sun and light. In terms of geomancy *yin* is usually associated with the West and *yang* with the East (Jochim 1986: 18).

The four spiritual animals comprise the dragon (*rong*), tortoise (*quy*), unicorn (*ly*), and phoenix (*phuong*). The dragon is the imperial symbol of the emperor signifying strength, prosperity and happiness. The dragon arises to heaven in spring and descends to water in autumn, and thereby is believed to bring rain (Ong Hean-Tatt 1993: 45, 60, 67). The second animal is the Black Snake or Black Tortoise, respectively. It embodies disaster and evil coming from the North. In addition to this negative meaning, the tortoise is also a symbol of longevity, strength and endurance. Pools of tortoises and gold fish are a common feature at holy sites as they signify wealth (Ong Hean-Tatt 1993: 90, 98). The unicorn embodies majesty, dignity and courage, while the fourth animal, the phoenix, is the symbol of the empress. It symbolises the sun, and is believed to bring prosperity to the people (Ong Hean-Tatt 1993: 43, 45, 115).

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Cao Chi Hoang and Tran Minh, 24.07.2008.

As time is measured, space is also structured. In ancient China, time was structured according to the Ganzhi System comprising cyclic signs. The Ganzhi System links the four cardinal points to the four “heraldic” animals. Here, Ong Hean-Tatt (1993: 25 f.) distinguishes between the four heraldic animals that comprise the phoenix, dragon, snake-tortoise, and tiger, and the aforementioned spiritual animals. He explains that the four heraldic animals are the source of power summoned during Taoist magic and spiritual rituals (Ong Hean-Tatt 1993: 27). The spiritual animals (*sze ling*) are believed to be endowed with special virtues for which they are also to be respected (Wu 1982 cited Ong Hean-Tatt 1993: 10).

The linkage of the four heraldic animals to the four cardinal points results in the following combinations: North-Black Snake, West-White Tiger, South-Red Phoenix, East-Azure Dragon (Ong Hean-Tatt 1993: 25).¹¹⁰ What is important for an emic reconstruction of space is that the arrangement of the four heraldic animals does not essentially differ from the constellation of the four spiritual animals mentioned by Vietnamese experts. The snake is often replaced by the tortoise (black warrior), and “the hairy animal representing the West could be the Tiger, the Bear, or the Unicorn” (Hsu, Ward 1984: 467 cited Ong Hean-Tatt 1993: 25 f.).

“The Ganzhi System has profound implications associated with Chinese animal symbolism. The associations of time and direction with animals arose as animals are living moving creatures and hence suitable reflections of the interactions of time and direction” (Ong Hean-Tatt 1993: 11).

Again, the four animals are linked to the five elements (Ong Hean-Tatt 1993: 22); water (*thuy*), fire (*hoa*), wood (*moc*), metal (*kim*) and earth (*tho*). The elemental phase of earth constitutes the centre. The East, where the sun rises, is connected to the element of wood. The South is associated with fire, while the West is linked to metal. Finally, the North is combined with water (Jochim 1986: 18).

The most suitable location for the edifice’s location would be a place located with the White Tiger in the West and the Azure-Dragon in the East, as together the White Tiger and the Azure Dragon represent the harmony between *yin* and *yang* (Jochim 1986: 18).

“If a grave site is located with the mountain at the rear and with a small hill in front, it is said to be sited with the green Dragon on the left (East) and the white Tiger on the right (West) and the descendants would be wealthy and receive official greatness” (Ong Hean-Tatt 1993: 106 f.).

Taken together the three determinants of *yin* and *yang*, the four spiritual animals and the five elements, form a comprehensive system of space. This conception is manifested in the architecture of many sacred spaces in Vietnam, such as the communal house of Ngoc Ha.

4.2.3 History and Semiotics of Ngoc Ha Communal House

The village saint of Ngoc Ha is Huyen Thien Hac De.¹¹¹ According to the legend the communal house of Ngoc Ha was founded during the Ly Dynasty (11th-13th century), when the locale was called Phu Phung Thien.¹¹² At that time, an old couple living in the area desperately longed for a child and one day the husband and wife went to the One Pillar Pagoda (*chua mot cot*) to pray to the gods for a child. After they had finished their prayer and returned home from the temple, the woman had a dream about a rich old man with grey hair giving her a

¹¹⁰ The West is associated with the colour white. The day light passes from the North to the South; therefore the North is associated with black, and the South with red. Finally, the East is related to blue.

¹¹¹ The presented data were collected during a narrative interview with Mrs Chi, a member of the communal house’s management board, on the 16th January, 2008.

¹¹² Unfortunately there are no records about the exact founding date.

child. He said that it was the child of the King of Heaven (*Ngoc Hoang*). The child was sent to earth as a penalty because it had broken a cup in heaven. Soon after this dream, the woman became pregnant with a male. The baby had black skin and therefore received the name Hac Cong, *Hac* meaning black. When Hac Cong grew up his only interest was in martial arts and he often went to the forest in today's Botanical Garden (*Bach Thao*) to practice. In the year he turned eight, he died there and legend has it that someone from heaven had descended to earth to take him back.

Some years later, the country was shattered by a war. The troops of the Ly King had to defend the country against foreign invaders. In order to receive heavenly support, the Ly King organised a spiritual festival. In the night after the celebrations he dreamt of a small saint advancing towards him from the north, and thus promising him victory. Suddenly, during a battle between the Ly King's army and the enemy troops on the river, a black cloud arose. The enemies were not able to see anything, and therefore the Ly King's troops were able to defeat them. In order to express his gratitude to the saint, the King commanded the thirteen farms (*thap tam trai*) located west of the royal citadel to honour the saint. The king gave the saint the name Huyen Thien Hac De. *Huyen* and *Hac* meaning "black", and *Thien* translating into "heaven". Subsequently, the three villages Ngoc Ha, Huu Tiep and Xuan Bieu, all parts of the thirteen farms, built communal houses and temples dedicated to Huyen Thien Hac De. The people of Huu Tiep specifically honour the saint's mother, Hoang Thi Duc, because they believe that she was born there and therefore, next to the communal house of Huu Tiep, the temple, Cat Trieu, was erected. In tribute to the saint's mother it is also referred to as Mau Cat Trieu. On the saint's birthday, the 19th of the first lunar month, villagers visit the communal house of Huu Tiep and his day of death, the 21st of the eleventh lunar month, is celebrated in Xuan Bieu Temple located in the Botanical Garden nearby. On both occasions, festivals (*le hoi*) are held in the communal houses and all villagers are invited, a tradition that continues today and on the occasion of such commemorations the residents of Ngoc Ha and Huu Tiep meet in the communal house to celebrate. On this day, numerous games and social activities take place in the communal house, such as singing folk songs, or performing modern Vietnamese folk opera, *cai luong*.

The architecture of the communal house follows a strict geomantic outline and the different spatial compartments are linked to specific functions. Many of the functions, particularly those related to sacred activities, have prevailed over time, whereas others have been altered and adapted to villagers' everyday life. The greatest change has been in the accessibility of certain parts of the holy site to the public.¹¹³

The brick wall surrounding the communal house clearly marks its outstanding position in the village structure. The wall's use function is protection; however, its symbolic function is the demarcation of a sacred territory within profane space. Eliade (1957: 15) argues that a "threshold" mediates between the profane and sacred worlds. In the case of the communal house, this threshold consists of the so-called *Cong Tam Quan* which leads into the courtyard. This gate is always opened on the 1st and 15th of the lunar month and on festival days. On other days it might be closed without further notice, making it difficult for residents to visit the communal house on working days. The members of the management board are in charge of opening the *dinh* to the public.

In general, communal houses in Vietnam have three common features: a courtyard (*san*), a well or pond (*gieng*) and a banyan tree (*cay da*). The obligatory pond of gold fish and the banyan tree are located within the courtyard, with the gold fish, as mentioned above, denoting wealth and prosperity. In front of the pool at *dinh* Ngoc Ha, two stone elephants facing each

¹¹³ The data presented were gathered during a tour of the *dinh* with Mrs Chi, 16.04.2008.

other are used to evoke protection of the communal house. The banyan tree located next to the pond is a symbol of longevity.

The main edifice of the *dinh* is located on side opposite the pool. It is surrounded by a smaller wall which separates it from the courtyard. The entrance to the communal house is marked by three gates. The main gate in the middle is framed by two pillars. On top of each pillar, dragons face the four cardinal points. The pillars' adornments depict the everyday activities of the village (*sinh hoat lang*). While the main gate is only open on festival days, the two smaller gates on the left (*cong ta*) and right (*cong huu*) are also open on usual days. Behind the two gates two smaller buildings are located, *phong ta* (left room) and *phong huu* (right room). The two rooms function as a resting place for visitors to the *dinh*, and here, visitors are offered a cup of tea.¹¹⁴

FIGURE 3: *CONG TAM QUAN* AND COURTYARD OF NGOC HA COMMUNAL HOUSE



Source: Private Photo (2008).

Entering the main structure of the communal hall, the first room is the *Tien Te*, with *Tien* referring to the location of the room that is the “front”. *Te* designates the activity that takes place within this space, “worshipping”. The space of the *Tien Te* consists of five courts (*san*). Wooden pillars demarcate the different courts and one court reaches from one column to the next. At the altar of the *Tien Te*, visitors to the communal house inform the spirit about the purpose of their visit, an inaugural act that every visitor needs to conduct before entering the other parts of the *dinh*. It is certainly the most profane space within the communal hall. During pre-colonial times this was the site, where villagers' taxes were collected. Nowadays, it is where community meetings take place.

Behind the *Tien Te* lies the *Phuong Dinh*, the chamber where the saint's palanquin (*long dinh*)¹¹⁵ is kept. The ceiling of the *Phuong Dinh* is adorned with paintings of the heraldic tiger. The next room behind the *Phuong Dinh* is called *Dai Bai*. In front of the entrance to this room, a certificate indicates that the communal house of Ngoc Ha received the official status as a historic and cultural vestige in 1992. This recognition is of particular relevance as it is the basis for state subsidies concerning renovation works. The sacredness of the *Dai Bai* and the chamber behind it called *Hau Cung* is emphasised by its height above the other halls. A step and a wooden gate separate this part from the front. Thus, to enter the *Dai Bai* another threshold needs to be passed. Traditionally, all wooden houses used to have such a step at the en-

¹¹⁴ During field research in spring 2008, the room on the right was used as a classroom for Chinese language lessons.

¹¹⁵ On festival days, the saint's statue is carried around in this palanquin to the Botanical Garden or even around Hoan Kiem Lake as occurred on the occasion of the Spring Fair in February 2008.

trance door. The threshold warrants that people slow down before stepping in and thereby ensures the worshippers' consideration. The deity's war tools (*trac ky*) are kept in the *Dai Bai*. Behind this area, the saint's altar is situated and always used to be accessible to all members of the community to pray. The holiest part of the communal hall is situated in the last room, the *Hau Cung* (Endres 2000: 46). It is the location of the statue of Huyen Thien Hac De. In the past, this space used to be separated from the other chambers by a wooden gate and was only accessible to the temple guardian (*thu tu*). Nowadays, it is open to the public.

The spatial configuration of the *dinh* is closely related to its first and second functions. In comparison to the royal citadel, within the *dinh* exclusive spaces existed which were not accessible to all members of the community alike. The degree of exclusiveness of a space communicates its degree of sacrality; the more sacred, the more enclosed. Moreover, the communal house's first function as a village assembly hall and thus its connotation of officialdom created supplementary barriers. This system of inclusion and exclusion was based on gender and class. For example, under the Nguyen Dynasty's rule the village administration constituted the council of notables. These notables were chosen from registered male villagers according to specific criteria including age, mandarin degree, competence in administrative matters, prestige, and property. The head of the council of notables was appointed on the basis of age and education and enjoyed prestige in the village. Within the council two groups of notables were distinguished; the main group of notables, *ky muc*, and the small notables referred to as *dich muc* (Großheim 2004: 57).¹¹⁶ This represented how village social stratification was outlined in terms of access to spaces of power.

4.2.4 Dynamics of functions

Both the denotations and the connotations of the communal house have altered over time. Initially, the communal houses of Ngoc Ha and Huu Tiep were built as sacred spaces dedicated to Huyen Thien Hac De and his mother Hoang Thi Duc. Thus, the communal house's first function was to offer an altar as well as a space to assemble on festival days. Then, a further utilitas function was added during pre-colonial times, the assemblage of the village council and the collection of taxes in the communal house. Thereby, the communal house became a symbol of profane power. Thus, the linkage between state/village authority and sacrality is immanent. Analogous to the capitals of Southeast Asian inland states, which were built on holy sites, the occupation of the communal house through state/village officials can also be seen as a means to seek legitimacy. In both cases the result is a manifestation of the relationship between state and spirits in architecture.

¹¹⁶ Nguyen Quang Ngoc (2009: 123) reports that in Yen So village of former Hoai Duc District the people, who had a rank in the communal house, could be divided into 11 classes (11 *tich*). In some villages selling and buying of ranks also became a popular means to augment the village budget.

FIGURE 4: ALTERING FUNCTIONS OF THE *DINH*

	<i>DINH</i> IN PRE-COLONIAL TIMES	<i>DINH</i> TODAY
First Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Residence of village administration - Space of worship - Space of assembly for the village community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Space of worship - Space for social activities of the locality
Second Functions	Sacrality, State, Community	Sacrality, Public

When asked about today's function for the communal house Chi (16.01.2008) answered: "In every village the communal house is the space, where the activities of the community take place, but foremost it is a place where to pray peacefully to the Saint".

Nowadays, celebrations in honour of the saint's birth and death are still organised in the *dinh*. Accordingly, the communal house continues to denote a place of worship and assemblage of the community. However, the communicative function of the *dinh* has been redefined. Apart from the connotation of sacrality, it also has come to be perceived as a public space. During regular visits to the communal house at different times of the day, an intense a-religious usage, specifically of the courtyard, can be observed. In the early morning and evening hours, young and old, male and female, meet in the courtyard for sports and social activities. The courtyard offers a playground for children, a sports ground, and a meeting point for the ward's residents.¹¹⁷

Sacred spaces have come to connote public spaces where members of the locality mingle. Their publicness is further emphasised by their openness to diverse strata of society. The former restriction of accessibility due to gender or social rank has been dissolved; anyone, who wishes to pray to the village deity, is allowed to enter. Although it is predominantly visited by people from the locality, it is also open to visitors from outside the community. In contrast to the connotation of the sacred, the connotation of state appears to have dissolved.¹¹⁸ Drummond (2000: 2381), citing Malarney (1993, 1996), reports that the post-colonial state transformed the *dinh* into "secular spaces" using them, for example, as rice warehouses.¹¹⁹ Nowadays, while its sacred function is reemphasised, the sphere of officialdom appears to have been shifted from the communal to the culture house (*nha van hoa*). The culture house was introduced in residential units (*cum*)¹²⁰ within the scope of the construction of new so-called "social spaces" in the 1950/60s.¹²¹ These social spaces were to offer leisure activities, as well

¹¹⁷ With respect to religious practices, Nguyen Duc Truyen remarks that a distinction between men going to the communal house and women more frequently visiting the pagoda can still be established (Interview 24.07.2008).

¹¹⁸ The assumption that it has not yet vanished completely rests on the fact that members of the communal house's management board are selected by the people's committee.

¹¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of the resurgence of communal house rituals in contemporary Vietnam see Shaun Malarney (2002) Chapter 7.

¹²⁰ Beneath the administrative level of the urban ward (*phuong*), two smaller informal administrative units are located. The *to* is the smallest unit. Eight *to* constitute a *cum*. An urban ward comprises approximately eight to nine *cum*. Both units have a leader who acts as mediator between local authorities and residents (Waibel 2002: 44).

¹²¹ Endres (2000: 83) explains that the Ministry of Culture aimed at the establishment of a system of culture houses on the village level in order to propagate the "masscultural movement" (*phong trao van hoa quan chung*).

as a place for social interaction among neighbours. They consist of the assembly hall (*hoi truong*), the culture house (*nha van hoa*), the library (*thu vien*), and a sports field (*san van dong*). These spaces are distinct from public spaces within the traditional village structure as they are completely a-religious spaces.¹²²

The entanglement of public and official space is obvious; on one hand the culture house functions as a place for residents' social and cultural activities, while on the other, it is also frequently occupied by the official sphere. Respondents explained that they were not allowed to enter the culture house when meetings of the People's Committee took place. This illustrates that even on the micro-level of governance the official sphere withdraws into an enclosed space, not accessible to citizens. Furthermore, local authorities supervise and determine which activities are organised in the culture house and it is often used by local branches of mass organisations. For example, the women's union regularly organises trainings on how to be a "good mother", child nutrition, or aerobic classes in the culture house. In this context, it appears rather appropriate to speak of the "administratisation of space" (*hanh chinh hoa*), compared to the former "sacralisation" of space.¹²³ As a result, the sphere of officialdom was transferred from the communal house to the space of the culture house.

4.2.5 Linkage between sacred and public space

In conclusion, the emic conceptualisation of public space is one of sacred space. Sacred sites offer a forum for social interaction where people from the private sphere can mingle. The alteration of the communal house's first and second functions over time demonstrates the linkage existing between sacrality and public. While this connection has been demonstrated with reference to the second category of public space, namely local public space, the first category of national public spaces also exhibit spiritual qualities. It is the moment of sacrality ascribed to a place that appears to be an important dimension in the formation of public space. This is especially true for those spaces that constitute geographical and symbolic centres in the city, for instance Ba Dinh Square or the banks of Hoan Kiem Lake.¹²⁴ Hoan Kiem Lake is ascribed a spiritual meaning because it is closely linked to the city's founding legend. Ba Dinh Square is associated with the charismatic persona of Ho Chi Minh who is worshipped by many Vietnamese.

Likewise, the redefinition of Ly Thai To Square, situated in the immediate surroundings of Hoan Kiem Lake argues for a correlation of the sacred and the public. Initially designed by the French as a public space, and renamed Gandhi Square after the revolution, it only received citizens' attention through its redefinition into Ly Thai To Square and the erection of the King's statue.¹²⁵ As a result, the process of sacralisation (*thieng hoa*) made for the square's perception as a public space serving as platform for social interaction between citizens.

¹²² Interview with Mai Van Hai, 24.07.2008.

¹²³ Interview with Nguyen Duc Truyen, 24.07.2008.

¹²⁴ The HAIDEP study (2007a: 12-13) declares that the Ho Chi Minh shrine and the Hoan Kiem Lake are two of the most popular landscape spots among Hanoi's citizens. In this study, the five most popular landscapes are the following: 1. Ho Chi Minh shrine area (16.8%); 2. Hoan Kiem Lake area (13%); 3. Ancient Quarter (10.1%); 4. West Lake area (9.9%); and 5. the area surrounding the Hanoi Opera House (9.9%) (HAIDEP 2007a: 1-12, 12-13).

¹²⁵ Interview with Ha Huu Nga, 08.05.2008.

4.3 State: Staged Performances of the official sphere

According to Lefebvre (1990: 119), states tend to represent themselves in the city via emptiness. In particular, authoritarian states employ empty spaces to stage state performances. Scott (1990: 45) argues that the demonstration and symbolisation of power is critical to the continuity and maintenance of domination. In order to manifest the hierarchical order, symbolic gestures are required.

“Being on stage in front of subordinates exerts a powerful influence on the conduct and speech of the dominant. They have a collective theater to maintain which often becomes part of their self-definition” (Scott 1990: 58).

Symbolic gestures comprise military parades as well as marches. According to Scott (1990: 60), the military parade is a “living tableau of centralized discipline and control”. “Parades, inaugurations, processions, coronations, funerals provide ruling groups with the occasion to make a spectacle of themselves in a manner largely of their own choosing” (Scott 1990: 58). The political symbolism of these authorised gatherings lies exactly in their controllability; subordinates are only to gather when they are ordered to do so. Arenas for such state mobilised mass meetings are usually referred to as public space. However, rather than being public these places are dominated by symbols of the state. As a consequence, the dimension of officialdom prevails.

FIGURE 5: PARADE ON BAC SON ST.



Source: Private Photo (2007).

In Hanoi, Ba Dinh Square characterised by its vast outline, poses an adequate example of the symbolisation of state power through emptiness. Initially designed as symbol of independence and the party-state, it appears to be increasingly “publicised” by Hanoi’s citizens.

FIGURE 6: BA DINH SQUARE, APRIL 30, 2008



Source: Private Photo (2008).

4.3.1 History of Ba Dinh Square

The narrative of Hanoi's Ba Dinh Square is closely linked to the August Revolution of 1945. On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the country's Independence on Ba Dinh Square and therefore the square is a symbol of nation-building that stimulates the collective memory. The most important architectural structure on the square is the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, commonly referred to as *lang Bac Ho*, which literally means "Uncle Ho's mausoleum".¹²⁶

Before the August Revolution in 1945, Ba Dinh Square did not play an important role in the city's symbolism; it was an uncultivated land plot right in the middle of the French administrative district. A 1902 city map illustrates that a street existed leading away from today's location of the mausoleum across from the site of the National Assembly towards the royal citadel; this street was named Général Bichot Avenue after a French General. The *Résidence de Gouverneur Général* was located on the lot, as was the powder magazine (*Poudrière*) at Brière-de-l'Isle Avenue (Anon. 1902; Taupin 1941: 9). However, the main part of the site consisted of land that lay idle for construction. Although the French architect Hébrard, known for the introduction of the *Style Indochinois* to Vietnam, had aimed to reconstruct the square, his plans were never realised.¹²⁷ In 1930, the French started to build the Finance Institution (*Nha Tai chinh*) and the Registry Office (*Truoc ba*) at Cot Co St. next to the square and additionally, a tall flagpole was erected on the site. Under French rule the place was referred to as *Quang Truong Tron* (Round Square) (HNM 17.08.08).¹²⁸ In 1945, the mayor of Ha Noi Tran Van Lai officially named the area Ba Dinh Square to commemorate the defence against the French colonial army in 1886-1887 (Marr 1995: 225). Nonetheless, the site remained empty without any specific architectural code. It was only in 1945 that Ba Dinh Square grew in prominence because of the Declaration of Independence. The new Vietnamese government

¹²⁶ Ho Chi Minh is colloquially called *Bac Ho* ("Uncle Ho"), as uncle is the informal form used to address an elderly person.

¹²⁷ Hébrard had planned the construction of a new *Résidence de Gouverneur Général* three times larger than the existing one surrounded by a green belt comprising parks and sporting facilities (Logan 2000: 103).

¹²⁸ Apart from Round Square, the square seems to have had other diverse names, but they vary according to the sources. While Logan (2000: 103) states that the square was named after Hébrard in the 1930s/40s, *Ha Noi Moi* Newspaper (17.08.08) reports that it was called Puginier Square.

under President Ho Chi Minh maintained the name Ba Dinh, yet referred to it as garden (*vuon hoa*), not as square. When the French regained power over Hanoi from 1947-1954, they re-named the site Flower of the Almond Tree Garden (*vuon Hong Bang*). Principal constructions began after the defeat of the French in Dien Bien Phu. In 1955, the first reviewing stand (*Le Dai Ba Dinh*) was built, signifying the restoration of the capital and later a second stand was added. After Ho Chi Minh's death, the latter was replaced by the mausoleum (Dang Thai Hong 1999: 75).

After Independence the Socialist government undertook great efforts to rename streets and places in the city. With regards to Ba Dinh Square's vicinity, it is striking that only few of the surrounding streets actually carry names attributed to the revolution, in fact, only the road that demarcates the square to the east is a direct reference to the Declaration of Independence, Doc Lap St. (Independence). In contrast, the parallel street in the west, right in front of the mausoleum, is called after the first Van Lang Kings, Hung Vuong. To the south, Chua Mot Cot St. borders Ba Dinh Square. The latter is a reference to the sacred space of the One Pillar Pagoda located nearby, built by King Ly Thai Tong in 1049.¹²⁹ Once again, the reference to dynastic times is striking.

The Declaration of Independence was a clear act of "counter symbolism" (Nas 1993: 16) to the current order. Before the 2nd of September, 1945, the organisation committee for the Declaration of Independence had looked for a vast space close to the city centre to assemble tens of thousands of citizens. Although the most central location would have been the square in front of the opera, it was deemed to be too small. In the end, Ba Dinh Square was chosen due to its location in the immediate centre of French colonial power. First, the flag of the Viet Minh was hoisted from the flag pole of French Indochina. Second, a wooden platform was erected on the site so that the public was able to see the new president (HNM 17.08.08; Marr 1995: 224). Thus, the public appearance of Ho Chi Minh transgressed the former strict segregation between the official sphere and the people, in contrast to the past when Vietnamese monarchs had usually abstained from direct interaction with their subjects. Accordingly, the assemblage of the masses was a totally new way for an authority to address the people (Marr 1995: 223).

The Declaration of Independence was a ceremonial act. Before Ho Chi Minh started to read out the Declaration, the national anthem was played and the flag raising ceremony was conducted. The Declaration itself was only 760 words long and was designed for both domestic and foreign consumption. In his speech, Ho Chi Minh referred to the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, as well as to passages from the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Furthermore, he announced the end to French special privileges in Vietnam and the cancellation of all French-Vietnamese treaties. The Declaration was followed by an introduction of the ministers of the provisional government to the public and the ministers had to take an oath of office.¹³⁰ A very symbolic act was conducted by the Minister of Information and Propaganda, Tran Huy Lieu, when he informed the public about King Bao Dai's abdication ceremony held in Hue three days earlier and handed the emperor's insignia over to Ho Chi Minh (Marr 1995: 225 ff.). Finally, the Declaration of Independence was the major act to determine Ba Dinh Square's symbolism, as the place was converted from an idle land plot into an icon of national independence, commemorating the foundation of the Demo-

¹²⁹ The One Pillar Pagoda is known as the oldest Buddhist pagoda in Hanoi. According to the legend, the king had a dream in which Buddha handed him over a baby son that he had longed for. In his gratitude he ordered the construction of the pagoda. After its destruction by the French, it was rebuilt.

¹³⁰ Marr (1995: 228) reports that besides the ministers the audience was also requested to take "a solemn oath of allegiance" to the Provisional Government and to President Ho Chi Minh. This act recalls the duties and responsibilities of Vietnamese citizens towards the state determined in the Constitution.

cratic Republic of Vietnam. In addition, the Announcement of Independence resulted in the acknowledgement of Ho Chi Minh as the charismatic leader of the newly found nation.

“Over the decades since Ho Chi Minh stood on that wooden platform in Hà Nội, the Independence Declaration has become a national icon, with school-children memorizing passages, politicians using it constantly as an authority anchor for policy pronouncements, historians citing it as the pivot-point between colonial slavery and triumphant liberation” (Marr 1995: 231).¹³¹

Once the identification of the concrete space of Ba Dinh with national independence was established the party strategically made use of this symbolism. With independence and *Bac Ho* serving as the basis of legitimacy for the nation state, their inscription into the urban landscape became an integral part of nation-building. Against this background, the construction of the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and the expansion of the administrative complex of the socialist government onto Ba Dinh Square ought to be viewed as attempts at the “routinization” of charisma through architecture.

4.3.2 Routinization of Charisma

Weber (1978: 241) defines charisma as follows:

“The term ‘charisma’ will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as ‘leader.’ In primitive circumstances this peculiar kind of quality is thought of as resting on magical powers, whether of prophets, persons with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, leaders in the hunt, or heroes in war. How the quality in question would be ultimately judged from any ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is naturally entirely indifferent for purposes of definition. What is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his ‘followers’ or ‘disciples.’”

In an empirical and value-free sense, charisma is “the specifically creative revolutionary force of history” (Weber 1978: 1117). Charisma may initiate a “subjective or *internal* reorientation born out of suffering, conflicts or enthusiasm” (Weber 1978: 245). It can result in a complete alteration of central attitudes as well as in a new orientation of attitudes towards “the different problems of the ‘world.’” The validity of charisma is constituted by the recognition of the charismatic leader, as such by the subjects to this authority. Psychologically, the recognition in the form of personal devotion to the possessor arises from enthusiasm, out of despair, or hope (Weber 1978: 242).

The August Revolution of 1945 introduced a transformation in attitudes as it represented a political shift from a monarchic and colonial regime to a socialist system. Communism was an ideology originally imported from Europe, where Ho Chi Minh and others had participated in the international communist movement. This political idea laid the basis for a new form of domination in Vietnam.

As recognition for his role as the nation’s liberator from colonialism, Uncle Ho became the charismatic leader whom to follow.

¹³¹ Nonetheless, the Declaration’s emphasis on equality, independence and freedom has seldom been given attention by Vietnamese writers. Officials of the Communist Party are well-known for their reediting and broad interpretation of the Declaration “in the most self-serving manner” (Marr 1995: 231).

“The bearer of charisma enjoys loyalty and authority by virtue of a mission believed to be embodied in him; this mission has not necessarily and not always been revolutionary, but in its most charismatic forms it has inverted all value hierarchies and overthrown custom, law and tradition” (Weber 1978: 1117).

Although a revolutionary idea was introduced in Vietnam, and thus constituted an obvious breach in traditions¹³², the dualism of state authority and sacrality was maintained. Weber (1978: 1117) declares that bureaucratic order does away with the idea of the sanctity of traditional norms replacing it with rationally determined rules. By contrast, charisma overturns all notion of sanctity through the enforcement of the subjection to the divine.

“But charisma, in its most potent forms, disrupts rational rule as well as traditional altogether and overturns all notions of sanctity. Instead of reverence for customs that are ancient and hence sacred, it enforces the inner subjection to the unprecedented and absolutely unique and therefore Divine” (Weber 1978: 1117).

Consequently, a new form of sacrality is created. In other words, the worshipping of Ho Chi Minh at the mausoleum can be considered a redefined form of sacrality.¹³³ Although Ho Chi Minh and the whole party apparatus followed the idea of communism fighting for the abolition of feudalism, analogies to the dynastic past can be detected. The most obvious parallel certainly is the reference to sacrality as a means to attain legitimacy.

Weber (1978: 1122) argues that eventually the transformation of charisma will become indispensable as it needs to fulfil the necessities of everyday life from which it was initially absent. Weber (1978: 246) refers to this transformation process as “routinization”. For the routinization of charisma, two principal motives are decisive; first, the ideal and material interest of the followers in the persistence of the community; and second, the even stronger ideal and material interest of the members of the administrative staff, the disciples or others, to continue the relationship in a way that their own position is transferred into a “stable everyday basis”. For Vietnam, it is certainly true that the people had an interest in the continuation of the community. Still, the dominant motive appears to be the party’s interest in the maintenance of its hegemony, even after Ho Chi Minh’s death. Weber (1978: 1158) notes that “only his specific charisma can guarantee the proper relation to the deities, which is indispensable for the legitimacy of the whole political structure, including the position of the actual ruler”. Since the “pure” form of charisma removes it needs to be turned into an “institution”, charismatic domination can be either traditionalised or legalised. In Vietnam it was legalised through the foundation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the election of Ho Chi Minh as president. In order to integrate diverse political movements, Ho Chi Minh assigned positions in the new government to members of the Viet Minh as well as to other political groups such as nationalists and ethnic minorities. However, the highest political positions remained reserved for members of the Communist Party of Indochina.

¹³² According to Weber (1978: 1122), charisma, like tradition, rests upon the religious aura of loyalty and obligation.

¹³³ It is important to remark that officially the party-state negates the existence of the personality cult around Ho Chi Minh, as a collective party leadership is stressed. This negation needs to be considered in the context of the Vietnam Workers’ Party’s reaction to the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956. On the occasion of the Party Congress, Crusev, in his “Secret Speech”, not only revealed the misdoings of the Stalinist period, but also sharply criticized the cult around the person of Stalin (Großheim 2009: 29). In order to distance itself from the Soviet Union the Vietnamese party leadership acknowledged that the worship of Ho Chi Minh partly included elements of personality cult, but insisted that it was not to be compared with the cult of Stalin. In his report to the Soviet ambassador in Hanoi about the 9th plenary meeting of the Workers’ Party, Nguyen Duy Trinh, a member of the central committee, emphasised the Vietnamese Party’s focus on a collective leadership, thereby preventing any possibilities of a direct transfer of the critique of personality cult to Vietnam (Großheim 2009: 30 f.).

It was not only through the formation of a bureaucratic state apparatus that the routinization of charisma occurred, but also through the literal preservation of the charismatic leader. In 1965, on the occasion of Ho Chi Minh's 75th birthday, the politbureau had already made the following decision: "1) to continue improving Uncle Ho's health as it was considered national property and 2) to prepare for the long-term preservation of his body" (Ba Ngoc 2006: 1). This decision violated Ho Chi Minh's Last Will, a simple cremation of his corpse the ashes from which were to be buried in the three regions of Vietnam.

"But, believing that HỒ belonged to the nation and not to himself alone (an idea that HỒ had done much to foster), the leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party opted to disregard his formal wish and proceeded to organize a grand state funeral" (Ho Tai 1995: 275).

On September 2nd, 1969, President Ho Chi Minh passed away. Two days later the guidelines for the funeral were set by the Central Committee of the party, the Council of Ministers, as well as the Presidium of the Fatherland Front. A funeral committee was established to organise the ceremony following a strict protocol. Every party member, every member of the armed forces, as well as every citizen, was given the order to wear mourning dress for seven days. Ho's corpse, dressed in a safari suit and left barefooted, was put into a glass coffin and placed in the hall of the National Assembly. Above the coffin, the slogan "Eternally Grateful to Our Great President Ho Chi Minh" was suspended. The actual state ceremony took place on the 9th of September in Ba Dinh Square. The funeral was a symbiosis of traditional Vietnamese rituals with Western rites. On a platform a grand portrait of Ho Chi Minh was erected with parallel inscriptions on the side. In imperial times, these inscriptions would have consisted of Chinese characters, however, this time they were written in Latin letters. Also according to Vietnamese tradition an incense holder was installed in front of the portrait. In contrast, a Western-style honour guard, consisting of soldiers in white uniforms carrying shiny weapons, was also in attendance. According to official statistics more than 100,000 people assembled for the memorial service at Ba Dinh Square (Ho Tai 1995: 276).

Due to the conflict caused by the II. Indochina War, the construction of the mausoleum only began in 1973 after the withdrawal of US troops. Finally, in September 1975 after the "liberation of Saigon", the construction of the mausoleum was completed and Ho Chi Minh's coffin moved into the mausoleum (Ba Ngoc 2006: 31, 35).¹³⁴

¹³⁴ The exact date of the transfer of Ho Chi Minh's corpse to the mausoleum is difficult to determine as different sources present various dates. Ba Ngoc (2006: 47) declares that the coffin was moved to the mausoleum on the 18th of July 1975, whereas Dang Thai Hoang (1999: 110) states that the mausoleum has been in use since the 29th of August 1975.

4.3.3 Semiotics of Ba Dinh Square

FIGURE 7: FLAG POLE AT BA DINH SQUARE



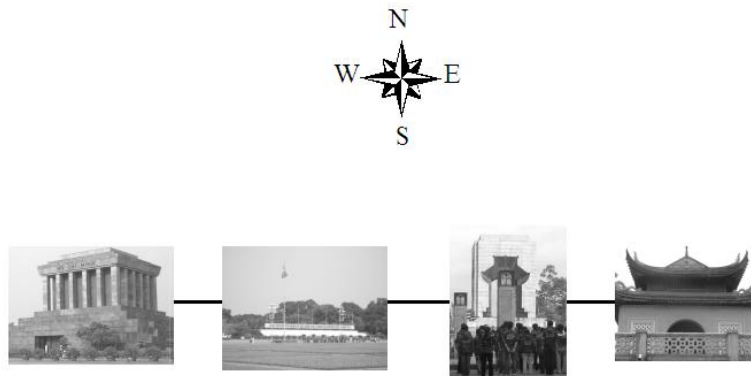
Source: Private Photo (2007).

The space in front of the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum consists of 320 x 100 metres with a capacity to accommodate more than 100,000 people (Ba Ngoc 2006: 44; Dang Thai Hoang 1999: 110). This potential already signifies the square's utilitas function, which is to offer a space to assemble the masses. The space is divided into two areas, each displaying distinct material features. The first area consists of the square in front of the mausoleum made from concrete. It serves as a stage for military parades as well as the changing of guards. Opposite the mausoleum stands a large flag pole surrounded by a barricade. This is where, every morning at 6 am and every evening at 9 pm, the official ceremony of the hoisting and lowering of the flag is conducted. The second area comprises 168 grass squares which are separated from one another by 1.4 m wide pathways made from concrete (Ba Ngoc 2006: 44). People are only allowed to walk along these pathways and the area is carefully watched by guards, preventing visitors from stepping on the grass.

Taken together both areas form a rectangular, as the North-South axis is longer than the East-West axis. Although geomancy usually plays an important role in the outline of tombs, geomantic principles were disregarded in the conception of Ba Dinh Square. This is particularly evident in the dominance of the East-West axis. This shift of focus from the traditional North-South Axis to the East-West Axis needs to be considered within the context of redefinition. The East-West Axis (today's Dien Bien Phu St.) was first introduced by French planners in order to connect the French administrative centre with the residential area south of Hoan Kiem Lake. The Socialist government took over the dominant East-West axis redefining it through the instalment of its own symbols. More precisely, with the location of the mausoleum in the west, and the National Assembly in the east a spatial linkage between the spheres of sacrality and profane power was created.¹³⁵ The extension of this symbolic East-West Axis is Bac Son St. connecting the mausoleum via the War Memorial (*Dai Liet sy Ha Hoi*) directly with Doan Mon, a main gate of the royal citadel. Thus, continuity between the pre-colonial past and the socialist state was established.

¹³⁵ Unfortunately the National Assembly building was destroyed at the beginning of 2008 and a new building will be built on the same site.

FIGURE 8: EAST-WEST AXIS OF BA DINH SQUARE



Moreover, the linkage between sacred and profane was greatly pronounced in the design of the mausoleum, as it seems to unite architectural styles of both a Vietnamese private residential house and an ancient communal house. In attempts to encourage the identification of the Vietnamese people with the last resort of the nation's father, the Central Executive Committee had organised a design competition in advance of the mausoleum's construction (Ba Ngoc 2006: 31).¹³⁶

“The final winning design was a combination of various design solutions. The main structure of the mausoleum was based on a three-step staircase that was very close to Việt Nam's ancient architectural styles. It symbolized a simple and popular five-compartment house of Vietnamese people. Other three-layered stairs on the roof were inclined upward, so Vietnamese might recall an ancient communal house, symbolizing the cradle of each Vietnamese person's love for the homeland” (Ba Ngoc 2006: 31).

The pedestal of the mausoleum consists of three stairs made from marble from the Marble Mountains¹³⁷ in Central Vietnam. The architectural structure above the pedestal resembles a Greek temple consisting of six columns erected on each side of the rectangular. On the first step of the rooftop *CHU TICH HO-CHI-MINH* (PRESIDENT HO CHI MINH) is written in red capital letters.

¹³⁶ Ba Ngoc (2006: 29) reports that more than 34,000 people commented about it and thus, the construction of the mausoleum was made both an official and a public affair.

¹³⁷ Marble Mountain is considered to be a holy site (Ho Tai 1995: 280).

FIGURE 9: HO CHI MINH MAUSOLEUM



Source: Private Photo (2008).

In the overall architecture of the mausoleum, the metaphor of the lotus is critical. It was already adopted in the construction of the sacred space of the One Pillar Pagoda that today forms a part of the shrine area. The symbolism of the lotus dates back to the Ly and Tran Dynasties. At that time, it used to be a symbol for beauty and purity (Nguyen Khac Vien 1993: 67). Since then the lotus has been frequently used in the design of pedestals. Accordingly, the plinth of the mausoleum is a replication of the flower. Moreover, the lotus served as source of inspiration for the design of the Ho Chi Minh Museum¹³⁸. As according to Ba Ngoc (2006: 72), the white lotus is to signify Ho Chi Minh's noble and moral life. Lotus flowers from Ho Chi Minh's hometown in Nghe An Province frame his tomb. In sum, the communicative symbolic function of the architectural structure is to represent the president's modesty¹³⁹ and purity.

When asked about the mausoleum, an interviewee¹⁴⁰ quoted the following two Vietnamese folk songs/poems:

“Trong đầm gì đẹp bằng sen
lá xanh bông trắng lại chen nhụy vàng
Nhụy vàng bông trắng lá xanh
Gần bùn mà chẳng hôi tanh mùi bùn”

The poem addresses the purity of the lotus. Although it blossoms in mud, no part of it resembles mud.

¹³⁸ In 1990, on the occasion of Ho Chi Minh's 100 birthday, the building was to complete the symbolic complex of Ba Dinh Square. The museum includes a 100-seat library, a 400-seat auditorium, an exhibition hall as well as a souvenir shop (Ho Tai 1995: 282). In the exposition, Ho Chi Minh's achievements for the country are displayed.

¹³⁹ Another symbol of Ho Chi Minh's modesty is his Garden House. Originally the house was built by the French as a home for the servants to the French Governor-General of Indochina who used to live in the residence next door. After the declaration of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam this residence was turned into the Presidential Palace. However, Ho Chi Minh refused to live in the mansion. Instead he chose to move into the house on stilts in the garden. During Ho Chi Minh's term in office, the Presidential Palace served official receptions and state affairs only. Nowadays, the garden house is a memorial site for Ho Chi Minh. Like the lotus it signifies Ho Chi Minh's modesty and Spartan way of life. Ho Tai (1995: 285) describes the garden house in the park as a “holy site”.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Duc, 24.04.2008.

“Thap Muoi dep nhat hoa sen

Viet Nam dep nhat co ten Bac Ho”

The verse translates as: “The lotus is most beautiful in Thap Muoi. Vietnam is the most beautiful carrying the name of Uncle Ho”.

The poem expresses Ho Chi Minh’s feelings for the people from the South. Thap Muoi is located in the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam, where most lotuses grow. The respondent explains that the mausoleum is built in the shape of a lotus flower “for the heart of the whole country, especially for the Southern people”. Consequently, the mausoleum is a symbol of national integration; the lotus represents the people of South Vietnam in the Northern capital.

In conclusion, the decision of the politbureau to preserve Ho Chi Minh’s corpse shows that his life and death were made matters of the highest authorities. The careful planning, in addition to the selection of the lotus metaphor for the design of the space, indicate that the party leadership were aiming at a routinization of Ho Chi Minh’s charisma, not only through bureaucratization, but also through its concretisation in architecture. This becomes particularly apparent when considering the “symbolic ecology” (Nas 1993: 16), the spatial distribution of symbols within the city. The concentration of state buildings within the immediate vicinity of Ba Dinh Square is striking. In particular, in the area demarcated by Hoang Hoa Tham, Phan Dinh Phung, Hung Vuong, Doc Lap, Hoang Van Thu and Hoang Dieu Streets, most party and government institutions are located.

“But after its routinization its very quality as an extraordinary, supernatural and divine force makes it a suitable source of legitimate authority for the successors of the charismatic hero; moreover, in this form it is advantageous to all those whose power and property are guaranteed by this authority, that is, dependent upon its perpetuation” (Weber 1978: 1146 f.).

Furthermore, through the construction of the mausoleum and the museum, the person of Ho Chi Minh was integrated into the Vietnamese pantheon of deities and heroes. In this pantheon, Ho Chi Minh is placed next to General Tran Hung Dao, King Ly Thai To and the Trung Sisters (*Hai Ba Trung*) and others, all of whom struggled for the country’s independence. Consequently, Ba Dinh Square unites both the sacred and the official sphere of the state in its structure.

4.3.4 Redefining Ba Dinh Square

In the early phase of nation-building, Ba Dinh Square first and foremost functioned as a sacred official space serving state performances and used for worshipping Ho Chi Minh. However, since *Doi Moi* an evident shift in the square’s use and communicative function is evident. Hanoi’s citizens increasingly encroach upon the place, conducting social and private activities. According to Drummond and Nguyen Thi Lien (2009: 176), this is due to one of the “paradoxes of the *doi moi* period”. With the state’s withdrawal from everyday life, citizens have an increasing amount of free time, which is paralleled by “a decreasing availability of public space in which to spend it”.

Every morning from 5 until 7 am the square is opened to Hanoi’s citizens. Many residents from the neighbourhood come to the square to do their morning exercises. Some people go jogging, others walk, do gymnastics, or *Tai Chi*. Individuals, as well as groups of friends or whole families, mingle on the square. Their spatial practices are determined by the materiality of the space and carefully watched by guards. All users follow the imperative not to step on the grass. Furthermore, white lines drawn on concrete around the mausoleum and the flag pole denote restricted areas where trespassing is prohibited.

The hustle and bustle in the early morning is shortly interrupted at 6 am, when the national flag is hoisted. This is a regular ceremony of the official sphere that turns the practitioners of the square into passive spectators. This is accompanied by the national anthem broadcasted over loudspeakers, while white uniformed guards march from the left behind the mausoleum to the flag pole in the middle to hoist the flag. After this short intermission people mingle again continuing their morning routine. The mausoleum is open every day except for Fridays and Mondays from 7.30 until 11 am. From October to December, the mausoleum is annually closed for maintenance. In summer the square is sealed off with bars at 7 am. From then it can only be accessed from the official entrance to the mausoleum at Ngoc Ha St; guards take position on the green and control activities at the square. Before the official visiting hour starts, visitors line up along the sidewalk of Ngoc Ha St. Although a trip to the mausoleum is among the must-sees in Hanoi for international tourists, most visitors are actually Vietnamese who come to pay tribute to Ho Chi Minh.

After the official opening hours the physical barriers around the square are taken down again and only the fences at Hung Vuong and Chua Mot Cot St. remain installed. However, from around 12 am until 6 pm a small breach is opened for pedestrians and cyclists to enter the square.¹⁴¹ Although the square is almost empty between 11 am and 2 pm, guards remain present in the square at all the times. From 2 pm onwards, most visitors to the square are tourists who come to sightsee.

After approximately 4 pm, the square becomes very crowded as both old and young, citizens of all generations occupy the space to participate in physical activity. In general, two groups of practitioners can be identified, those who come to the square on their own and exercise individually, and those who exercise in pairs or as part of a group. It is striking that groups are formed according to gender; men walk together with men and women with women. During their exercises they chat intensively and thus, they use the occasion for social interaction.

At this time of the day the correlation between space and practices is most striking. In contrast to the East-West axis that determines the square's symbolism, people predominantly walk along the North-South axis; groups especially tend to walk or jog along in this direction. In contrast, individuals often make use of the East-West axis by walking on the concrete in between the section of lawn. Another remarkable feature is the groups' spatial segregation according to age. On the right hand side of the mausoleum, towards the Presidential Palace, mostly old people mingle and their meetings appear to be institutionalised as some even bring little chairs with them. In contrast, young families tend to gather on the left hand side of the place, near the entrance to Chua Mot Cot St. There, parents often sit together watching their children play.

From 7 to 9 pm social activities dominate the scene. Friends and families come to the square to meet and chat. In order to cater to the great demand for parking spaces in the evening, the square's management board has extended parking to Chua Mot Cot St. The increasing number of people coming by motorbike indicates two things; first, they come from other areas of the city than the immediate neighbourhood, and second, they do not come to participate in physical activities as Hanoians tend to concentrate activities on open spaces near their residence which can be easily reached by foot, especially if they are exercising alone. Team sports such as football and badminton, require people to meet at places that fit the spatial requirement of the sport. At Ba Dinh Square these kinds of sports are not observed.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ The bicycle's street exact opening time can vary between 11 and 12 pm.

¹⁴² Although there is no sign explicitly prohibiting badminton, football or skateboarding, people refrain from carrying out these activities on the square. Instead they go to other national public spaces like Ly Thai To Square or the Lenin Monument.

At 9 pm the national flag is lowered, representing a continuation of the official sphere's performance. All visitors to the square are directed to move behind a demarcated line and in cases of non-compliance, the guards use their whistles to attract attention. Music playing over loudspeakers announces that the ritual is beginning and the audience carefully watches the procedure. After the flag is lowered, the guards move behind the mausoleum and as soon as they have vanished, the whole crowd returns to mingling, as the public is once again permitted to cross the demarcated area surrounding the flag pole.

FIGURE 10: SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES AT BA DINH SQUARE¹⁴³

TIME	ACTIVITIES
5-7 am	Sports, playing with children
6 am	Hoisting of the flag
7.30-11 am	Visitor hours for the mausoleum
11 am – 2 pm	Hardly any visitors, guards are still present
4-7 pm	Sports, chatting/meeting friends, playing with children
7-9 pm	Chatting/meeting friends
9 pm	Lowering of the flag

The schedule above illustrates the diverse activities carried out in Ba Dinh Square. For many Hanoians a visit to the place has become a fixed element in their daily routine, mostly before or after work. Regardless of if they like to enjoy the cold breeze in the evening, participate in physical activity, or meet friends, they come to the place deliberately and regularly. Individual intentions behind the usage of the square are diverse.

For example, Hang and her little sister live in Ngoc Ha. Usually they go to the mausoleum from 7 until 8.30 pm to exercise. Hang has never seen the lowering of the flag at 9 pm, as she always goes home beforehand. She thought that the lowering of the flag only took place on Mondays.

Thao is the owner of a guest house in Ngoc Ha. She likes to exercise with her son in the evening. They walk from her house to the Botanical Garden and from there to Ba Dinh Square and then back to her house again.

Huong and her husband go to the mausoleum in the evening to exercise but they never go together, choosing instead to go on their own.

Giang works as a maid for a family in Ngoc Ha St. She has to cook and clean the house all day but in the evening she meets her friend, who is the owner of a small tea stall on the corner next to the house she works. Together they go to Ba Dinh Square for a walk. They prefer to exercise there in the late evening because it is an opportunity for them to chat and gossip. Moreover, they like to come to the square for the fresh breeze.

The newspaper sales woman at Le Hong Phong St. indicates that she had to work all day but likes to go out in the evening to watch the lowering of the flag.

Trung, Son, Nguyen, Hue and Duc are university students. They report that they like to come to Ba Dinh Square in order to meet tourists to practice their English. Besides Ba Dinh Square, they also go to the Temple of Literature to talk to foreigners.

¹⁴³ The times for different activities carried out in the morning may vary according to season.

Phuong lives in Ngoc Ha ward. When her children were small, she used to take them out for a walk in the Botanical Garden and to Uncle Ho's mausoleum. She reports that people like to come to Ba Dinh Square because of the fresh breeze. If the power is cut in the evening, it would be very crowded, especially in the summer months when it is too hot and dark to stay inside. Therefore, people go to Ba Dinh Square to let their children play there.

Mai argues that Ba Dinh Square is increasingly used for physical activities because people eat more and move less, a result of an increase in wealth. Therefore, they need to exercise more. She argues that during war time, everyone had to work very hard and there was not much to eat. Nowadays, people have to participate in sports or aerobics to keep in shape.

Overall, it seems that mainly everyday activities are conducted on the square. Löw (2001: 190) like Norbert Elias explains that human action is guided by intention, but that the outcome of those actions is unintended. It is this divergence between intentions and outcomes that helps to explain the square's redefinition through practices of everyday life. In his work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984) argues that everyday life practices ought not to be seen as mere background of social activity but as modes of operation. He believes that everyday practices have a tactical character and a tactic continuously has to manipulate events to transform them into "opportunities" (de Certeau 1984: xix). With regard to Foucault's (1991) *Discipline and Punish*, de Certeau (1984: xiv, 96) aims to assess the "ways of operating" that society employs to avoid the reduction to the net of discipline.¹⁴⁴ He concentrates upon those multiform resistance procedures that evade discipline from the inside, or from within the sphere it is exercised. In this context, he regards everyday practices as a mode of resistance. "These 'ways of operating' constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users re-appropriate the space organized by techniques of socio-cultural production" (De Certeau 1984: xiv). It is in this sense that the official space of Ba Dinh is redefined through modes of operation. In other words, state dispositifs limit and control citizens' movement within this space; however through everyday practices citizens re-appropriate the space evading discipline from within the sphere it is exercised. Or as Thomas (2002: 1616) puts it: "everyday practices are presently offering up a set of tropes through which transgressive ideologies and desires may have an outlet".

To De Certeau (1984: xiv) everyday practices are "clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'". Mechanisms of discipline are obeyed in order to undermine them. In addition, Goheen (1998: 489) points to the "unreadability" of everyday practices by the state and highlights their subversive potential. This is analogous to Lefebvre's (1991) notion of spaces of representation.

"Combining the real and the imagined, things and thought on equal terms, or at least not privileging one over the other a priori, these lived spaces of representation are thus the terrain for the generation of 'counterspaces,' spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning" (Soja 1996: 68).

¹⁴⁴ In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault analyses the mechanisms - the dispositifs - that strengthen the apparatus' production of discipline.

4.3.5 Lenin-Monument

FIGURE 11: LENIN-MONUMENT



Source: Private Photo (2008).

A further example of the redefinition of official symbols through practices of everyday life is the Lenin Monument located at Dien Bien Phu St. It comprises the Lenin statue, a small square in front, as well as a park in the back. The figure of Lenin is on a pedestal, neatly dressed, his right hand holding his jacket, which seems to flutter in the wind. Behind it, a small park is situated bordering Tran Phu Street. The square consists of a platform that can be reached from the pavement via a three-step stair. Close to the sculpture, a second three-step staircase leads to the park. The left and right side of the statue are always decorated with flowers. With regards to the object's semiotics, its primary use function is one of a memorial. Furthermore, the platform offers a space to assemble. In comparison to the first function, its connotation is much more complex. To begin with, Lenin himself was a great supporter of the colonies gaining independence. Ho Chi Minh had a high regard for him due to his theses on the abolition of imperialism. Furthermore, the monument poses an excellent example of formal and informal meanings that can be ascribed to the same symbol (Nas 1993: 16). Initially, the monument was to represent the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the socialist state and in that the state determined the formal symbolism, which remains today, as marked by the annual decoration of the monument with flowers and banners on Lenin's birthday, the 22nd of April. Moreover, the platform in front of the statue is utilised as a training site for the state's police forces.¹⁴⁵ Yet, an informal meaning is ascribed to the monument as well; Hanoi's residents use the place for social activities referring to it as "Soviet" (*Lien-Xo*) Park. In recent years, it has become a prominent gathering point, as especially in the evenings, young people mingle in front of the statue to break-dance, skateboard, and play football. In the morning groups of elderly people gather on the sidewalk at Dien Bien Phu St. to play badminton and additionally, dance classes are held on the platform.

Relating the dualism of formal and informal meanings to Scott's (1990) differentiation between "public transcript" and "hidden transcript", spheres of power and resistance immediately become apparent. Scott (1990: 2 f.) defines public transcript as open interactions between subordinates and those who dominate. The public transcript is systematically skewed in the

¹⁴⁵ Groups of the police forces frequently train on the site. They practice marching or martial arts. During the official training sessions in the morning no civilians make use of the square.

direction of the discourse represented by the dominant. In contrast, the hidden transcript is the site of subversive discourse; it is specific to a social site and a given set of actors (Scott 1990: 14, 25). Both hidden and public transcripts are realms of power and interest, as these terms engage in a dialectical relationship, whereby practices of domination automatically generate hidden transcripts (Scott 1990: 27). Thus, although it is an official symbol demonstrating state power, the Lenin Monument can also become a site of resistance.

“RELATIONS OF DOMINATION ARE, at the same time, relations of resistance. Once established, domination does not persist of its own momentum. Inasmuch as it involves the use of power to extract work, production, services, taxes against the will of the dominated, it generates considerable friction and can be sustained only by continuous efforts at reinforcement, maintenance work consists of the symbolization of domination by demonstrations and enactments of power” (Scott 1990: 45).

4.3.6 Linkage between state and public

The developments at Ba Dinh Square illustrate alterations in both its denotation and its connotation. With regards to its utilitas function, overall the square denotes a place of assembly. Although in the early years of nation-building the square mainly functioned as a stage for official performances, it has recently come to denote an open space within the densely populated city where residents can enjoy their free time. Space, previously dominated by the official sphere, is increasingly occupied by the public through practices of everyday life, such as participating in physical activity, meeting friends, taking children for a walk, etc. Accordingly, everyday practices reflect modes of operations. The appropriation of the square by citizens ought to be comprehended as a process of negotiation of the current order. Symbols of the state are contested by the public through a redefinition of their meaning and thus, when private individuals infringe upon the square, they actively involve in the city’s public life, thereby leaving their imprints on the urban landscape.

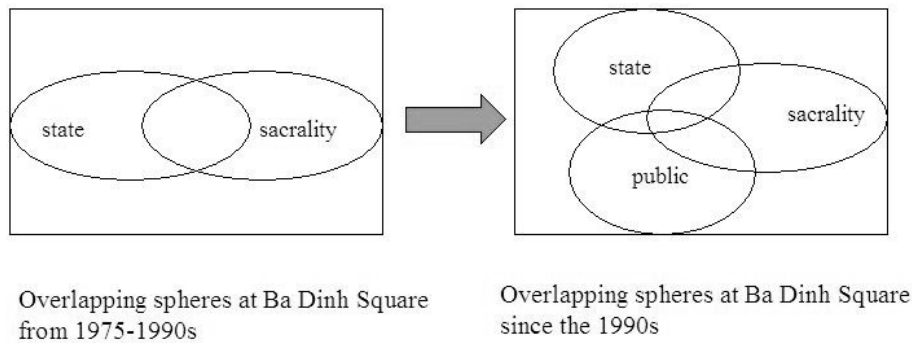
With regards to the square’s symbolic communicative function, a modification of the connotation of officialdom could be observed. Apart from its existence as a sacred space, it is perceived as a space for social interaction where strangers mingle. Thus, the dimension of the official is increasingly challenged by a further communicative function, the one of the public.

FIGURE 12: MODIFICATIONS IN BA DINH SQUARE’S FIRST AND SECOND FUNCTIONS

	Ba Dinh Square 1945 – 1990s	Ba Dinh Square 2008
First Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Place of assembly - Staged state performances - Worship of Ho Chi Minh 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open space in the city - Staged state performances - Worship of Ho Chi Minh - Space for social interaction
Second Function	Sacrality, State	Sacrality, State, Public

In other words, the former dualistic relationship between sacred and state is amended by a third variable, the public. The public has not yet replaced the state in this relationship, but it is gradually encroaching upon it. Ba Dinh Square has become the physical location, where the official sphere and the public sphere most frequently encounter. It is a space where negotiations about the common good, between citizens and state, occur.

FIGURE 13: SHIFTING CONNOTATIONS OF BA DINH SQUARE



4.3.7 Shift in modes of celebration

The shift in state-society relations is also expressed in the alteration of modes of celebration. In recent years, the appeal of staged state performances to the people has decreased and, except for Ho Chi Minh's birthday¹⁴⁶, state events with the primary objective of mass mobilisation no longer appear to succeed (Thomas 2002: 1618). Instead, citizens increasingly make individual decisions in which events to participate. Correspondingly, Thomas (2002: 1614) argues that the crowd "has had a huge semantic shift since the 1940s". She explains that popular events, such as the visit of Microsoft director Bill Gates or the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games, tend to assemble more people than festivities offered by the official sphere. Likewise, the attendance of the funerals of the founder of the Democratic Party as well as of a founding member of *Bloc 8406* by hundreds of activists hint towards growing self-organisation in the public (The Economist 26.04.08).

On one hand, this self-organisation poses a challenge to the party-state and its instruments of control and supervision, while on the other hand, the state acknowledges this shift and continuously withdraws from the public sphere, thereby creating an enclosed official sphere. The festivity on the eve of Hanoi's Liberation from French occupation on the 10th of October 2007 held at Ba Dinh Square is a prominent example. That evening, the whole square was cordoned off so that only invited guests of the state were able to enter and thus, the public was refused participation. Citizens coming to Ba Dinh Square were surprised to find that they had been excluded.

Other national festivities also appear to have a new texture. Nowadays large official celebrations on the occasion of the Liberation of Saigon (30.04.), May Day (01.05.), and Independence Day (02.09.), are only organised every five years on Ba Dinh Square. In 2008, the party-

¹⁴⁶ Based on data collected on the 19th May, 2008, it can be argued that his birthday still attracts citizens. Nonetheless, the mobilisation by the party-state is apparent. Although no official celebration took place on Ba Dinh Square that day, many people, particularly from the countryside, visited the mausoleum to pay tribute to Ho Chi Minh. The tour to Hanoi in large groups was organised by schools, the local people's committee or a local unit of the mass organisations.

state celebrated these events in the Vietnamese-Soviet Friendship Palace behind closed doors. Yet, in order to convey participatory elements, the police newspaper reported that representatives of society were allowed to attend the festivities. These consisted of “comrades of the revolution, the mothers of Vietnam’s heroes as well as representatives of all classes of the capital’s citizens” (ANTD 03.09.08 translated from Vietnamese). Only a small ceremony took place on Ba Dinh Square. Members of the party’s leadership, the National Assembly and the government placed flowers in front of the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and the War Memorial. Nonetheless, this sacred gesture, once again a ceremony to demonstrate the legitimising relationship between the Communist leadership and Ho Chi Minh, did not attract public attention. At Ba Dinh Square, only the red flags with the yellow sickle hoisted on the left side of the mausoleum, and the national flags hoisted on its right side, testified to the presence of a national holiday. As Scott (1990: 59) formulates, “[t]he show is all actors but no audience”. It is a ritual that the official sphere organises for itself and that does not meet the masses.¹⁴⁷

Hanoians are aware of the alteration in the modes of celebration. Respondents explained that on the occasion of national holidays in the past, many young people from the countryside used to make a pilgrimage to the capital, arriving in buses decorated with the national flag. Nowadays, less and less youth groups visit the capital and April 30th and May 1st are no longer national holidays but rather days free for leisure. While many urban dwellers make use of this opportunity to travel abroad to Thailand, Singapore and Cambodia, or to domestic sea attractions including Ha Long or Cat Ba, people from the countryside still tend to come to Hanoi to visit Uncle Ho’s Mausoleum. Tourist and traffic companies anticipated this new business opportunity and ahead of Independence Day in 2009 diverse tourist agencies offered holiday package deals. Trips to Southern destinations such as Da Lat, Nha Trang, Phu Quoc and Con Dao were offered, departing from the main urban centres of Hanoi, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City (VietNamNet 26.08.09). These programs primarily target the urban middle class because its members have time and money to travel.

For those who cannot afford to leave the city, visits to semi-public spaces like amusement parks and urban public spaces have become popular.¹⁴⁸

“Nguyen Thu Nguyet, a resident of Doi Can Street, said that her family decided to spend the holiday at a suburban entertainment centre instead of at a luxury resort in Quang Nam Province.

‘We’ll use the money for our children’s education, and go by motorbike, so we’ll still have time together during the days off despite high inflation,’ said Nguyet” (VietNamNet 29.08.09).

For families with small children, green parks close to the city centre have become a popular destination.

“Young people and couples who have little kids preferred going to the park, the zoo or strolling around Hoan Kiem lake, while students selected the West Lake Water Park for sports and other recreational activities.

Early on September 2, major outdoor entertainment centres in the city were packed with holiday-makers. The Thong Nhat (Unification) Park alone served more than 400 people,

¹⁴⁷ Already in 2000 Thomas (2002: 1618) noted that the state distanced itself from the public during the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the end of war in Ho Chi Minh City or on the occasion of Ho Chi Minh’s 110th birthday.

¹⁴⁸ In 2008, the Vice Head of the Hanoi Railway Station reported that there was a 20% reduction in passengers in comparison to the previous year. Additionally, the Head of the Hanoi Bus Station Management Company’s Planning Office reported that ticket prices had increased about 15% due to a hike in fuel prices (VietNamNet 29.08.09).

mostly kids, in the morning. Several days earlier, the park undertook clean-up activities and introduced new services to cater to visitors' tastes.

Today, the Thu Le Zoo was more crowded than normal days, with many children dressed in new clothes coming from Hanoi's suburban districts and nearby provinces" (VietNamNet 03.09.09).

In the past, the primary function of national holidays was to fuel the collective memory and to mobilise the masses in the name of the nation. Nowadays they seem to have turned into important days for the family's private sphere. Many families like Mrs Nguyet's demand a leisure program differing from their daily routine. This argues for an ideological shift away from the collective and the nation in a broader sense, towards the private individual and the family. The collective character of national days no longer appeals to citizens; instead an individualised focus on the family and friends has become evident. A striking increase in the urban population's demand for leisure activities is also present. Since the official sphere is no longer able to mobilise the masses through military parades or speeches, it anticipates citizens' demand for leisure and attempts to satisfy this demand through the organisation of light entertainment programs.

This very recent development is best exemplified in the public music shows on Liberation and May Day in 2008, when the municipality of Hanoi offered public performances, free of charge, on three stages in the heart of the city around the banks of Hoan Kiem Lake.¹⁴⁹

This shift in the mode of celebrations found its culmination in the festivities of Independence Day in September 2009, when the 64th anniversary of independence as well as the 40th anniversary of the realisation of Ho Chi Minh's testament were celebrated in diverse places across the city. On the 5th of September, shortly after National Day, a music gala named "Ho Chi Minh – A Life Devoted to the Country and People" was staged right in front of the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum at Ba Dinh Square (VietNamNet 27.08.09). The name of the concert as well as the song titles¹⁵⁰ point to the festivals' focus on the charismatic persona of Ho Chi Minh. These music galas in honour of Ho Chi Minh and the performance of songs commemorating his personality indicate, once again, a form of the routinization of charisma. As previously invented traditions no longer yield fruits, the state seeks citizens' affirmation through modern forms of celebration and thus National Day is turned into a popular event. Until recently it would have been unthinkable to use Ba Dinh Square as an arena for concerts or other popular events.

By linking the founding of the nation to popular culture, a new collective identity is created, presenting a means to integrate social groups who had formerly been kept away from state performances, for example younger generations. This linkage was made explicit by My Linh's appearance at the gala concert on the 2nd of September, 2009, in the Hanoi Opera House (VietNamNet 27.08.09).

¹⁴⁹ The largest stage at the Northern corner of Hoan Kiem Lake was decorated with a banner that stated: "Commemorating 33 years of the Day of Unification of the whole country 30/4, Congratulating International Labour Day 1/5, and commemorating the 118th birthday of President Ho Chi Minh". To further demonstrate the significance of the Day, a neon sign with the slogan, "The Socialist Republic of Vietnam shall live forever", was installed on a store house's façade, outweighing the advertisement of the fast food chain Kentucky Fried Chicken which was displayed in red letters beneath. In the Northern part of the Ancient Quarter, an even larger stage was installed presenting a modern light and sound show. *Vietnamese Television* (VTV) broadcasted the event presenting a young female singer and her back-up dancers wearing traditional Vietnamese costumes.

¹⁵⁰ The songs performed by Vietnamese pop singers had such titles as "Sing the Praises of President Ho", "Singing from the City that Carries the Name of Uncle Ho" (VietNamNet 27.08.09).

My Linh's career¹⁵¹ is indicative of her commitment to popular culture and her openness towards foreign musical influences, which used to be an anathema¹⁵² to the Communist Party in the mid 1990s. Accordingly, her engagement in the celebration of National Day alludes to the official sphere's opening to new forms of celebration. In this context, Thomas and Heng (2001: 309) identify a "new post-communist media revolution". Celebrities are able to attract a peaceful audience, whereas the party is isolated from public appeal.

"Celebrities exist without democratic capitalism, but in a site such as Vietnam their power is still delicate – even though it has undergone breathtaking growth in the last decade. This configuration means that in the future the place of the celebrity is likely to symbolically register political unrest and social instability. Despite a history of immersion in media propaganda, the Vietnamese audience is highly discriminating and critical of the mass culture that they consume and are not passive manipulated consumers of cultural products" (Thomas, Heng 2001: 305).

Therefore, the invitation of a major celebrity like My Linh to participate in a national gala with a political function hints towards the state appropriating celebrity for its own purposes; on one hand, it succeeds in attracting a broader public, while on the other, it undermines the anticipated threat of political and social instability.

Pop events are one way that the state can reach the public. The use of references to Vietnam's dynastic past represents another. Hobsbawm (2003: 6) explains that for the purpose of nation-building ancient material in the form of official rituals, religion, folklore, etc., is borrowed in order to "invent" traditions. Hobsbawm (2003: 1) defines "invented traditions" as a "set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past".¹⁵³ According to the collected data, a great number of festivals conducted in public space commemorates Vietnam's ancient times. The emergence of such a "re-estimation" of the monarchy in Hanoi is certainly connected to the 1000th anniversary of Thang Long-Hanoi in 2010. In preparation for the great event, in 2007 and 2008 historic festivals and parades took place on the grounds of the former royal citadel, as well as around Hoan Kiem Lake. The most popular site for celebrations of course is Ly Thai To Square, where the choice of location's symbolism is apparent.¹⁵⁴ The occurrence of festivities on public space in the traditional heart of the city can already be regarded a symbolic act in itself, as it emphasises Hanoi's long and heroic past. Furthermore, these celebrations have become a magnet for the public.

¹⁵¹ My Linh is certainly one of the most well-known pop stars in Vietnam. In 1998, she began to make soul and funk music. Furthermore, she is the first Vietnamese singer who signed a contract with an American record label (Blue Records). She released English language albums with symbolic titles such as "Made in Vietnam" and "Coming to America" (VietNamNet 11.10.07; VietNamNet 17.08.04). In 2006, she was a judge on the Vietnamese version of "American Idol".

¹⁵² In 1996, the VIII Party Congress initiated the "Foreign Social Evils Campaign". The objective of the campaign was to antagonise the threatened "Westernization" of Vietnamese culture. Apart from the utilisation of English language on billboards, the consumption of Western music and media, was prohibited. Instead, traditional Vietnamese songs and dances were broadcast on national television (Logan 2000: 254).

¹⁵³ To legitimise recently evolved institutions as well as the newly set relationship of authority, specific rites and ceremonies are required. Although Hobsbawm (2003: 8) argues that "a general hostility to irrationalism, superstition and customary practices reminiscent of the dark past, if not actually descended from it, made impassioned believers in the verities of the Enlightenment, such as liberals, socialists, and communists, unreceptive to traditions old or novel", I believe that his findings are relevant for Vietnam, especially with regard to the commemoration of Vietnam's royal past.

¹⁵⁴ Most of the celebrations relating to Thang-Long Hanoi's forthcoming 1000th anniversary were organised at Ba Kieu Temple or Ly Thai To Square, both located at the banks of Hoan Kiem Lake.

However, the contradiction of this re-emphasis on dynastic times with the socialist ideology is evident. The socialist state initially drew legitimacy from the abolition of the monarchy and the colonial regime, but now seems to be the driving force behind an emphasised reference to the monarchy and the revitalisation of religious activities and customs. This could be attributed to the absence of a dominant ideology that unites citizens and state, as Koh (2007: 234) has already illustrated. The mere reference to Ho Chi Minh is not sufficient anymore. In this light the official revitalisation of grand personalities of Vietnamese history can once more be viewed as an attempt to create a historic continuity between pre-colonial times and the current political order.

FIGURE 14: FESTIVALS IN COMMEMORATION OF THE DYNASTIC PAST IN 2008

EVENT	ACTIVITIES	LOCATION	DATE
Opening ceremony "Moments of Thang Long-Eastern Capital-Hanoi"	- Procession of traditional dance and music groups	Ly Thai To Square, Hoan Kiem Lake	13.01.08
Hanoi-Past and Present	- Photo Exhibition - <i>Nom</i> -Painting - Exhibition of traditional Vietnamese wood houses	Ly Thai To Square	13.01.08
Moments of Thang Long-Eastern Capital-Hanoi	- Start of the countdown to Hanoi's 1000 th anniversary - Music Concert	Ba Kieu Temple	13.01.08
Spring Festival	Two-hour parade with 22 folk groups comprising: - Traditional Vietnamese music - Martial Arts - Dragon Dance	Ly Thai To Square, Hoan Kiem Lake	17.02.08
Tourist week of handicraft villages and streets in Thang Long-Hanoi	- Exhibition of traditional handicraft products and artefacts of the Ly, Tran, Le and Trinh Dynasties	Royal Citadel	02.05.08
580 years after the liberation of Dong Quan and the coronation of King Le Thai To (1428 - 2008)	- Dragon Dance - Procession of social and cultural groups by Hanoi's citizens	Hoan Kiem Lake, Royal Citadel	17.05.08

In conclusion, there has been an evident shift in state-society relations with regards to the state's performance in public space. The mobilisation of the masses has become a difficult undertaking for the state. Private individuals deliberately choose when and where to participate in public life. The masses are gradually turning into a self-organised public. People from the private sphere assemble to form a public on the occasion of popular events such as con-

certs or championships. According to Thomas and Heng (2001: 299) participating in non-political activities creates a corporate feeling or community spirit. At the same time the official sphere tends to withdraw itself from public into an enclosed official space, as demonstrated in the Independence Day celebrations in 2008.¹⁵⁵ In order to reach out to citizens, the official sphere has begun to satisfy citizens' demands for amusement with music galas and concerts on national holidays. Nonetheless, the amusement offered is not completely apolitical as it still serves some political ends. Moreover, the invention of traditions in the form of festivals celebrating Vietnam's royal past assists the overall objective of the maintenance of national integration.

4.4 Privateness: private and public in Vietnam

In her theoretical work, *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt (1958) deals with the decline of the public realm under the conditions of modernity. Arendt (1958: 28) begins her analysis with the ancient city-state, where a clear-cut "distinction between a private and public sphere of life" existed. This differentiation between private and public corresponds to the perception of the household (*oikia*) and the political realm as two separated entities. The private sphere was grounded in the necessity of life; men work to provide nourishment for the family, and women give birth. Correspondingly, all activities related to production and reproduction were ascribed to the realm of the household. In contrast, the sphere of the *polis* was regarded a sphere of freedom (Arendt 1958: 30). However, in the modern age the distinction between these two spheres was blurred. The emergence of the modern nation-state was accompanied by the "rise of the social" that is neither private nor public. According to Arendt (1958: 28) everyday affairs of the family are taken care of by a "gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping", called "society" and its political organisation termed "nation". The rise of the social implies "the institutional differentiation of modern societies into the narrowly political realm on the one hand and the economic market and the family on the other" (Benhabib 1992: 74). With the evolution of the institutions of the modern state, the meaning of "private" became greatly diversified (Benhabib 1992: 91). In this context Habermas (1987: 43 f.) speaks of the "doubling of the private sphere", where a private man is also, the owner of commodities while at the same time a family man. Furthermore, Benhabib identifies three distinct spheres summarised under the term "privacy" in the modern age. The first dimension of privacy is the "sphere of moral and religious conscience". The second comprises "privacy rights" which are linked to economic liberties. "In this context, 'privacy' means first and foremost noninterference by the political state in the freedom of commodity relations, and in particular non-intervention in the free market of labor power" (Benhabib 1992: 91). The third meaning of privacy evokes the intimate sphere. According to Arendt (1958: 72) throughout history the bodily parts of human existence needed to be hidden in privacy comprising all activities serving subsistence and survival; "[t]his is the domain of the household, of meeting the daily needs of life, of sexuality and reproduction, and of care for the young, the sick and the elderly" (Benhabib 1992: 91). To distinguish it from the private sphere, Benhabib (2006: 320) terms this the "domestic-intimate" (*häuslich-intim*). Through the adoption of the term of the "home" (*zu Hause*) Benhabib (2006: 331 f.) succeeds in denominating the realms of inti-

¹⁵⁵ Further examples of the biased appreciation of official celebrations by citizens are the celebrations of National Independence Day in 2005. As it was the 60th jubilee, the state organised a large military parade through the city in the early morning and a spectacular firework at three public spaces in the city in the evening. While the parade was highly controlled, and access was restricted to the main roads, in the evening the city's streets were crowded with people, all coming to see the fireworks. Even motorbikes were not able to get through the streets. In the morning police were patrolling along the major streets supervising citizens' movement. In the evening the crowd made its own way and authorities did not seem to care much about the disorder and traffic jams in the capital's streets.

macy, domesticity and individuality as being distinct from the private sphere of economic activities.

At first glance, spatial practices in Hanoi do not seem to match the conceptualisation of private and public as depicted above. Activities, which Arendt clearly assigns to the private realm or Benhabib to the domestic-intimate, are often carried out in public space in Hanoi. Streets and sidewalks are used for the satisfaction of needs of everyday life, such as cooking, eating and washing. Moreover, a great part of activities related to the childcare and the elderly is also carried out in public space. Small children are nurtured on the sidewalks during play, or are taken to the gutter for a pee. In Thong Nhat Park physically challenged men are accompanied by family members and friends to practice walking or just to enjoy the fresh breeze in the park. Another frequently encountered image is that of young unmarried-couples embracing each other on park banks or motorbikes parked at lake banks. This can certainly be attributed to the lack of private space. The low average per capita floor area, 10.6 sqm, (HAI-DEP 2007b: 2-5) has fuelled people's "social creativity". Korff (1991: 15) refers to "social creativity" as people's initiative to improve their living standards. Urban dwellers have developed strategies to extend the private space of the home onto public space. The expansion is heightened by a lack of infrastructure. In many housing areas, households need to make use of communal water pipes located on the sidewalks.

Since the introduction of economic reforms an increasing private appropriation of public spheres can be observed. Individuals renovate their private houses at the cost of sacred or public spaces. Another form of this private appropriation exists in the expansion of private businesses' showrooms onto sidewalks, as well as mobile street vendors selling fruits and vegetables on the roadsides. Forbes (1996a: 62) calls this quite fittingly the "pavement economy".

In her article "Street Scenes: Practices of Public and Private Space in Urban Vietnam", Lisa Drummond (2000: 2377) addresses the difficulty of the application of the Western concept of public space on a society where clear distinctions between private and public realms are seemingly absent. As a result, she introduces the concepts of "inside out" and "outside in". The former denominates the conduction of private activities in public space, whereas the latter designates the state's intervention into the domestic sphere of the home.

"At the same time, however, as the urban populace is appropriating public spaces, the transgression of the border between public and private is working in the opposite direction. The state's involvement with domestic or private spaces centres mainly around attempts to organise household relations and structure social roles within the family. The state is extremely active in attempts to formulate domestic activity: (...)" (Drummond 2000: 2185).

Thus, the private appropriation of public spheres, or what Drummond calls inside out, hints more towards a privatised society than to a public sphere according to Western political thought. Although the concepts are seemingly contradictory, privatisation and the development of public sphere are closely interrelated. Sennett (2008: 169 f.) argues that the private used to be the corrective of the public sphere and together both spheres formed equilibrium. Correspondingly, Bahrtdt (1974: 66) regards private and public as the structuring poles of the modern metropolis perceiving the private and public as forms of communication.

He argues that within a “cohesive social system” a privatisation of certain realms of life is impossible and that it is only within a less structured social environment like the city that individuals are able to define or even manipulate the personal social role according to the situation.¹⁵⁶ So-called “performance” or “performing behaviour” (*darstellendes Verhalten*) assists in cloaking these personal features that ought to be withheld from the public (Bahrtdt 1974: 67). At the same time performance helps to present those qualities that ought to be recognised in public. In order to gain recognition from others, “representation” (*Repräsentation*) is necessary. Bahrtdt (1974: 69 f.) introduces this term to denote a behaviour that results in both the demonstration of individuality distinguishing the individual from the mass, and the integration of the individual into a common value system. Thus, representation is a means of communication that bridges distance. The objective of representation is to render visible both the subject itself and the collective in order to achieve communication and integration between them.

“Die äußerlich erkennbare Erscheinungsform des Verhaltens ist deshalb weniger ein natürlich hervordachsender Ausdruck eines Innern, sondern vielmehr ein >Sich-geben<, ein Auftreten, ein Sichdarstellen oder auch ein abstraktes, von der Sache, um die es geht, abgelöstes Geben von Zeichen” (Bahrtdt 1974: 67).

The development of individual “qualitative uniqueness”¹⁵⁷ and the formation of a visible collective on the basis of representation can be most frequently observed among the urban youth in Hanoi. Breakdancers, hip-hop dancers and skateboarders who frequent public spaces such as Ly Thai To Square, Lenin Monument and Thong Nhat Park express their individuality through their clothing, speech and performance. They recognise each other in space through a set of common codes like clothes, music, dance moves, or nicknames. Other youth who share a common interest, for example breakdancing, are able to read these signs. Accordingly, the members of the FIT and MiNi Shock Crews explain: “We got to know each other here. Everyone who likes to dance, comes here. Everyday it is getting more crowded” (B-boy Born, 17.04.2008).

Furthermore, this indicates that breakdancing crews are open for newcomers to join and thus, when asked about how many members the group has, a B-boy answers: “Many. About 13. We have many small groups” (B-boy Jo, 17.04.2008).

¹⁵⁶ Bahrtdt draws his conclusions from a comparison of so-called “cohesive social systems” as detected in rural or feudal societies with the anonymity found in the modern metropolis. He regards the market as one of the earliest forms of public spheres. Bahrtdt (1974: 63 f.) declares that the “incomplete integration” of the market is the “negative prerequisite for public sphere”. By “incomplete integration”, he implies that each individual decides on his or her own degree, kind and duration of social interaction with other individuals. In contrast to cohesive social systems, in which social order is determined by personal relations, in the metropolis most individuals interact with one another without being able to locate the counterpart in a common social order. Privatisation then is the “negative precondition for the evolution of private sphere”.

¹⁵⁷ According to Simmel (1903: 131), two distinct forms of individualism are likely to evolve in the metropolis; first individual independence, and second the formation of individual *Sonderart* implying “qualitative uniqueness”.

Everyone who enjoys breakdancing is welcome to participate. This statement corresponds to Drummond's and Nguyen Thi Lien's (2009: 185) findings about what students consider to be public spaces. They state: "Some high school students felt that public spaces were places where they could make new friends, meet people with similar interests or hobbies (i.e., meeting people who like swimming at the swimming pool), ...". Again, this points towards representation as a means of communication to bring together those that share a common interest. Although social cohesion within these groups appears to be high, it is striking that the diverse groups that regularly hang out around Ly Thai To Square, Lenin Monument or Thong Nhat Park hardly interact with one another. Groups gathering for sports activities clearly stay within their own faction within a spatially demarcated area. Drummond and Nguyen Thi Lien (2009: 187) come to a similar conclusion in their study on young people in Hanoi. First of all, they view young people as "an increasingly amorphous and individuated group". With respect to their spatial practices, they argue that "where there is public space or other recreation space and those spaces are used, the use of those spaces by young people is increasingly individualized". A further example of individualised behaviour is found in the aerobic classes offered at the Botanical Garden and Ly Thai To Square. These classes are only visited by women and when class is over, only a few women remain in the park to chat or partake in other forms of social interaction. Most of the participants quickly return home alone on their motorbikes, hinting once more towards an individualisation and privatisation of society.

4.4.1 "Intimising" public space

The anonymity of urban public space is not only used for representation and performance, but also for the creation of spheres of intimacy. Public spaces like parks and the banks of lakes serve as meeting points for young unmarried couples, especially in the evening. Drummond (2000: 2382) reports that in the 1990s young couples mainly made out in parks at night or in shadowed wall spaces along the streets. However, nowadays they also embrace each other or hold hands in broad daylight.

A young respondent notes that the Botanical Garden has become a popular place for young couples to meet. There, they can feel "free", caring about anyone but the partner. He argues that it is a good spot to meet in the evening because it is dark.¹⁵⁸ Another young man states that he started to date his girlfriend on the banks of West Lake because he was not allowed to bring her home. Yet, after they decided to get married, his parents asked her parents for permission to go out with her. Since then, the couple dares to go to the cinema at Vincom Towers.¹⁵⁹

These narratives point to public space offering a retreat from the private sphere of the family. The anonymity, as well as the low degree of social control-not to be confused with civilisatory control-creates a "liberating" quality of urban public space. Another popular place to go to in order to obtain privacy is the so-called "guest house" (*nha nghi*). Although intimacy among partners is generally not accepted before marriage, especially for women, visits to these places have been institutionalised. Nonetheless, ambivalence towards these "intimate" spaces in public prevails as they contest moral values. In their study of youth's attitude towards public space in Hanoi, Drummond and Nguyen Thi Lien (2009: 186) found that particularly students from outer provinces of Hanoi complained about "the amorous behaviour of couples in parks". On the contrary, students from Hanoi were not bothered by them, as some of them were these couples.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Thang, 17.10.2007.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Hiep, 03.10.2007.

Of course, the critique of young people being intimate in parks also highlights a more general critique of adolescents' attitude towards sex, as demonstrated below:

“Today the young are so easy to have sex before marriage, before it was no sex. After my generation, from the 80s to the 90s it is changing, especially from the 90s up to now. If you do interviews maybe young people will not tell you. They get a lot of information from TV and internet. They prefer Western life like private life” (Duc, 24.04.2008).

Finally, the creation of spheres of intimacy in public space, or more precisely the “intimisation of public space”, illustrates that privacy is not necessarily equated with private space. Elias (2006: 347 f.) suggests to speak of “l'espace privé”, in reference to Philippe Ariès' “espace privé”. Elias applies this term not to denominate a place or locality, but as a metaphor for the social process of privatisation. Accordingly, private space is created through its recognition and the respect given by others. Consequently, privacy can be established anywhere, even in public space.

4.5 Conclusion: Three dimensional model of public space

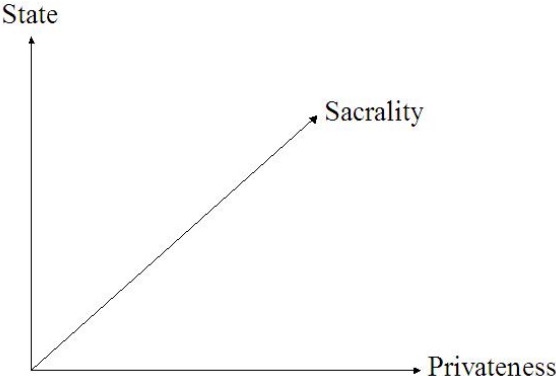
Assuming the existence of multiple public spaces, it is also possible to integrate those spaces, primarily serving private activities, into a redefined version of public space. It is in this light, that “national” public spaces in Hanoi are thought of in a three dimensional way. The three dimensions comprise: (1) Sacrality; (2) State; and (3) Privatness. Beginning with an emic perspective, this thesis argues that traditional public space within village communities mainly consists of sacred spaces, including the pagoda, temple and communal house, where villagers mingled. During pre-colonial and colonial times the communal house was not only a symbol of sacrality, but furthermore, of officialdom. Over time, the connotation of officialdom has diminished, as today the communal house foremost signifies a sacred public space offering an arena for local residents to mingle.

The relationship between state and sacrality was first established in the form of the royal citadel, and its role as the residence of the ruler. The king in Vietnam was believed to be sent from heaven, and thus his residency was considered the sacred centre of the empire. This historical linkage between officialdom and the sacred was later co-opted by the socialist government. The routinization of charisma through architecture on Ba Dinh Square presents the attempt by the Communist Party to employ the connotation of sacrality to legitimise its power. Moreover, in advance of the 1000th anniversary of Thang Long-Hanoi the state evidently seeks to establish continuity between Vietnam's monarchic past and the current order. As part of the commemorative project, the state actively revives religious rites and customs, for example through the preservation of religious buildings or the organisation of parades. Yet, at the same time, it also introduces new modes of celebration. The reference to popular culture can be considered the party-state's attempt to reach out to a broader public, in particular to the younger generation that has not personally suffered from the war.

The linkage between officialdom and sacrality is contested by private individuals. Citizens' redefinition of official spaces like Ba Dinh Square and Ly Thai To Square through everyday life practices point towards the development of public spaces in Hanoi. Furthermore, the shift in the mode of official celebrations demonstrates that former mechanisms of mass mobilisation no longer succeed. Instead, the public increasingly organises itself. Youth groups gather in national public spaces for breakdancing, skateboarding or football. Elderly people come together to play badminton or for dance classes. They are brought together by a common interest. Through representation, the collective becomes aware of itself and is able to communicate. This leads to the third dimension of privatness. The anonymity of public space favours individualisation and privatisation at the same time. Thus, in contrast to socially cohesive sys-

tems, the public sphere renders performance and thence a redefinition of the social role possible. Young people escape the private sphere of the family through the creation of spheres of intimacy within the public space of parks and on the shores of lakes. Another form of the private appropriation of public space is the expansion of private economic activities onto streets and sidewalks. Drummond alludes to the entanglement of private and public in Hanoi with the concepts of inside out and outside in.

FIGURE 16: THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF PUBLIC SPACE



In conclusion, it is argued that the three variables are critical constituents of the development of national public spaces in Hanoi. Based on the acknowledgement of multiple public spaces, the different spaces presented in this paper differ as state, sacrality and privatness are represented in their materiality, practices and meanings. Finally, the overlapping connotations of the state, the sacred and the private point to processes of negotiation between citizens and state, further arguing for citizens' engagement with former spaces of officialdom in place of local public spaces. Whereas national spaces are publicised, local public spaces appear to be emptied. Thus, the emergence of urban national public space needs to be considered in the wider context of shifting state-society relations in Vietnam.

5 Negotiations between citizens and state

An important aspect of *Doi Moi* is the promotion of private sector development. Since the introduction of economic reforms, private individuals have taken the opportunity to open their own businesses and shops. A necessary precondition for private enterprises is access to land, both in urban and rural areas. For those who lack access to urban land, small-scale trade, so-called “petty trade”, has become an attractive source of income. This development is often discussed in terms of urban informality.¹⁶⁰ The establishment of the first Land Law in 1993, and its diverse amendments since, enables citizens to claim land-use rights from the state. The privatisation process and the issuance of land-use certificates emerged simultaneously with a growing awareness about private ownership. This chapter discusses the private appropriation of public spheres, as well as citizens’ individual and collective right-claims as specific form of the dynamic process of “contested institutionalisation” (Korff, Schrader 2004: 17).

5.1 Private Appropriation of Public Spheres

In Hanoi, a clear-cut division between private and public space is challenged by private businesses’ practices, such as the expansion of showrooms onto sidewalks, and the use of the roadside by mobile street vendors selling fruits and vegetables. Forbes (1996a: 62) aptly calls this phenomenon the “pavement economy”. The development of the pavement economy in Hanoi is closely linked to the economic liberalisation process introduced by *Doi Moi* policy. An important factor that fuelled this development was the reduction of the state sector as the main employer in Vietnam. In reaction to the loss of employment opportunities, a significant number of former state employees became involved in the pavement economy, as a means to make a complete leaving or to attain additional income (Koh 2006: 156). In more general terms, new possibilities for individual decision-making became available to citizens after a period of an austere command economy, when private sector activities in the form of shop ownership and street peddling had officially been declared illegal.¹⁶¹ In particular, the relaxation of the household registration system, which previously regulated access to employment and social services, resulted in, more or less, free choice in employment and residency. Above all, it was the city that attracted the peasantry; some rural dwellers sought additional income besides farming, commuting to the cities to sell their agricultural products, while others sought temporary employment in the city’s low-income sector. Hence, rural-urban migration was, for the most part, motivated by the promise of a better life, or what Wittrock (2002: 49) refers to as “promissory notes”. In order to satisfy the growing demand for low-income services and food products in the city more and more private individuals engaged in street trade. As Koh illustrates (2006: 156), the influx of mobile vendors from the surrounding villages into the city accelerated after 1988, when the state liberalised the agriculture procurement

¹⁶⁰ For a discussion on urban informality, see for example the work of Evers (1985, 1997), Evers and Korff (2003), or Forbes (1996a).

¹⁶¹ It is important to note that during the period of command economy, especially within the urban economy, informal private activities prevailed. Turley (1975: 373) reports that after the First Indochina War in the 1950s, 40,000 market stall-keepers, shop-owners and street pedlars were located in a metropolitan area of 400,000 residents in Hanoi. Correspondingly, Koh (2006: 166) outlines that in the 1950s more than 10,000 food operators occupied the pavements. Thus, private business was tolerated because it played a crucial role in the maintenance of urban food security. Likewise, Turner (2009: 1213) determines that after the government’s attempts to collectivise agriculture and trade as well as to socialise industries in the late 1950s, trade in illegal goods persisted. This was carried out behind closed doors in the private homes of the Ancient Quarter. Similarly, after the Second Indochina War in 1975/76, the private sector was able to regain in strength through trade in consumer goods that were illegally imported from Ho Chi Minh City on the basis of previous trading links (Nishimura, Hoang Huu Phe 2000: 25).

system. The new system allowed peasants to sell their surpluses on the market provided that they fulfilled their state contracts. That is also the reason why Hanoi experienced an “urban involution”¹⁶² in the late 1980s, as depicted by Armstrong and Mc Gee (1980). Street trade became the main economic sector, soaking up urban labour surpluses in Hanoi. Accordingly, Forbes (1996b: 43) categorizes the pavement economy as part of the city’s informal economy.

Pavement economy was initially introduced to denominate informal economic activities, it was later used additionally to describe the occupation of the pavements by both the formal and the informal sector (Schnepf-Orth 1999: 48; Waibel 2003: 35). Apart from street trade, it denotes the expansion of private shops’ showrooms or restaurants onto the sidewalks.

Schnepf-Orth (1999: 48 ff.) developed a zoning model to demarcate different types of spatial practices in the Ancient Quarter of Hanoi.¹⁶³

Zone A comprises the shop’s foyer and the pavement directly in front of the entrance. This area is primarily used to store, as well as to showcase, merchandise. There are often saleswomen sitting on a staircase or plastic stool in this zone. Furthermore, the owners of food and tea stalls make use of the area to heat food and drinks. Zone B consists of the part of the pavement surrounding the water tap. Hence, all activities related to the usage of water, such as washing dishes, hair-washing, etc., are conducted here. Additionally, food stall owners expand seats and tables for their customers onto the pavement. Sometimes whole families have their meals on the pavement in front of their house. After the shop closes, the sidewalk is once again accessible to pedestrians. Zone C is located in between Zone B and the curb. It is mainly used as parking space for motorbikes and bicycles. Mobile food vendors also set up seats for their customers in this zone. Zone D is the curb. In the evening households put their garbage on the curb so that it will be picked up by the municipal waste collectors. Some households cover the curb in front of their entrance with a ramp in order to park motorbikes on the pavement. Zone E comprises the roadside. It constitutes the main field of action for mobile street vendors. Zone F represents the middle of the road; its actual function is to serve traffic. Yet, since the pavements are often barricaded, pedestrians must use the street. Furthermore, streets are frequently blocked by vehicles that stop on the street for loading and unloading.

The activities described above share a common feature; they represent the appropriation of public spheres for private interests. Public goods, such as sidewalks and roadsides, even sacred spaces like temples, are occupied for private activities and private profit. This of course raises the tension between the public sphere’s representation of the common good and private interests. On one hand, public space appears to be understood as a public resource that anyone can make use of. On the other hand, it is also believed to constitute a private space belonging to the households located nearby. An article in the *An Ninh Thu Do* Newspaper (16.10.07) reports that a family selling food on the pavement in front of their house believes that the sidewalk belongs only to the family, yet this assumption is in conflict with Drummond’s (2000) appraisal. She argues that urban dwellers are well aware of the fact that the pavement they use is not “within their own possession”, and hence a private good. Nonetheless, they “appear to feel either that they need to use the space in order to conduct commercial activities and therefore are justified in doing so, as long as they do not get caught or the penalties are

¹⁶² In reference to Clifford Geertz’ study of the Indonesian town Modjokuto Armstrong and McGee (1980: 220 ff.) distinguish between two interlinked economic sectors. The first sector consists of a company centred economy characterised by unpersonal relationships. The second sector is made up by the traditional “bazaar” economy. The first mentioned capital intensive sector stands for high productivity, but its capacity to absorb human labour force is restricted. On the contrary, the bazaar economy is marked by a low degree of productivity and under-employment. It absorbs urban surplus labour. The result is an “involution” within the bazaar economy. This means that although the number of employees rises, productivity does not parallelly increase.

¹⁶³ In her research Schnepf-Orth (1999) focuses on the two streets of Hang Buom and Nguyen Dieu.

not too harsh, (...)” (Drummond 2000: 2384). However, whether it is thought of as a private or public good, in the exploitation of public space private interests appear to dominate those of the public.

5.1.1 Attempts at regulation by the state

In reaction to the rapid expansion of the pavement economy, the state has conducted diverse attempts to enforce order on the sidewalks. The first two campaigns in 1986 and 1991 did not have a great affect; it was only in 1995 that the third major operation established at least some order (Koh 2006: 157). In 2003, in advance of the Southeast Asian Games held in Hanoi, the state initiated another anti-street trade campaign. Its objective was “to sanitize the city’s teeming street life into a Singapore-style vision of a clean urban environment” (Far Eastern Economic Review 2003: 38), as a cadre reflects:

“In the years before, Hanoi did not have a ‘considerable/important’ plan to effectively manage the sidewalks. Earlier regulations on the usage of sidewalks include the government’s ND 36/CP or ND 13/CP, but these only resulted in the ‘pushing away’ of activities that were deemed to cause disorder. This made the re-establishment of public order a daily exhausting undertaking” (ANTD 08.01.08: 12 f. translated from Vietnamese).

After previous attempts to establish public order on the sidewalks (*trat tu via he*) failed to succeed, the People’s Committee of Hanoi passed Decision (*Quyết Định*) No. 227/2006/QĐ-UBND in 2006. The decision regulates the management of public spaces such as pavements and streets on a district level. More precisely, it determines the transfer of the responsibility for public space management from the municipality to the district. In this respect it can be considered an initial attempt at decentralisation in the field of urban governance. Accordingly, the main responsibility of the management lies with the Public Traffic (GTCC) Office. In general, this office manages the construction and usage of streets. Mr. Nguyen Thai Hoa, Head of the Chamber of Construction of Hai Ba Trung District, explains the aim of decentralisation as follows:

“When the responsibility of management is assigned, the work of directing and supervising will be closer. The investment, repair and maintenance of the sidewalks will be faster. Furthermore, if the image of the sidewalk lies in the responsibility of the cadres of the wards and districts, the people’s committees of the districts and wards will be required to get more closely involved” (ANTD 09.01.08: 12 f. translated from Vietnamese).

However, two years after the decision’s introduction, “dis-order” still appears to prevail on Hanoi’s streets. One reason for this certainly is the existence of diverging interpretations and management of the regulation in each locality. One such example is evident in the districts Hai Ba Trung and Hoan Kiem with respect to the handling of article No. 13 of the decision. Article No. 13 permits private citizens “to provisionally use sidewalks and roadsides in order to set up parking spaces”. The authorities of Hai Ba Trung District appear to be very strict in the issuance of permissions for parking spaces, while conversely authorities in Hoan Kiem District seem to be rather lax and after only 6 months of the article’s implementation, the latter had already issued about 200 permissions (ANTD 08.01.08). This high number indicates that a financial benefit must be the driving force behind the implementation and enforcement of particular articles of the decision.

Apart from differing applications of the legislation, the lack of capacities poses another problem. The Head of Police in the Hang Bong ward located in the Ancient Quarter explains that only three policemen have to control 600 businesses and four hospitals in the ward. Therefore,

a large part of police work actually consists of patrolling the streets demonstrating that regulations are enforced (ANTD 10.01.08). However, on one hand, citizens demand authorities to establish public order, while on the other they do not follow regulations. They explain their non-compliance with the necessity to generate an income from the pavement economy. As a journalist explains, street vendors' anxiety about local authorities is not as great a threat as having to cut a meal because an income opportunity is missing (ANTD 08.01.08; ANTD 09.01.08).

Against this background additional directives dealing with the usage of sidewalks and roadsides for private economic activities were established in 2007 and 2008. Decision No. 148 was issued on the 28th of December 2007 and became effective on January the 8th 2008. It permits the provisional usage of the sidewalks by private individuals, in association with a fee (ANTD 11.01.08). This is rather contradictory as the municipality's official documents determine that "the sidewalks and roadsides are all part of the basic system of the urban technical infrastructure belonging to the state. The sidewalks should basically be used by pedestrians" (ANTD 09.01.08: 12 f. translated from Vietnamese). In other words, the pavements are not supposed to be turned into a market place, a place to sell goods, or to park vehicles.

Decision No. 148 obviously challenges this understanding of the function of sidewalks. It will render the utilisation of sidewalks, roadsides and standpipes for private business legal, if a fee is paid. The municipality intends to elevate the following fees (TN 03.01.08: 2):

35,000 - 45,000 VND/m²/month to set up parking spaces for bikes/motorbikes, as well as food and tea stalls;¹⁶⁴

25,000 VND/m²/month for setting up a business in the Ancient Quarter's night market;

10,000 VND/m²/month for car parking spaces;

50,000 VND/m²/month for moving building material;

Firms that make full use of parking spaces and some other organisations can receive a provisional permission of the People's Committee of Hanoi to use the roadside to park bikes, motorbikes and cars; the fee consists of 2% of the revenues deriving from renting out roadsides as parking spaces;

Maximum costs for using the side as station will be 100 million VND/station/year;

50,000 VND/m²/month for setting up an advertising board on the sidewalks;

30,000 - 40,000 VND/m²/month for the usage of the watersurface managed by the state in order to do business;

Fees must be paid by all organisations that receive permission from the jurisdictional organ to provisionally use the above-mentioned public utilities. The returns then ought to be reinvested into the maintenance and repair of the districts' public spaces, as Mr. Nguyen Thai Hoa declares:

"Another positive factor is the usage of the returns coming from the management of the sidewalks. The responsibility assigned to the power of the district and ward should be

¹⁶⁴ In April 2008, the People's Committee of Hanoi additionally introduced Decision No. 20/2008/QD-UBND determining the rules for establishing parking spaces. According to the decision the coordination and management of parking spaces on the streets lies within the responsibility of the people's committee on the district level. Guidelines for setting up parking spaces are as follows: Parking spaces have to be set up 20 metres away from the traffic and must be demarcated. Bikes and motorbikes must be arranged in a row 0.2 metre away from the curb with the front facing the pavement. On streets smaller than 3 m parking spaces for motorbikes are only permitted when a space of 1.5 m is left for pedestrians to pass by. From the 1st of July 2008 all violations of the decision will be fined according to the law (ANTD 25.04.08; ANTD 23.05.08).

enough to determine which business activities are prohibited; returns are sufficient, come from all sorts of businesses that are registered for activities on the sidewalk. This source will provide the basis for the expenditures for maintenance and improvement of the pavements and the infrastructure in particular” (ANTD 09.01.08: 12 f. translated from Vietnamese).

Overall, Decision No. 148 actually bears the capacity to cater all actors involved in the pavement economy. For the state, an extra source of revenue is opened through the elevation of fees, whereas private individuals are still able to rely on the pavement economy as a source for income generation. Nonetheless, public order is still not maintained. Lieutenant Le Van Phieu, Vice-chief of the Police in Ngo Thi Nham, regards the problem as evidence that the new rule fails to prevent citizens from violating the law. In the past, the illegal erection of parking spaces used to be fined 750.000 VND. Nowadays, according to Decision No. 148, the fine is only 75.000 VND (ANTD 10.01.08).

However, the main problem is that the introduction of Decisions No. 148 and No. 227 means that two diverging directives coexist. The contradiction is apparent: while Decision No. 227 clearly states that the sidewalk ought to be for pedestrians only, thereby prohibiting the practice of business on the sidewalk, Decision No. 148 explicitly permits its utilisation provided payment is received (ANTD 11.01.08). As a consequence, even citizens who want to comply with the law, find themselves confronted with conflicting information. For example, Mrs Nguyen Thi Mai, a woman who sells noodle soup from her mobile food stall on Hang Dieu Street, states: “Tomorrow I go to the ward to ask to cut the fee on the usage of the sidewalk; it seems that doing business is legal (...)” (ANTD 11.01.08: 13 translated from Vietnamese). This problem is not only confined to Mrs Mai. Numerous people involved in the pavement economy believe that Decision No. 148 will permit them to use the sidewalk for business activities, if they pay the fee of 35.000-45.000 VND/m²/month depending on their location in the district.

The existence of different directives referring to the utilisation of sidewalks for private economic activities demonstrates the legislation’s continuous modification and redefinition. As a consequence, citizens find themselves lost in a legislative jungle, not knowing which regulation they should obey. Citizens are not correctly informed about which activities are considered legal and which are illegal. Thereby, not only are mobile vendors ascribed to the realm of informality, but also private shop owners who in effect deem themselves as part of the formal economy. Although they have registered with local institutions and pay taxes, by extending their showroom onto the sidewalk they enter the space of informality. Nevertheless, the municipality’s primary target group appears to be street vendors. Further evidence of this is found in Decision No. 02/2008/QĐ-UBND by the People’s Committee of Hanoi on the 9th of January, 2008. The decision concerns the organisation and management of street hawkers in the city, who are, in fact, officially banned from the city centre (ANTD 11.01.08; ANTD 23.01.08). Subsequently, the municipality has classified 62 streets¹⁶⁵ and 48 historic sites in the urban core area, as areas where street trade is completely prohibited (ANTD 20.05.08; ANTD 28.05.08).

When Decision No. 02 was finally enacted on the 1st of July, 2008, the municipality mobilised 2000 cadres to supervise the regulation’s correct implementation and enforcement (TN 01.07.08). In the weeks thereafter street trade in the urban centre declined. At that time, street hawkers who were hiding in small alleys or running away from official patrols were frequently encountered. *Thanh Nien* Newspaper (TN 02.07.08) reports that “many store owners are following the ban more because they are afraid of penalties than out of concern for the city’s

¹⁶⁵ The list of 62 streets comprises 16 streets in Hoan Kiem District, 26 streets in Ba Dinh District, 12 streets in Dong Da District, 3 in Hai Ba Trung District, 3 in Cau Giay District, and 2 in Thanh Xuan District.

image”. However, with regard to the former attempts of the municipality to control the use of public space, Koh (2006: 159) remarks that although campaigns to restore order on the sidewalks usually would start well if supervision by a higher-level authority was strong, after a few months campaigns appeared to fizzle out, therefore lacking persistence and consistency. Thus, the immediate clearance of sidewalks as soon as official patrols approach, and the direct reappropriation after the patrol has vanished, has become a common strategy for petty traders and street hawkers.¹⁶⁶

5.1.2 Informality as part of locality

The constant modification of the legislation concerning the pavement economy can be characterised as a process of “contested institutionalisation”. Due to citizens’ non-compliance to previous regulations, the state continuously revises existing directives and creates new ones. However, although decisions are made on the municipal level, citizens actually participate in the law-making process through renegotiation that occurs on the local level. The question that arises is how this negotiation is made possible.

In his recent article, “Conceptualising informality: Regulation and Enforcement”, Ravi Kanbur (2009) suggests that formality and informality should be defined in relation to state intervention and regulation. He argues that “specificity on regulation and on enforcement is the key to achieve conceptual clarity in the analytical literature and in the policy discourse on informality” (Kanbur 2009: 1). Consequently, studies of informality ought to consider the relationship between an economic activity and a specific legislation.¹⁶⁷ Kanbur (2009: 2) further concludes that the nature and intensity of enforcement need to be examined. As already outlined above, in Hanoi the degree of a regulation’s enforcement appears to vary according to the locality. Through decentralisation measures public space management has been assigned to the district, thus enabling altering handlings of regulations by the districts. Yet, more importantly, citizens’ redefinition of existing regulations does not begin at the district level, but rather on the local level of the urban ward. It is in the daily encounters between citizens and local officials that regulations are constantly redefined. David Koh (2006: 15) argues that negotiation is made possible through so-called “mediation space”. It is due to local officials’ social embeddedness in the locality that laws can be redefined according to the situation.

“In Vietnam, local officials often have to play dual roles of being party-state agents and of being a part of the local community. When the values of these two roles clash, mediation of state power often occurs” (Koh 2006: 9).

According to Koh (2006: 9, 15) the problem is the lack of a clear-cut differentiation between private and public roles of local officials. They are often compassionate (*thong cam*) because they feel for their community. He contends that cultural and moral dynamics result in officials

¹⁶⁶ Even before Decisions No. 148 and No. 02 were made official, encounters between officials and citizens followed this rule. On the 5th of November 2007 the police was patrolling Ngoc Ha market in the late afternoon at 5 pm. And when the minivan of the patrolling forces entered the alley, the news of their arrival was quickly spread. Apparently all actors in the market had complied to the order to clear the sidewalks. Saleswomen immediately pulled their stacks of fruit away from the street to their little stalls. Moreover, mobile street vendors hid their goods behind fixed market stalls. Yet, as soon as the patrol disappeared, the saleswomen pushed their fruit packs back onto the sidewalks and street hawkers resumed the place where they had sold their goods before. What is striking is the quick self-organisation among the actors. Regardless of having a fixed stall or a mobile business, vendors assisted each other by spreading the news that the patrol was approaching, and by hiding mobile vendor’s products in fixed stalls.

¹⁶⁷ In his article Kanbur (2009: 1) presents four conceptual categories that ought to assist the analysis: a) a regulation is applicable and compliant; b) a regulation is applicable, but non-compliant; c) a regulation is not applicable after the adjustment of an activity; and d) a regulation is not applicable to the activity.

helping family, friends and neighbours, even if this means that regulations are sometimes not correctly implemented. For example, they would make exemptions from the pavement regime in order to ensure the daily basis of income for the needy. Koh (2006: 160) reasons that there is a “moral economy that even the highest levels of government would support”. In an interview with *An Ninh Thu Do* Newspaper Lieutenant Le Van Phieu echoes Koh’s assumptions. He explains that for local policemen it is not always easy to enforce regulations. For example, he mentions motorbike drivers who violate the law by parking on the sidewalks and who would plead with the authorities and sometimes even start to argue with the police. He states, “[i]f we are resolute, 9 out of 10 witnesses will say that the police ‘troubles’ the people”. In his opinion the police do not get a lot of sympathy (*thong cam*)¹⁶⁸ from citizens these days (ANTD 10.01.08: 12 f. translated from Vietnamese). His statement illustrates that the police is expected to be compassionate, and that there ought to be spaces for negotiation. At the same time, local officials appear to be afraid of having to argue with citizens as well as of being misjudged. Yet, as the decentralisation process enhances local officials’ responsibility for law enforcement, daily confrontations between residents and officials are likely to rise on the local level. This in turn heightens local officials’ dilemma between public and private roles (ANTD 08.01.08; ANTD 11.01.08).

In conclusion, mediation space offers a scope for a redefinition of existent regulations on the local level. The social embeddedness of local state representatives encourages them to apply informal practices themselves. Bounded by a moral economy that is only fully functional within socially cohesive systems like in the locality, local officials do not comprehensively enforce regulations. This highlights informality’s integral role in the locality. Informality as part of the locality is not only produced in the encounters between citizens and officials, but also in encounters between fellow citizens, such as renting private houses’ front spaces to street traders. By paying a fee to the house owner, street hawkers attain access to urban space without appropriating public space, thus circumventing the space of informality. On private land, police and local officials are not able to exert any power over them. Thus, “informal” arrangements with private individuals are able to render a kind of “semi-formality” to street vendors.

5.1.3 Contested visions of the city

Vietnam’s current goal to become an industrialised country by 2020 means that the national capital, Hanoi, has to represent the country’s socio-economic development. Modern cities in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Singapore or Seoul, function as role models for urban planning. For example, the city-state of Singapore followed a rather authoritarian way of modernisation that, among others, included the eradication of street vendors from the urban landscape. With the implementation of the legislation above, the municipality of Hanoi pursues a similar goal: the creation of a “civilised and modern Hanoi” (*mot Ha Noi van minh hien dai*). The image of the city is designed in correspondence to the political elite’s idea of modernity. In order to justify the ban on street trade in Hanoi, official discourse declares that street trade is a relic from the past that conflicts the modern image of the capital. The government considers street trade “bad habits” that need to be extinguished (TN 02.07.08). However, this process of institutionalisation is highly contested by public spheres negotiating “their” image of the city.

The implementation of Decisions No. 148, No. 20, and No. 02 and the appropriation of the sidewalks for economic purposes and, in particular, the abandonment of street pedlars from 62

¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, as citizens expect authorities to act in this manner, officials adopt the same term of being “compassionate”. The expectation of “compassion” on both sides founds the basis for the renegotiation and redefinition of the law.

streets in the urban core area became a “hot” topic.¹⁶⁹ As a consequence, public debate arose around the issue. What is striking is people’s obvious ambivalence towards the pavement economy; on one hand, citizens welcome the municipality’s attempt to abolish it, while on the other they are dependent on it. Not only do many citizens generate income from the pavement economy, but for many it has also been a cheap provider of food and other commodities. In fact, the pavement economy forms an integral part of the urban supply system.¹⁷⁰ Hanoi’s narrow alleys can often only be accessed by foot or motorbike, and thus street trade is a comfortable way of shopping while ensuring, at the same time, that citizens have access to daily-use products.¹⁷¹ In other words, a great part of the populace profits from the pavement economy.

Nonetheless, many citizens seem to share the municipality’s view that street trade is an obstacle to modernisation. Accordingly, street pedlars are publicly blamed for bringing the image of the countryside into the city. Street trade denotes the life of the countryside, an image of a less modern life than in the city. Although the city is on one hand associated with estrangement, on the other, it is regarded as the centre of civilisation and the belief is that it is only within the city that civilisation can flourish.

Another contra-argument is that street vendors are considered to be the cause of diverse urban problems such as traffic jams, environmental pollution, and public disorder. Additionally, the Hanoi Department of Industry and Trade announced that temporary stalls would fall short of food safety, as they lacked hygiene standards (Bernama 11.12.09). A few citizens went as far as to demand a comprehensive ban on street trade in Hanoi, as the ban on the city’s major streets has encouraged street traders to retreat into small alleys where they, allegedly, cause disorder. In some neighbourhoods residents have already handed in petitions to the ward and district to prevent hawkers from invading their alleys (HNM 06.01.08).

Other citizens believe that the well-being of a few street pedlars, who have to suffer from the new policy, is secondary to the welfare of the whole of society (HNM 06.01.08). This discussion evokes images of the so-called “quality of life” campaigns in American cities. Mitchell (2003: 189) argues that those “reduce the ‘right to the city’ for all to a ‘right’ for some to be free from the annoying ‘resistance’ of those thrown into the streets they want to walk on”. In this context, Collins and Blomly (2003: 40) refer to the “purification of public space”. Such

¹⁶⁹ In October 2007, one year after the implementation of Decree No. 227, *An Ninh Thu Do* Newspaper had made the pavement economy the topic of discussion. From the 10th until the 17th of October 2007, the newspaper issued a daily series on the occupation of the sidewalks for economic activities. Readers’ reaction to the series was strong. Motivated by the campaign, many readers sent letters to the editor requesting that local authorities enforce order on the sidewalks. In this context, the call for a “civilised and modern Hanoi” was often expressed (ANTD 11.10.07).

¹⁷⁰ In times of shortages in the formal economy, the pavement economy can render services and provide commodities that otherwise could not be obtained. Urban dwellers’ dependency on street trade became apparent during the New Year holidays in February 2008, about one month after Decision No. 2. was passed. At that time more street pedlars than usual were encountered in the centre, even in places where vendors had never settled before, such as around St. Joseph Cathedral. Most hawkers were female vendors selling flowers, fruits and vegetables. Private individuals also established food stalls and parking spaces on sidewalks and roadsides next to public parks, like Thong Nhat Park, to serve the high number of visitors. It was reported that at that time food prices were 3-4 times the usual price. Even temples were occupied by street vendors, thereby preventing believers from making offerings (ANTD 12.02.08). Strikingly, at that time, the authorities did not intervene and citizens living in the city centre did not complain about “bad habit” of street trading.

¹⁷¹ This illustrates that the retention of street trade or its disappearance not only depends on formal permission/prohibition, but on consumer behaviour. The authorities are actually aware of this dilemma. A cadre, who works in the field of urban construction, explains that all regulations only focus on the coercive power of the police. However, the core of the problem is the system of demand and supply, and thus the practices of everyday life on the sidewalks are not properly addressed (ANTD 09.01.08). Likewise the head of the Market Management Unit in the Department of Industry and Trade, Police and Transport argues that “[u]nless customers build up a habit of shopping in modern retail formats rather than the traditional outdoor market, unplanned temporary markets will continue to exist” (Bernama 11.12.09).

policies have become a powerful instrument to “purify” the urban landscape in order to compete in the global economy. Mitchell (2003: 189) declares that anti-panhandling and anti-street trade regulations “raise a politics of aesthetics above the politics of survival”.¹⁷²

Yet, such ‘purification’ strategies can also lead to citizens thinking about alternative ways of commodity and food supply, the lack of which in Hanoi is a reason for the ambivalence towards the pavement economy. People are aware of the problem caused by the ban and that many small-scale businesses will vanish, and thus important suppliers of daily-life products will cease to exist (HNM 06.01.08). In response, alternatives to street trade are being proposed, including the restriction of street hawkers to certain areas like the Ancient Quarter, or the gathering of all hawkers into one place like the so-called hawker centres in Singapore (HNM 06.01.08). However, these remedies fail to address the probable loss of the street trade’s attractiveness for both hawkers and customers. For customers street trade’s attractiveness lies in doorstep-trade; citizens do not have to go to a shop to buy their daily supplies, but they can buy cheap products in walking distance or even at their front door. In an interview, Nguyen Thu Huyen explains that going to a modern supermarket would take more time for parking, whereas at temporary markets “[y]ou only need a few minutes to buy a whole meal” (Bernama 11.12.09). Then again, one initial incentive for citizens to become involved in street trade is that standing expenses are rather low, particularly when compared to the formal economy. A further critical factor is that access to urban land, which is usually difficult and expensive, is not a prerequisite for conducting economic activities (Korff 1988: 303). Accordingly, the pavement economy offers the possibility for income generation, particularly for unskilled workers that lack savings. It is very likely that the demand to gather all hawkers in one place will result in a competition for access to urban space and those who cannot afford to pay the rent, will be automatically excluded from the urban economy.

Although many citizens share the position that the municipality should abolish street trade, dissenting voices also arise. Opponents to the ban raise the issue of “poverty reduction”, challenging the elevation of ‘politics of aesthetics above the politics of survival’. Citizens argue for the persistence of street trade in favour of those who need it to make a living, and thus the sidewalk denotes a space of poverty reduction. Mr Nguyen Van Danh from Tu Liem District explains that “[s]treet trade is the profession for poor people generating an income and seeing it from this angle makes it a social issue. (...) How many supermarkets does Hanoi want to build to replace this line-up” (HNM 06.01.08 translated from Vietnamese). Nevertheless, others contend that it is not only poor people who are making a living from the pavement economy as a reporter put it, “[t]o be correct we have to say that the people are nowadays getting rich thanks to the sidewalks, the sidewalk is not just the place for poor people making their living” (ANTD 08.01.08: 12 f. translated from Vietnamese).

Those that argue in favour of street trade often reference Hanoi’s culture. Street trade is considered to be an integral part of Vietnamese culture that needs to be preserved (HNM 06.01.08), and is identified with the “culture of selling on the sidewalk” (ANTD 08.01.08: 12 translated from Vietnamese). These thoughts are nurtured by feelings of nostalgia for the countryside, the “cradle” of Vietnamese civilisation. That is why vanishing street trade marks a parallel to a feared loss of local identity. As Nguyen An Ninh, a reader of *Ha Noi Moi* Newspaper posted, “[p]reserve tradition but do not affect urban civilisation” (HNM 06.01.08 translated from Vietnamese).

¹⁷² The example of Northern America illustrates that the demand for ‘purification’ is not only a common claim in developing countries that aim at modernisation or in authoritarian countries, where the state is able to suppress a counter-discourse. In New York the desire of the former mayor Guiliani “to counteract ‘anarchy’ with repression” likewise resulted in the order to “arrest any homeless or other street people who did not ‘move along’ when told to do so, even if they committed no crime” (Mitchell 2003: 17).

The diversity of citizens' opinions about the pavement economy shows that citizens are concerned about their city. The legal framework established by the municipality is not merely taken for granted, but is controversially debated. Citizens are actively involved in the public discourse, however customers of the pavement economy, for the most part, drive the public debate. On the contrary, the factual target group of the new legislation appears to be excluded from the discourse. Thus, the self-organisation of street hawkers who articulate their discontent with municipal planning policies is even more noteworthy. In August 2008, one month after Decision No. 02 had been implemented, a group of women gathered regularly on the sidewalk of Hoang Hoa Tham St. opposite the entrance of the Government Office. Settling down on plastic stools and tables, they demanded a market place for their businesses from the government. On the first day of the protest a group of approximately 40-50 people assembled. In order to yield public attention protestors hung red banners above their camp saying "300 women and children miss a regular place to do trade". One week later additional banners stated, "500 women and children lack a market to sell their goods, Complaint No. 3" and again some days later "500 women and children lack a market to sell their goods, Complaint No. 5". Thus, with the protest, street hawkers stepped out of their marginality, making themselves visible in the public arena of the city. Through self-organisation they succeeded in transforming the sidewalk in front of the Government Office into a public space, claiming their right to the city.

In conclusion, both the public discourse and the street vendors' protest demonstrate that it is not only the state that gets to define the urban landscape but the citizens also have a voice. Urban landscapes are socially produced; they are the outcome of processes of negotiation between diverse social actors.

"in the city, different people with different projects must necessarily struggle with one another over the shape of the city, the terms of access to the public realm, and even the rights of citizenship" (Mitchell 2003: 18).

The image of the city is regarded to be part of the common good that is taken care of by public spheres. Citizens actively are involved in the public discourse about the image of "their" city, and thus they make the dominant vision of modernity a contested one.

5.2 Individual and collective right-claims against the state

Another form of contested institutionalisation is the occupation of public space for the communication of private interests. In the context of land conflicts between citizens and the state, sidewalks and parks in front of government institutions like the Government Office and the Anti-corruption Inspectorate have become arenas for the articulation of individual claims.

5.2.1 Land Claims

The growth of the private sector appears to be happening at a time when there is an increased understanding and appreciation of ownership, particularly with regards to land ownership. The formal recognition and issuance of land-use rights certificates have resulted in numerous conflicts between private individuals and the state. According to a survey conducted in 2008/2009, land-use complaints in 7 provinces comprise 80-90% of all complaints launched against the state. This number also coincides with the percentage of complaints received by the Department of Claims and Petitions in the Office of the National Assembly (World Bank 2009: 138 f.).

The claim for private land is not new in Vietnam. Throughout history private ownership used to be a crucial constituent in the maintenance of citizens' autonomy from the state, first under the monarchy, and later during party-state rule. In pre-colonial times there was already a distinction between communal and private land. Papin (1997: 212) reports that as early as the 15th century King Le Thai To introduced reforms that resulted in a differentiation between private and communal land. In the early period of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam private-land ownership was diminished only through a comprehensive land reform campaign. Through the collectivisation of agriculture in the 1950s and 1960s, the state succeeded in making the individual reliant on the collective thereby undermining citizens' autonomy. Nonetheless, during this period every household was also awarded a plot of land for private usage.¹⁷³ Following this, with the decollectivisation of the 1980s-1990s, the Land Law formally determined the management and usage of land.¹⁷⁴ This law declares that all land belongs to the entire population, but the right to management is held by the state.¹⁷⁵ The state issues land-use rights, thus allowing individuals to use the land (Nguyen Van Suu 2004: 270). Accordingly, Article 17 of the 1992 Constitution (Anon. 2001: 7) states:

“The land, forests, rivers and lakes, water supplies, wealth lying underground or coming from the sea, the continental shelf and the air, the funds and property invested by the State in enterprises and works in all branches and fields - the economy, culture, society, science, technology, external relations, national defence, security - and all other property determined by law as belonging to the State, come under ownership by the entire people”.

In his study about access to land and land conflicts, Nguyen Van Suu (2004: 274) explains that decollectivisation measures foresaw that agricultural land ought to be rationally redistributed among villagers over a 20-year cycle. This concerns all agricultural land except for land of collective interest, land for family economy and water. However, although the Land Law institutionalises the private ownership of land, the decollectivisation policy resulted, specifically in rural areas, in an “inequality among various parties and institutions with regard to access to land at the local level”, and thus, social differentiation (Nguyen Van Suu 2004: 271). A major problem arose, as children who were born after the time of the official land allocation were not included in the system. Therefore, they had to wait up to 20 years for the next allocation cycle. Inequality among villagers increased through local officials' collection of obligatory service fees per head. These were elevated regardless of the villager's age or the amount of land owned, thereby aggravating the burden of the landless population (Nguyen Van Suu 2004: 274). Socio-economic disparities are additionally enforced through state claims for agricultural land to be used as industrial zones or for infrastructure projects. Land compensation measures cause households to frequently lose their farmland. Consequently,

¹⁷³ Kerkvliet (1993: 11) reports that since the practice of cooperatives began, 5% of arable land was reserved for private utilisation. Since households were allowed to keep the harvest for themselves, many concentrated their efforts more on the cultivation of their private land plots than on the collective. In the North, the encroachment of private households onto collective land became a common strategy to extend private land plots.

¹⁷⁴ The first Land Law was passed in 1988, a fuller version followed in 1993, introducing prices. Then, in 1998, investors' rights were strengthened, albeit neglecting small landholders. The revised version in 2003 declared that compensations ought to be paid according to market prices. Furthermore, it determined the rights and obligations of both land users and state authorities. A further improvement was made in 2007 through passing a decree that provides conditions for the recognition of land-use rights of current land users who lack legal documents. In August 2009, Decree No. 69/2009 on Land Use Planning, Recovery, and Compensation was passed, strengthening compensation claims and providing assistance for parties affected by land recovery. The objective is to ensure that compensation reflects the market price of the time when the land was recovered (World Bank 2009: 42, 48 f.).

¹⁷⁵ At this point a comparison with the land tenure system under the Tran dynasty is striking. During its rule communal land was transformed into state land. As a consequence, all land belonged to the state in the form of the king. Villages only attained the authority to manage land (Phan Huy Le 2006: 29 f.).

this has a negative impact on their social status as well. Their status and occupation are altered from so-called “farmers having land” to “farmers not having land”. As a result, the latter need to rent land (Nguyen Van Suu 2004: 274 f.). It is against this background that land conflicts emerge. According to data from 2005 provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), one of the main causes for complaints about land compensation and resettlement is the compensation value. The argument is that the state does not pay the actual market value when recovering land, instead it offers a much lower price (World Bank 2009: 46).

Citizens openly challenge these state measures. Forms of protest are diverse. Protests range from gossip and discussions- or in Scott’s terms ‘hidden transcripts’-to demonstrations and sometimes even violent protests. Other measures include the delays in the payment of taxes and fees to authorities (Nguyen Van Suu 2004: 272). In recent years citizens have increasingly made use of their right to present petitions. Following the World Bank Development Report (2009: vii) in 2007 more than 12,000 formal complaints related to land issues were sent to MONRE. In addition, in the last 10 years the move to the city appears to have become the last resort of many villagers, when local authorities fail to address their complaints. Thus, citizens from all over the country come to the capital to protest against expropriation,

“[t]his rural protest movement, in which dispossessed farmers march to Hanoi or Saigon to file petitions and camp outside government buildings protesting state confiscation of lands for development projects and lack of compensation, has reached explosive proportions, with over 2 million complaints filed over the past 10 years” (UN General Assembly 2009: 7).

5.2.2 The Associational Effect of Public Space?

In the first instance, land related complaints are settled by the chairman of the local government against which the complaint is filed. Following this, the complainant is allowed to lodge the complaint to higher level government authorities, which can comprise heads of ministerial units and ministers. An alternative is a lawsuit using the court as a medium. The task of the Prime Minister is to provide direction for dispute settlements while maintaining the power to re-examine final settlement decisions. The Government Inspectorate provides assistance and advice to government institutions in charge of settling complaints (World Bank 2009: 49 f.). In this context, the World Bank Development Report (2009: 49) criticizes “the restrictions on the jurisdiction of the courts on land-related administrative cases, and the limited powers of National Assembly and People’s Councils, which at most can urge government authorities to settle the complaints”. Against this background, many citizens consider the Government Office and Anti-Corruption Inspectorate in Hanoi the last resort, only to be explored if lower-level authorities dismissed their case. Thus, many citizens who demonstrate in front of these institutions have diverse papers that document their proceedings at hand, including submitted petitions as well as local authorities’ responses. Furthermore, on placards they refer to distinct decisions and official correspondences. It is striking that the majority of protestors are women. This may be a by-product of the Land Law itself. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the United Nations General Assembly summarizes that administrative obstacles in the Land Law, might prevent the issuance of joint land use certificates to both husband and wife (UN General Assembly 2009: 3). It was only in 2003, with the revision of the Land Law, that the recording of both names on the certificate was introduced. While newly issued certificates follow this regulation, older ones still only present the husband’s name. According to the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey in 2008, only 35% of land-use rights certificates include the wife’s name (World Bank 2009: 43).

In an interview, Mrs. Thao spoke of “running the gauntlet” from one governmental institution to the other. Mrs Thao came from Can Tho Province in the Mekong Delta to protest in front of the Government Office. Like other protestors, she occupies the sidewalk opposite of the government institution carrying a petition with her. The petition is directed at the Prime Minister and the Head of the General Inspectorate with the specification of her full name and address. She explains that for 14 years she has been filing petitions in the name of her mother, but has not had any success yet. In 1983 her family was dispossessed of its property because the district required the household’s land to build a bank on the site. However, they had not received a new lot. First they presented a petition to the district, which decided that the bank should be removed from the lot. And part of the land was returned to the family. However, a small part remained occupied by a woman, who had settled there after the family had been relocated. The woman was not willing to hand over the land. Thus, Mrs Thao appealed to a higher institution, the people’s committee of the province, which decided in favour of Mrs Thao’s family and returned the whole land plot to them. However, the decision was revised based on a claim that was entirely unfounded. As a consequence, the smaller plot was taken from them once again. In order to have the ability to travel to Hanoi to present their petition, they had to transfer the bigger lot over to the bank for a mortgage and as such, the family no longer owns any land. In 2004 the General Inspectorate intervened, requesting that the People’s Committee of Can Tho turn the complete estate over to Mrs Thao, but this decision was also revised.¹⁷⁶

A second case is presented by the experience of Mrs Hoa from Da Nang in Central Vietnam. In a similar manner, she has been coming to Hanoi for five years. She usually goes to the Anti-Corruption Inspectorate at Cau Giay St to demonstrate or to the Government Office. She carries a paper with her that demands that the National Assembly stops corruption. She says, “I lost my land, my house, everything. Now the war is over. It is peace”, yet, she is not able to reclaim her land.¹⁷⁷

Several conclusions can be drawn from these cases. First, citizens are aware of which institutions they should address and the proper procedure for petitioning decisions. By writing petitions to the Prime Minister and the General Inspectorate they directly address the institutions that have the final say in the complaint settlement. Furthermore, by referring to the legislation and exposing their full name and the objective of the complaint on their billboards, they follow the regulations of the Law on Complaints and Denunciations.¹⁷⁸

The timing of the protest is also particularly noteworthy. Many assemblies coincide with sessions of the National Assembly which only take place twice a year in the capital.¹⁷⁹ For example, the public protest in front of the Lenin Monument took place on the morning of the preparatory meeting at the XII. National Assembly’s 2nd session in 2007. While citizens articulated their discontent¹⁸⁰ with state land policies in public, representatives of the National Assembly debated the issuance of land-use certificates (TN 22.10.07). It is not only the timing,

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Mrs Thao, 23.04.2008.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Mrs Hoa, 09.11.2007.

¹⁷⁸ The Law on Complaints and Denunciations (1998), which was amended in 2004 and 2005, entitles both individuals and organisations to file petitions against the administrative decisions on all levels of government. According to the law all citizens who present a written denunciation need to proclaim their name, surname and address. Even if an oral denunciation is made at a government institution, the full name and address of the plaintiff has to be recorded (World Bank 2009: 103). Interestingly, citizens even adopt this formal procedure on their self-written posters.

¹⁷⁹ The sessions referred to here are the 2nd as well as the 3rd session of the XII. National Assembly. The second session took place from 22.10.2007 until 21.11.2007. The 3rd session officially opened on 06.05.2008 and ended on the 17.06.2008.

¹⁸⁰ A group of about 15 people, most of them women, wore t-shirts with self-written slogans like “We demand the President to return our land”.

but also the protest's location that is striking. It was the first time in decades that the National Assembly did not meet in the Hall at Ba Dinh Square, which was to be demolished two months later, but in the nearby Ministry of Defence at Nguyen Tri Phuong St. (ANTD 22.10.07). Staging public protests at this new location, in front of the actual place where decisions were made, became impossible. The Ministry of Defence is not accessible by the public, a problem compounded by the fact that Nguyen Tri Phuong St was blocked during official meetings. Consequently, the Lenin Monument was redefined through the placement of protest activities in front. Additional protests took place on the weekend before the opening session in front of the Anti-corruption Inspectorate on Hoang Van Thu St, as well as in front of the Government Office on Hoang Hoa Tham St. During the 3rd session, May 2008, comparable protests occurred around the Government Office.

Taken as a whole, the timing and location of protests hint at citizens' awareness of the political context in which they are acting. Citizens know which government institutions they must appeal to and they also adhere to bureaucratic procedures. By using their right to file petitions as well as their right to assemble (Article 69), citizens act within the recently established legal framework to claim justice from the state. Since in most cases local-level corruption, in the form of land expropriation, and insufficient or even absent compensation measures, is denounced, citizens travel to the capital with the hope that their case is handled according to the law. Thus, a duality exists, whereby citizens question the accountability of local institutions and central-state institutions appear to be associated with the rule of law and "justice".

Questions arise about the degree to which claimants succeed in transforming concrete public space in front of government institutions into the material location of public spheres. Although citizens try to publicise the place through the adoption of symbols, such as the Vietnamese insignia or billboards, they apparently fail to attract the interest of both the authorities and an urban public. Petitioners are often not able to present their cases face-to-face with officials, as Mrs Hoa explains "I never entered. In there are the big men". This statement highlights the charisma of the centre. To Mrs Hoa it is apparent that she is not able to enter the Government Office because it is the centre of state power, and is thus reserved for the "Big Men" only. Here, a parallel can be drawn to the enclosure of the Forbidden City during dynastic times, as it was the centre of sacred and profane power and commoners were not allowed to enter. All communication between the ruler and his subjects was handled via intermediaries, and thus there was no direct interaction whatsoever between them (Marr 1995: 223). Similarly, nowadays citizens stand outside government institutions waiting for decisions of an anonymous bureaucracy.¹⁸¹

This non-perception by government officials is echoed by urban dwellers who disregard those that come to protest. Demonstrations at the Government Office usually occur at the intersection of Hoang Hoa Tham St. and Mai Xuan Thuong St., two highly frequented streets. Although many Hanoians pass by there on their motorbikes on their way to work or to the city centre, the protesters do not gain much attention. Some by-passers may slow down to shortly throw a glance, but they do not stop to ask what is going on or to get involved. As one Hanoian, who drives by the protesters every day on his way to work, explained, "[t]hese protests have gone on for more than 10 years now and nothing changes. That is why people are not interested in the protests".

Urban citizens' attitude towards demonstrations appears to be characterised by what Simmel (1903: 121 f.) terms *Blasiertheit* and *Reserviertheit*. Both terms designate mental phenomena adopted by urban dwellers to cope with the complexity of urban life. *Blasiertheit* refers to the

¹⁸¹ A further analogy can be drawn to Kafka's (1951) *Der Prozess*. Akin to the novel's protagonist Josef K., who is excluded from his own lawsuit, citizens vainly try to get access to the law. Like the court for Josef K., the Government Office remains closed to them, protected by a large gate and guards.

incapability of people to react to new stimuli with an adequate amount of energy. *Reserviertheit* describes urban residents' mental attitude towards each other, which is based on indifference and aversion (Simmel 1903: 121, 123). Rather than being alerted by placards and assemblies of people, Hanoi's residents appear to react with indifference.¹⁸²

In conclusion, sidewalks and public parks in front of government institutions offer the material basis for the emergence of public spheres, but this potential needs to be deployed through citizens' collective action. According to Arendt's (1958: 244) associational view of public space, power arises when people act in concert and it disappears the moment people leave. An important precondition for this is that the private interest of the individual is transformed into a broader common interest.¹⁸³ However, as the cases of Mrs Thao and Mrs Hoa illustrate, most come to Hanoi on an individual basis to advocate their personal fate. Thus, the occupation of public space in the administrative district of Hanoi appears to be individually motivated, instead of resulting from the self-organisation of a multiplicity of actors. Yet, public spaces in the sense of Arendt's associational space, will only be produced if the collective envisions itself in space (Benhabib 2006: 313).

5.3 Catholic Church and the State

The relevance of the differentiation between private and public land is the most evident problem in the struggle between the Catholic Church and the state. While the term "public" is attributed to land owned by the state, the Church emphasises the legitimacy of its claims to private property through the reference to legal documents such as land-use rights and correspondences about confiscation. This once more hints towards a rising legal awareness, as well as an increased understanding of private ownership.

The land conflict between the Catholic Church and the state over two land plots in the city centre of Hanoi emerged in January/February 2008 and in August/September the same year. The first conflict arose from a debate about the plot on 42 Nha Chung St. located next to St. Joseph Cathedral; this site was adopted for the location of the protests. The Office of Culture and Information is located on this lot, as is the culture house of Hoan Kiem District. The dispute emerged in the public on the 25th and 26th of January, 2008, when Catholic believers occupied the lot. The protest manifested itself through the erection of religious symbols comprising a large wooden cross as well as a statue of Virgin Mary; the cross blocked the entrance to the administrative building and the statuette of Virgin Mary was placed in the shadow of a big banyan tree next to the edifice, surrounded by flowers and candles. In front of both icons believers gathered-sitting on plastic stools or standing-to pray. The assembly's objective was to claim back the plot that the state had taken over from the Catholic Church in the 1960s. According to *Ha Noi Moi* Newspaper (27.01.08) rumours about the possible construction of a night club or trade centre on the site next to the biggest Catholic Church in Hanoi set off the protest. In contrast, to the assemblies in front of the national government buildings, this incident attracted the attention of both the state authorities and the public sphere. In particular, the local media focused on the events at Nha Chung St. Print media, especially the capital's police newspaper, *An Ninh Thu Do*, and *Ha Noi Moi* Newspaper covered the story in depth. The TV channel *Television Hanoi* also reported on the confrontation.

¹⁸² This was compounded by the non-coverage of these incidents by the local media. Of course, a major reason for this is state censorship. Nonetheless, newspapers like *Thanh Nien* or *Tien Phong* have regularly reported on cases of local-level corruption in recent years.

¹⁸³ With respect to the distinction between the social and the political realm Arendt argues that the process of the public political struggle needs to integrate small private interests into one bigger public and common interest (Benhabib 2006: 313).

FIGURE 17: ERECTION OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS AT 42 NHA CHUNG



Source: Private Photo (2008).

According to the *An Ninh Thu Do* Newspaper (26.01.08), Pastor Nguyen Tung Cuong had handed over the disputed land lot to the state on the 24th of November 1961. Since then the area has been managed by the state. In 2003, the state's ownership of seized land was affirmed by Resolution NQ No. 23/2003/QH11 of the XI. National Assembly. The resolution asserts that the state refuses to consider any claims for land return or to review guidelines and implementation of policies relating to land and houses which were transferred to the state for management, allocation and utility, prior to the 1st of July, 1991 (MoFA 2008). Thus, the lot located on 42 Nha Chung is officially declared state property, and its management and usage is the responsibility of the People's Committee of Hoan Kiem District. Nonetheless, the archbishop of Hanoi lodged a complaint against the land seizure, demanding that the state return the property to the Church. The President of the Government responded by ordering the Ministry of Construction to write an official answer on the 6th of November, 2007. The correspondence declares that "[t]he application of the archbishop of Hanoi does not have enough of a basis to be resolved and does not comply with NQ 23 of the National Assembly" (ANTD 26.01.08 translated from Vietnamese). Reports indicated that the Church refused to accept this response. Instead, on the 25th of January 2008, it mobilised approximately one hundred priests and Catholics to jointly proceed to the fence at 42 Nha Chung after the service at St. Joseph's Cathedral. The newspaper further reported that the archbishop gave an "arousing" speech that was broadcasted over loudspeakers, encouraging Catholics to demolish the property of the state organs situated on the site. After violently tearing the iron fence surrounding the property down, a 4-meter high cross was installed. Moreover, the newspaper asserted that the faithful had erected a camp in the park in front of the administrative institutions. The camp consisted of a tent set up next to the statue of the Virgin Mary. Following this, the People's Committee of Hoan Kiem District requested that the Office of the Archbishop remove its followers from the lot. However, the article stated that the archbishop's representatives were not willing to cooperate. Consequently, the official sphere declared that the assembly of Catholics on the plot was illegal. Citizens participating in the occupation of the land lot were accused of the following: Destruction of state property; occupation of public land, illegal construction; displaying a slogan violating the decision; illegal assembly and encampments of people; disturbing public order; and the disruption of order at the official residence of state organs at 42 Nha Chung; injury and revile of cadres and civil servants; and the organisation of prayers conflicting with the law on religion (ANTD 26.01.2008). Similarly, the *Ha Noi Moi* Newspaper (27.01.08) reported about the "arousement" and the "disturbance of public disorder" caused by the Catholics. These articles were highly biased and only represented the official point of view; none of the daily reports contained comments from protesters or the Office of the Archbishop. Instead, statements from residents living in the immediate neighbourhood of the

church were presented. The *An Ninh Thu Do* Newspaper also reported such statements (28.01.08 translated from Vietnamese), including the following:

“Our street zone No. 5 includes both Catholics and residents that do not follow a religion. For many years our relationship has been affectionate, united and always based on mutual assistance and respect.

However, since 20.12.2007 some things have happened that are very pressing to us residents, such as the actions of some people who brought the Lord’s statue to the tree stump, placed flowers onto the iron fence and prayed. These actions are not part of a Catholic festival, which has a very solemn origin. On the 25th of January, we witnessed the Catholics demolishing the iron fence, they gathered and raised an uproar on Nha Chung St.

We ask ourselves why they took such actions. Up to now, all Catholics were very good people. Was it the leadership, the pressure by someone, because many Catholics from other provinces also came? In this case the responsibility of the archbishop is quite high. If the archbishop guides the spirituality of his Christian followers, he will have to educate them and provide them with knowledge about the execution of the law...” (Tran Xuan Phoi, Au Trieu St.).

These quotations illustrate that citizens were concerned with the relationship between both Catholic and Non-Catholic citizens. However, some citizens appeared to be alarmed by the loss of public order caused in the quarter, for example a school in the area. The chairman of the Red Cross of Hang Trong quarter, Mr Nguyen Dinh Phung, explains:

“I have been living here for more than 50 years now and this is the first time I witnessed such a sad event. I am sure that the guidance of someone caused the Catholics to carry out the above actions. Gathering and creating uproar on the streets does not only cause disorder on the streets, but also has an impact on the student’s learning. I am really angry about the disturbance caused by a few Catholics. (...)

If there is a petition for land, then it is enough to do the paperwork and it is important to follow the order. The juridical decision is certain not to provoke any negative pressures against the functional organs. In addition to that, I suggest that the state power on all levels should be resolute in the handling of cases of serious violations”.

Mrs Vu Thu Ha, member of the Father and Elder Brother Committee of the 7th class of Tan Trao School, clarifies:

“We already knew that the cathedral reads prayers using loudspeakers, but this only happened in the park of the church. Now we do not understand why the church set up loudspeakers outside allowing Catholics to stand in the courtyard of the church and on the roadside to listen to the prayers.

Religious freedom is a right that has to be respected by all segments of society. But any freedom, in my opinion, also has to be in compliance with the law and traditional values of morality, civilisation and culture. This liberty should not be misused in order to cause a loss of order on the streets, or to affect the education of young pupils who are the future masters of our country. The highest liberty is not to make someone else lose his liberty (...)”.

These quotations illustrate several points. First, they point towards an understanding and tolerance of Catholicism, which is not self-evident in a country where Catholics constitute a minority.¹⁸⁴ Second, they show that it was not the reason for the dispute that was being ques-

¹⁸⁴ According to the 1999 Census Catholics make up for 6.7% of the population (LIPortal InWEnt).

tioned by other citizens, but rather the means because it affected the neighbourhood. Furthermore, it is striking that the citizens interviewed did not think that the protest was self-organised. Conversely, they suggested that “the guidance by someone” made Catholic citizens occupy the lot.

These articles and quotations indicate that the national media portrays an image of the Catholic Church as an entity that endangers social cohesion. It is evident that it is not Catholic citizens who are blamed for the disturbances, but rather the Catholic Church institution. More precisely, the archbishop was openly accused of having initiated the riot. The police newspaper (ANTD 29.01.08 translated from Vietnamese) even suggested that the protest’s objective did, in fact, “lay outside the mere claiming of land”. This is a strong accusation especially given the recent consolidation of Vietnam-Vatican relations. A year prior to the dispute, January 2007, the Prime Minister, Nguyen Tan Dung, had made an official visit to the Vatican, thereby raising expectations for an improvement in the relationship between the two states (Asia News 05.05.08).¹⁸⁵

Since the Catholic Church in Vietnam does not have the opportunity to present its position on the matter in state media, it reacted in a two-fold way. First, on the local level, the Office of the Archbishop responded by posting a counterstatement on the walls of the archdiocese’s building located next to the disputed land lot. On a global level, the international Catholic community was mobilised. In its counterstatement on the 28th of January 2008, the Office of the Archbishop of Hanoi requested that its followers “Pray in Peace”, and also withstand any attempts of arousal.¹⁸⁶ Next to the statement on the wall of the archdiocese, a petition was posted that was addressed to the Director of *Hanoi Television*, the Editor in chief of *Ha Noi Moi* Newspaper and the Editor in chief of *An Ninh Thu Do*.¹⁸⁷ This complaint reasserted the claims of Church sovereignty with regards to the plot located at 42 Nha Chung.

“In its evening programme of 26.1.08 Hanoi television and the newspapers, *Ha Noi Moi* and *An Ninh Thu Do*, 27.1.08, announced information about the old building of the Apostolic Nuncio and the incident of 25.1.08 with a content that completely misrepresents reality. (...) The archbishop of Hanoi has adequate legal evidence about the sovereignty over the land and property in here”.

In addition, the Office of the Archbishop argued that the land transfer in 1961 lacked any legal basis because Priest Nguyen Tung Cuong, who is said to have transferred the land to the state, never had the power of disposal for the land.

In response to the accusation of having “occupied public land”, it was announced that “[n]obody occupied public land. It is land that is under the land-use right of the archbishop. It was never given or sold at any point to anybody”.

Concerning the ‘arousal’ and ‘loss of public order’ that was allegedly caused by Catholics, the petition states that these instances were provoked by cadres who resorted to violence, while the faithful prayed peacefully and remained calm. It was only at that point that other Catholics

¹⁸⁵A major point of negotiation is the nomination and appointment of local bishops. While the Vietnamese government examines the nominees, the Vatican requests the unhindered appointment of Church leaders in Vietnam. According to the Asia Times Online (24.07.08), Vietnam’s opening policy towards the Catholic Church was adopted to assist the nation’s international recognition especially in advance of its WTO accession. As a result, prior to the APEC meeting in Hanoi in November 2006, the US Department of State removed Vietnam from its list of “countries of particular concern”. Currently the Catholic Church and the Vietnamese state are working on a roadmap for the development of bilateral relations (VietNamNet 15.06.08).

¹⁸⁶ Announcement of the Office of the Archbishop in Hanoi, 28.01.08 (translated from Vietnamese).

¹⁸⁷ The official Vietnamese documents attest to which organs received the correspondence. In the case of the archbishop’s petition, it was sent to, among others, the Prime Minister of the Government, the People’s Committee of Hanoi, and the Ministry of Information and Communication.

entered the scene to help their fellow Christians. To support their claims, the archdiocese indicated that Vietnamese citizens witnessed the cadres' interference.

Apart from this announcement on the local level, on the global level the Catholic Church in Vietnam involved foreign media and adopted digital networks to spread its view about the conflict, as a means to mobilise the global public sphere. This mobilisation played an even more important role in the land conflict at Thai Ha parish some months later in the same year. In August 2008, hundreds of Catholics launched mass prayer vigils on land, which previous to its seizure by the state, had been part of Thai Hai parish located in Hanoi's Dong Da District. Again, the state declared that the church had formally handed the land over in 1961. Since then, the state has used most of the former parish's 60,000 square metres to build a hospital and industrial structures. Similarly to the protests on the Nha Chung lot, Catholics occupied the site by erecting religious symbols including a makeshift altar and a cross. Additionally, they expressed their protest by holding vigils. Even after Hanoi's police arrested some of the parishioners, vigils continued and additional protests occurred in front of the district's police department (AFP 28.08.08; Vietnam News Briefs 01.09.08).

In contrast to the assembly at Nha Chung, which was dissolved after a few days when the state promised to return the land to the diocese¹⁸⁸, the Thai Ha parish's protests lasted longer, gaining even greater public attention. There are two plausible reasons for this. First, the events in Nha Chung had already alerted the Vietnamese Catholics; while the protest in Thai Ha parish was still ongoing, the state media announced that the lot at 42 Nha Chung would be transformed into a public park (September 2008) and construction began one day later.¹⁸⁹ This fuelled the protests at the Thai Ha parish, initiating new mass prayers which were held in front of St. Joseph Cathedral (BBC News 19.09.08; AsiaNews 26.09.08, Human Rights Watch 06.10.08). Second, the interconnectedness of the comparably small Catholic community in Vietnam with the large international Catholic community enhanced public awareness on a global scale. Catholic news agencies, such as *VietCatholic*, *Independent Catholic News* and *CatholicCulture*, continuously reported the condition of Catholics in Vietnam on the internet. Additionally, digital platforms such as *YouTube* spread information both inside and outside Vietnam.¹⁹⁰

FIGURE 18: PUBLIC PARK AT 42 NHA CHUNG



Source: Private Photo (2010).

¹⁸⁸ The end of the conflict was manifested through the re-erection of the iron fence surrounding the plot in the beginning of February 2008 and hence the reestablishment of “public order”.

¹⁸⁹ The *BBC News* (19.09.08) reported that the diocese only received the information through the media after waiting for 8 months for a solution to the conflict. On the contrary, *Ha Noi Moi* Newspaper (20.09.08) reported that the Office of Planning and Architecture had organised a meeting on 18.09. to present the plan to the public, but no representatives of the archbishop participated.

¹⁹⁰ For example, soon after a reporter for the *The Associated Press*, Ben Stocking, was arrested, a video appeared on *YouTube*.

In conclusion, current land disputes between the Catholic Church and the state in Vietnam seem to follow a similar pattern. In most of the cases, the conflict arises based on public announcements about state plans for constructing buildings to serve commercial purposes, such as hotels, nightclubs, trade centres, or sometimes, like was the case for Nha Chung, public parks, on land that the Church considers its property.

In recent years diverse “hot spots” have emerged across the country - reaching from Hanoi over the central highlands to Ho Chi Minh City.¹⁹¹ Due to the large number of citizens that participated in the protests and the level of public awareness, the state is not able to simply ignore these reclamations. In comparison to the land protests carried out by individuals in the administrative district of Hanoi, the Church’s capability to negotiate with the state certainly lies in its potential to organise, both externally and internally. The events at Nha Chung and Thai Ha both illustrate that the institution of the Catholic Church is able to mobilise its followers. Moreover, on the national level the Vietnam Conference of Catholic Bishops acts as spokesperson and official assembly for the leaders of various congregations. In response to the land dispute at Thai Ha and the defamation of Hanoi’s archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet in the state media, the Conference published the “Statement of Vietnam Conference of Catholic Bishops on current issues”. The statement was released on the homepage of *VietCatholic News* (26.09.08) claiming the revision of land and property laws as well as accusing the national media of false reports.

Therefore, it is certain that in the negotiation of state-society relations, the Catholic Church’s position is enhanced through its linkage to a global religious community. This facilitates access to digital networks and platforms and a global public can be mobilised, thus reaching beyond the local community. In comparison, citizens who reclaim their land lack a comparable organisational structure and thus lack the potential to mobilise a broader public. Therefore, the degree of self-organisation among citizens sharing a common interest in the city appears to be rather low.

However, Carlyle Thayer’s (2008) assessment of a public protest by farmers in Ho Chi Minh City in June and July 2006 shows that there is potential for people’s self-organisation in times of political relaxation. Farmers from Tien Giang Province were joined by citizens from seven other Mekong Delta provinces to demonstrate near the local offices of the National Assembly in Ho Chi Minh City. According to Thayer (2008: 15) “[s]everal aspects of these events are unprecedented: the large numbers involved, the diversity of provinces represented and the length of time they were permitted to demonstrate and display their banners in public”. Furthermore, a new phenomenon was established by the use of new telecommunication technologies like digital networks and mobile phones, which enabled protesters to receive support from overseas dissident networks and local dissidents like the leader of *Bloc 8406* and Venerable Thich Quang Do of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. This support brought the appeal to a wider, and particularly a global, public. In comparison to the demonstrations of expropriated citizens in Hanoi in 2007 and 2008 this reclamation occurred at a time when many-especially foreign-observers proclaimed an atmosphere of political liberalisation in advance of the country’s accession to the WTO and the APEC summit held in Hanoi in November 2006. Yet, thereafter pro-democracy claims were once again suppressed.

¹⁹¹ Apart from the two cases in Hanoi presented above, similar land conflicts occurred in Ho Chi Minh City in April 2008 and in Vinh Long Province in Southern Vietnam in May 2008 (CNA 15.12.08; CBCP News 02.05.08). However, there are also examples where the Church and the state managed an agreement. In Quang Tri Province, the local government returned the land surrounding the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of La Vang which had been confiscated by the state in 1975 (CAN 15.04.08). Furthermore, the state handed over 11,000 sqm of land to the bishopric of Buon Ma Thuot in Dak Lak Province as well as 9,000 sqm to the Da Nang bishopric (MoFA 2008).

Although the Tien Giang demonstration hints at the potential for citizens to organise, it must be noted that the farmers' demonstrations appear to be easily dissolved by the official sphere. Protests in both Ho Chi Minh City and those in Hanoi all were brought to an end rapidly when security forces detained protesters. Furthermore, the Church's ability to mobilise people even within an environment of reduced political freedom is particularly noteworthy. While the farmers' demonstration occurred during the liberalising period of 2006, Catholics occupied disputed land in 2008, when this tendency was already over. In conclusion, what distinguishes individual land protests from the vigils held by Catholics is the capability of the Catholic Church to organise larger protests, thereby creating 'public spaces' on disputed land lots according to Arendt's associational view. Here, Catholic citizens "act in concert" and articulate a common interest.

5.3.1 Charisma of the Centre

The demonstrations above all share one common characteristic; they took place in urban space. Land conflicts between the Catholic Church and the state even arose around urban land. Although many citizens who protested in front of government institutions come from provinces in Central and Southern Vietnam, they travel to Hanoi to present their complaints. This "move to the city" literally presents the "impingement of the peripheries on the centers" that Eisenstadt (2002: 6) outlines in his assessment of the political program of modernity. In his view, the restructuring of centre-periphery relations resulted in the incorporation of the periphery's themes and symbols of protest into the centre. These themes and symbols consisted of claims for equality, freedom, justice and autonomy, what Eisenstadt (2002: 6) calls the "combination of the 'charimatization' of the center with themes and symbols of protest".

Thus, the charisma of the centre is generated through citizens' involvement with it. Geertz, (2000: 122) in reference to Shils (1961), outlines the correlation between charisma and centre, arguing:

"Such centres (...) consist in the point or points in a society where its leading ideas come together with its leading institutions to create an arena in which the events that most vitally affect its members' lives take place. It is involvement, even oppositional involvement, with such arenas and with the momentous events that occur in them that confers charisma. It is a sign, not of popular appeal or inventive craziness, but of being near the heart of things" (Geertz 2000: 122 f.).

The capital is the location of the highest government and party institutions and thus the centre stage of politics through which charisma is generated. However, there is more to charisma than merely being the administrative centre. Charisma connects anonymous workings of an administration with persons. In other words, rituals and related emotions also play an important role. In public protests citizens directly refer to Ho Chi Minh or the institution of the Communist Party. At a demonstration that took place on Ngo Quyen St, citizens decorated the fence of a government institution with the portraits of Ho Chi Minh. Additionally, a red banner with yellow script was displayed, with the words "The open Communist Party" (*Dang Cong San Quang Minh*). At another occasion, a family that was protesting in front of the Government Office expressed its discontent by having their little daughter wear a self-written T-shirt that stated, "Uncle please help us" (*Bac hay cuu chung chau*).

Furthermore, citizens make use of the centre's symbols to articulate their discontent with state policies. During demonstrations in front of the Government and Anti-Corruption Offices¹⁹², or on Hung Vuong St.¹⁹³, citizens make themselves visible in public space by hoisting the national flag and proclaiming their demands on self-written boards.

Accordingly, the centre's symbols, which are synonymous with state symbols, are appropriated by citizens to express a "counter-symbolism". That is how the capital is turned into a public arena for the political struggle of diverse social groups.

5.4 Contested Institutionalisation

These spatial practices also represent the dynamic process of contested institutionalisation, a hypothesis that follows up on the debate of the three dominant schools of thought that deal with state-society relations in the modern Vietnamese nation-state. The first is the "Accommodating State School", which presents a "manoeuvring space" for society. This school considers the relationship between state and society as one that is characterised by tolerance, responsiveness and mutual influence. In particular, it stresses the non-compliance of authorities at lower-levels of the administrative system to top-level instructions. The reason for this is that local officials often tend to identify themselves more with the local community instead of with the party-state. Bounded by local norms and morality, local officials frequently face a role conflict between being a member of the community on one hand, and the executor of state policies on the other (Koh 2006: 3 f.). Thus, state-society relationships are viewed as a dynamic and ever altering process (Koh 2006: 5). In contrast, the "Structural Dominance School" determines that there is only limited space for society to exert influence on the state. Through what it terms "Mobilizational Authoritarianism", every social group is represented by a mass organisation, thereby undermining the development of alternative associations. The third school of "Bureaucratic Socialism" draws a rather negative picture of the state bureaucracy, which is considered slow, and bureaucrats are believed to be unresponsive and authoritarian towards society (Koh 2006: 5 f.).

An alternative approach to these three schools is outlined by Benedict Kerkvliet. Kerkvliet (2001: 240) proposes to assess "arenas in which boundaries, rights, jurisdictions, and power distribution between state and societal agencies are debated, contested, and resolved (at least temporarily)". Thus, he proposes to think of the relationship between state and society¹⁹⁴ in

¹⁹² The Anti-Corruption Inspectorate was formerly situated at 1 Hoang Van Thu Street in the immediate vicinity of Ba Dinh Square. In May 2007, the Anti-Corruption Inspectorate was moved to 110 Cau Giay Street. Citizens coming to Hoang Van Thu Street in order to hand in petitions are informed via a sign on the front door that the office has moved to Cau Giay District. Concerning the materiality of the two addresses, the institution's relocation clearly undermines the public space's function as arena of public protests. Whereas Hoang Van Thu Street's large sidewalk offers space for demonstrations, the new office at 110 Cau Giay Street is located on a large, highly frequented street with only a small sidewalk for assemblies. Furthermore, the new address is hardly recognisable from the outside as there is no sign to indicate that it is the Anti-Corruption Inspectorate. To enter the administrative complex, citizens need to register with a guard. That is how public protests in this location are undermined.

¹⁹³ In July 2008, tricycle drivers protested against the prohibition of tricycles decorating their vehicles with the national emblem. In Vietnam tricycles are mainly used by physically challenged men, many of them war veterans. They generate their income by participating in the transportation industry. However, since the 1st of July, 2007, the government has officially prohibited the use of these tricycles. It is important to note that a week later the *An Ninh Thu Do* (07.07.08) issued a series on tricycles and four-wheel bikes. Nonetheless, the protest was not mentioned in the media.

¹⁹⁴ Kerkvliet (2001: 240) applies the term "state" to "officials and institutions that make, implement, and enforce rules that are intended to apply across the entire society and its various parts". "Society" on the other hand is understood as "a summary term for people in a country, including their institutions and customs, who share political and economic circumstances and environment".

Vietnam in terms of a ‘dialogue’, “which incorporates communication of contentious ideas and preferences in ways that, in Vietnam, are often indirect and non-verbal” (Kerkvliet 2001: 245).

“That is what the ‘dialogical’ interpretation is pointing out. State agencies do not completely control policy-making and implementation. People can ignore the state’s rules on some matters. They can also go beyond official channels to make their views and concerns known” (Kerkvliet 2001: 269).

Kerkvliet (2001: 248) contends that personal connections are one of the most prominent keys for influencing state decisions. In *Wards of Hanoi*, Koh (2006: 9) follows up on Kerkvliet’s dialogical approach when analysing interactions between state and societal agents on the local level of the urban ward. Koh argues that both the Structural Dominance and Bureaucratic Socialism Schools appear to reflect realities on the national level, whereas they are not able to explain everyday interactions. Thus, they fail to include people’s resistance or neighbourhoods’ self-regulation. Furthermore, they do not succeed in offering an explanation for the vertical non-compliance of lower officials towards higher officials. Therefore, Koh (2006: 15) proposes the concept of “mediation space”. Spaces of mediation are produced through daily encounters between citizens and state within a locality. Koh (2006: 10) concludes that although the state is generally stronger in decision-making and policy formulation, society appears to be stronger in policy implementation.

Both the persistence of the pavement economy and citizens’ individual and collective rights-claims against the state argue for a prevalence of manoeuvring space as assumed by the Accommodating State School. The latter particularly stresses the tolerance and mutual influence prevalent in state-society relations. This mutual influence is exerted through processes of negotiation between citizens and the state, which can take place at both the local level, as Koh shows in his concept of mediation space, and the national level through digital/virtual public space, as illustrated in the case studies above. Institutions are formed through these processes of negotiation. The most critical aspect of institutionalisation is that institutions need to be *sinnstiftend*, and in a sense provide meaning to society. As long as institutions are not accepted by citizens, they will be constantly contested and redefined until meaning is ascribed to them. An excellent example of this is people’s ambivalence towards the pavement economy. Although many citizens actually seem to approve of the municipality’s goal to abolish street trade, they rely on it at the same time.

The trade-off between everyday practices and the vision of a ‘modern and civilised capital’¹⁹⁵ is apparent. Regulations are formulated by the urban élite according to its idea of modernity that do not reflect social realities of everyday life. Therefore, the new legislation does not make sense to urban citizens who do not comply with the regulations. As these policies endanger urban supply mechanisms or even worse people’s daily basis for income generation, they lack legitimacy. Accordingly, the persistence of mediation spaces as well as citizens’ discussion of diverse visions of “their” city argue for a renegotiation of existent institutions and the formation of new institutions.

In Vietnam’s transition to a rule of law-based state, citizenship as a legal status has also become more important. Land reclamations by private individuals or the Catholic Church point towards an increased understanding of private ownership as well as of legal procedures. For

¹⁹⁵ The vision of a ‘civilised and modern capital’ incorporates much more than only the prohibition of the utilisation of sidewalks for private economic activities. According to the Head of the Bureau of Urban Construction there are plans to restructure the two main streets Ba Trieu and Pho Hue so that they match the “outer appearance of civilisation and trade”. On the sidewalks, parked vehicles ought to be completely prohibited. Additionally, green trees ought to be planted and electric lights installed (ANTD 09.01.08: 13 translated from Vietnamese).

example, citizens make use of the Law on Petitions and Denunciations to file their petitions, yet these forms of protests are distinguished by their degree of organisation. As a global institution, the Catholic Church in Vietnam is able to reach to both national and global public spheres to mobilise support for its objectives. Through the adoption of new information and communication techniques it is linked to the global Catholic community. Therefore, its position for negotiations with the state is enhanced. In contrast, citizens moving to the capital to claim their rights on an individual basis seem to remain excluded from urban and national public spheres.

Organisation and collective action can only be achieved, if the actors involved share a common interest. That is the reason why the prayer vigils held on the disputed land lots in Hanoi produce public spaces according to the associational view, in contrast to citizens' protests in front of government institutions. The epistemic function of public space is based on the idea that the small private interest of the individual is transformed into a broader public interest. It is only then that the collective can recognise itself in space through a repertoire of available interpretations that are shared by all (Benhabib 2006: 313).

6 Privatisation of Public life

The emergence of public spaces on the municipal/national level appears to be accompanied by a retreat from public life on the local level. Local public spaces are emptied in favour of national public spaces, the latter serving residents' demand for social and leisure activities.

Most prominently, Richard Sennett addresses the issue of people's retreat from public life to the sphere of intimacy. In his comprehensive work *Civitas* Sennett (1991: 13) argues that the Western distinction between "inner and outer experience" is rooted in the occidental culture of Christianity. The dualism of "in" and "out" found its first manifestation in the demarcation of territories in mediaeval cities (Sennett 1991: 35). For Sennett the terms in and out refer to the spatial division between the religious and secular sphere. In the Occident of the 18th century this differentiation was transformed into the distinct spheres of private and public based on the antagonism of nature and culture. Nature was related to the private, whereas culture represented the public. Since soul life was comprehended as a transcendental and "quasi-religious" phenomenon, it was associated with nature, and thus, family life was considered to be an experience of nature. Man as a creature of nature was an animal lacking civility. In contrast, the public sphere offered culture and civilisation, thereby becoming the corrective of the private sphere (Sennett 2008: 169). Together both spheres formed an equilibrium (Sennett 2008: 171).

According to Sennett (2008: 455) this equilibrium was destroyed in the 18/19th century.¹⁹⁶ Public space became associated with crime, coldness and, through its complexity, was considered irritating. Private space, on the contrary, was characterised by order and distinctness (Sennett 1991: 47). Society was believed to be impersonal, a world in which human relations ceased to exist. Only the sphere of intimacy could protect the individual from outside harm, providing a space where one's own personality had room to blossom (Sennett 2008: 455). Arendt (1958: 69) and Sennett agree that the retreat into intimacy is a flight from the outside world into the subjectivity of the individual which was formerly protected by the private realm. Arendt (1958: 38 f.) argues that modern privacy places itself in opposition to the social realm as it shelters the intimate.

Bahrtdt (1974: 77) outlines the protection of the family's private sphere through legal rights and the development of housing conditions that favour the separation of family life from public life, as the two major prerequisites for privatisation. Both preconditions are met in Vietnam. In recent years, major improvements have been made in Vietnam's Civil Code. The private space of the home is officially recognised by the state and protected from outside intrusion, as stated in Article 73 of the 1992 Constitution (Anon. 2001: 23):

"The citizen is entitled to the inviolability of his domicile.

¹⁹⁶ Sennett (2008: 457) suggests to regard the crisis of public life in the Occident in a dual context; first he highlights the emergence of the idea of a "public person" in the 19th century, which was followed by the attitude of denial. The "public person" came to be a contradiction in itself, finally resulting in the destruction of the public sphere. Personalities like politicians and artists, who were able to express their emotions in public, were considered superior. Instead of interacting with the audience, they dominated it. Consequently, the audience lost its belief in its ability to judge. The fear to express oneself in public resulted in an emptying of public space (Sennett 2008: 457). For Sennett (2008: 458 f.) the attitude of denial consists of the rejection to accept that the self is bounded by restrictions. One example he presents is the denial to recognise that communication among individuals ought to be limited. Although facilitating communication between individuals is pursued by any means possible, the "media" produces a great passiveness among the audience. Personality is gradually turned into an object of outer appearance, in particular in political life. At the same time people deny that the possibility of movement in the city must be restricted. To ensure free movement corresponding means of transportation are invented, but in the end people are surprised that the organism of the city is destroyed. Sennett (2008: 459) contends that due to contradictions from the past, and the rejection of this past, we are still caught in the cultural prerequisites of the 19th century.

No one can enter the domicile of another person without his consent, except in cases authorized by the law.

Safety and secrecy are guaranteed to the citizen's correspondence, telephone conversations and telegrams.

Domiciliary searches and the opening, control, and confiscation of a citizen's correspondence and telegrams can only be done by a competent authority in accordance with the provisions of the law".

The protection of the home is also guaranteed in the right to ownership determined by Article 58 of the 1992 Constitution. According to Arendt (1958: 61), the connection between private and public becomes most obvious in questions of private property¹⁹⁷, which represents "a privately owned place to hide in", providing shelter from publicity (Arendt 1958: 71).

"The citizen enjoys the right of ownership with regard to his lawful income, savings, housing, chattel, means of production, funds and other possession in enterprises or other economic organizations; with regard to land entrusted by the State for use, the matter is regulated by the provisions of Articles 17 and 18.

The State protects the citizen's right of lawful ownership and right inheritance" (Anon. 2001: 18).

In terms of space, the separation of family life from public life is manifested in the architectural "turn" that is currently taking place in Hanoi. In general, this is exhibited in a shift from small and narrow constructions, like the traditional tube houses, towards bigger private residences. Although the previous type of housing is typical for the Ancient Quarter¹⁹⁸, it can also be found with slight modifications in other wards in Hanoi. In the research area of Ngoc Ha, houses are also built on small land plots, and sometimes the front only comprises four metres. However, the narrowness of the house is compensated through multiple-storey additions that provide expanded private space, thereby dissolving the combination of living and work place. This transformation becomes most obvious in Hanoi's New Urban Areas that consist of condominiums and detached houses. The movement into these housing areas argues for an increased demand for privacy. This new form of dwelling compromises the general emphasis on the collective, as in most apartments only the core family lives together.

¹⁹⁷ From Roman times until the middle-ages, private wealth used to be a precondition for access to public life. The owner of private wealth was free to engage in public life because he did not have to produce the means for use and consumption by himself (Arendt 1958: 64 f.).

¹⁹⁸ In the 19th century tube houses were built on former market land plots. These market stalls were often no more than three metres wide due to the available length of timber beams. Although they are narrow, they are also often 40-60 metres deep. Similar to Chinese shop houses, they unite the two functions of reproduction and production and especially since the inception of *Doi Moi* the ground floor is used as a shop and showroom, while the upper floors serve as a living space (Logan 2000: 41; Nishimura, Hoang Huu Phe 1991: 104 f.).

6.1 Research Area Ngoc Ha

The urban ward of Ngoc Ha was chosen for this research because it comprises a cluster of ancient villages.¹⁹⁹ The main research focus is on the three neighbouring villages of Ngoc Ha, Huu Tiep and Dai Yen. Forming a part of the agricultural section of the capital known as “13 farms”, the villages used to play an integral role for the urban economy of the pre-colonial state. In the villages of Ngoc Ha and Huu Tiep flowers and vegetables were grown, while Dai Yen village was well-known for the production of traditional Vietnamese herbs (*thuoc Nam*) (Anon. 1996: 27). The three villages are bound together through a common founding legend. Annually, celebrations are held in honour of the villages’ founder. In addition, residents of the urban ward actively engage in the preparations of the celebration of Thang-Long Hanoi’s 1000th anniversary.

6.1.1 Foundation of the 13 farms

According to the legend²⁰⁰, the daughter of a Ly king went on a boat trip on the Thien Duc River, nowadays the Duong River. Suddenly, a monster arose from the water ramming the boat causing it to capsize and the princess fell into the water. The villagers went to the banks looking for her, but no one was able to find her. The king, desperate about the loss of his daughter, promised a reward to anyone who could find the princess. Finally, a young man from Le Mat village²⁰¹ was able to retrieve her corpse from the water. The Ly King wanted to reward the young man graciously with gold, silver, and money, but the young man from Le Mat village refused these gifts. All he requested was a plot of land situated in the west of the royal city of Thang Long. The king accepted his wish and assigned the western land to him.

¹⁹⁹ During the Tran Dynasty, the city, then called Trung Kinh, consisted of 64 quarters. Following this, under the rule of the Le kings, the area was renamed phu Phung Thien and comprised 2 districts with 36 quarters. During the Nguyen Dynasty’s administration, phu Phung Thien incorporated the two districts of Vinh Xuong and Quang Duc. Later, phu Phung Thien was renamed thanh phu Hoai Duc, while Vinh Xuong District was called Tho Xuong and Quang Duc District became Vinh Thuan. The land registers of Vinh Thuan District stipulate that in the time between 1810-1813, 1837 and 1866 Ngoc Ha was designated a farm (*trai*). In the land register of 1886-1888 it was formally listed as a village (*thon*) (Papin 1997: 50). In 1831, Hanoi Province was founded. The four farms of Ngoc Ha, Dai Yen, Vinh Phuc, and Huu Tiep continued to belong to Vinh Thuan District. Only Xuan Bieu became a part of Yen Thanh. After 1889 a great amount of the latter’s land was taken by the French colonial administration to construct the Botanical Garden. It was only in 1889 that the French government took land from the districts of Tho Xuong and Vinh Thuan to found the city of Hanoi (*thanh pho*). Until 1899, a *Zône suburbaine autour de ville Hanoi (khu ngoai thanh Ha Noi)* existed, comprising land from the districts of Vinh Thuan and Tu Liem. In 1915, this outer area changed its name to Hoan Long District forming a part of Ha Dong Province. In 1942, Hoan Long District was officially ascribed to the central administration of Hanoi City, with the new name “*Délégation spéciale de Hanoi*” (*Dai Ly dac biet Ha Noi*). Residents referred to it as *Dai ly Hoang Long*. During the resistance against the French and the August Revolution, the farms and villages of Ngoc Ha ward changed their names several times. At the end of 1945 the area was called Dai La, in May 1948 it renamed Tran Tay District. In November 1954, it was renamed Ward 6 (*Quan 6*), and in 1961 it was made Ba Dinh Quarter (*khu pho Ba Dinh*). Finally, in 1979, the site received its current name Ba Dinh District (Anon. 1996: 7 ff.).

²⁰⁰ This recollection of the founding legend is based on two sources. The main source is a narrative interview conducted with Mrs Chi, a member of the organisation committee of the Ngoc Ha Communal House that took place on January 16th, 2008. Her husband’s family has been living in Ngoc Ha for more than ten generations. The information gathered in the interview was amended by a second source, a book on the history and tradition of Ngoc Ha published by the urban ward of Ngoc Ha. This book indicates the authorities’ engagement in propagating Vietnamese history and traditions. It was published in 1996, a time when the Vietnamese government intensively supported the revitalisation of Vietnamese tradition through TV broadcasts of dance and folklore. The objective was to undermine the impact of the so-called “foreign social evils” coming from the West. The book was published to inform residents about the “source of the water they drink from” (*uong nuoc nho nguon*) (Anon. 1996: 3).

²⁰¹ Le Mat is a village located across the Red River in today’s Gia Lam District. It is famous for its restaurants specialising in snake dishes.

Thereafter the young man named Hoang Phuc Trung invited his fellow villagers from Le Mat to follow him and settle down in this new area. From then on the land was called “13 farms” (*thap tam trai*); the name is Sino-Vietnamese where *thap* means ten, and *tam* signifies three. The 13 farms consist of Ngoc Ha, Huu Tiep, Dai Yen, Xuan Bieu, Cong Yen, Van Phong, Vinh Phuc, Lieu Giai, Cong Vi, Thu Le, Ngoc Khanh, Kim Ma, Giang Vo villages. Presently they all belong to the urban district Ba Dinh (HNM 26.04.05).

Although the 13 farms share a common founding legend, a clear functional division existed between the three villages studied from their early beginnings onward. The villagers of Ngoc Ha and Huu Tiep mainly engaged in the cultivation of flowers and vegetables. A few villagers also worked as bricklayers or petty traders, and as civil servants or industrial workers. The women of the two villages carried the flowers in baskets on their backs to the royal citadel selling them to the capital’s residents, who always bought flowers on the first and fifteenth day of the lunar month to pray and worship. This represented the earliest form of street trade in Hanoi. In Dai Yen, medicinal herbs like lemon grass, peppermint, etc., were cultivated.

Before 1945, residents of Ngoc Ha and Dai Yen also bred milk cows. In 1970, during the war against the United States, the “vegetable cooperative of Ngoc Ha” was founded. Its task was to produce vegetables for the state, especially simple vegetables such as water spinach (*rau muong*). In response to the high demand for vegetables, flower plantations were replaced with vegetable beds (Anon. 1996: 27, 68 f.). After the war, when the cultivation of vegetables was no longer required, the vegetable beds were gradually transformed into building land.

6.1.2 From *lang xa* to an urban ward

“In the century of industrialisation and modernisation the people change. They do not grow medicine or flowers anymore. They moved the flower and herbs planting fields outside the city to Dong An and Tinh Yen, the people plant there, and the land in Ngoc Ha is completely occupied with residential houses” (Chi 16.01.2008).

In 1980, the village was transformed from a rural administrative entity (*lang xa*) into an urban ward (*thanh phuong*) of Hanoi. This also favoured the area’s transition from an agricultural production site into a residential area.²⁰² In 1994, the urban ward of Ngoc Ha comprised 9 residential units (*cum*) and 63 resident groups (*to*) with 14,000 residents (Anon. 1996: 10). According to statistical data from 2005, the ward comprises 80.1 ha of land and 16,774 registered residents. The housing area is attractive for residents, for both Hanoians who are looking for a dwelling close to their place of work and for newcomers to the city, because of its close proximity to the city centre (4 kilometres). Naturally, the high demand for living space fosters the conversion of agricultural lots into land for building, as revenue from rent and sales are much more lucrative than from agricultural production. This in turn affects the residents’ source of income. In Ngoc Ha, the occupation has shifted from the agricultural to the state sector. One respondent implies that currently many residents of the former village of Ngoc Ha are employed in civil service, for example in the Office of the Government which is situated nearby, or in the Police Department.²⁰³

Moreover, the rising number of residents requires adapting the villages’ infrastructure. Water and electricity supply, roads and educational and health services must be adjusted for the number of dwellers living in the area. In the past, residents used well water; nowadays most

²⁰² The Constitution of 1980 introduced the ward system. Before this the local administration constituted a two-level system (city, district). With the administrative entity of the ward, a third level was established within urban areas (Koh 2006: 53).

²⁰³ Interview with Hang, 28.05.2008.

of the households have access to tap water. Additionally, the ward awarded its own primary school.

6.1.3 Public space in the village

In general, public space in Ngoc Ha ward is scarce, as the ward's streets are very narrow. The main alley is about 4-5 metres wide, only permitting motorbikes and bicycles to pass. A pavement for pedestrians is non-existent. The path system from village times appears to have been retained as a main alley leads into the villages, which then branches out into several smaller lanes. Additionally, makeshift improvements in private households, in particular the illegal expansion of houses, has caused the loss or at least the reduction of public and sacred spaces.

With regards to the public space of the market, the three villages exhibit quite different features. First, the biggest market, "Ngoc Ha market"²⁰⁴, is not situated within the administrative boundaries of Ngoc Ha ward, but rather within Doi Can ward. It is located next to the junction of Le Trong Phong and Ngoc Ha Streets. The market in the immediate centre of Ngoc Ha ward is called Huu Tiep market. The market used to consist of wooden market stalls erected in a demarcated area, but today only few of the stalls are still in use. Most of the economic activity has shifted to the main alley leading to the market. Thus, the market is occupied by mobile vendors, coming from outside the village. Additionally, the owners of houses that face the market lane have transformed their ground floor into small shops. The major customers in the ward are women; they buy fresh vegetables, fruit, meat and flowers for the day. Due to the narrowness of the market, there are limited opportunities for rest or social interaction like chatting. Many women stay at the stall where they purchase their food, talking with the owner.

FIGURE 19: ANCIENT VILLAGE GATE IN DAI YEN



Source: Private Photo (2008).

In Dai Yen, economic activities are concentrated around the ancient village gate. There is a combination of fixed shops and mobile vendors, comparable to conditions in the Huu Tiep market. The area is located right at the junction between the two main alleys connecting the

²⁰⁴ Since the market is not located in the village area, it is not of concern to this analysis. It is just mentioned because the name points to its former belonging to Ngoc Ha village.

village with the surrounding main roads. Therefore, more room is provided for social interaction than is available in Huu Tiep market.

At least in Huu Tiep, some additional recreational space is provided by two lakes, B52 and Dai Phuong Lake. The former is named after the wreck of a US-B52 bomber lying in the middle of the lake.²⁰⁵ On the shores of the lake, the primary school, communal house of Huu Tiep and Cat Trieu Temple are located. Accordingly, the banks of the lake constitute the symbolic centre of the village.

In particular, in the late afternoon hours the banks of the B52 Lake are a popular gathering place for children and their parents. Around the lake, two mobile drinking stalls offer refreshments and a place to sit down and chat. They are mainly visited by parents who watch their children play. In the morning and afternoon two different food stalls take turns occupying one specific spot opposite the school. In the morning sticky rice (*xoi*) is sold and in the afternoon noodles with snails (*bun oc*) is available. Food stalls are for the most part frequented by pupils and their parents before or after school. Besides, not many neighbours use the space for recreation or social interaction. This is especially interesting given the little public space in the area. As soon as it gets dark, the banks are emptied and neighbours retreat to their houses.

Besides these profane spaces, many sacred spaces, such as the communal house, Taoist temple, and Buddhist pagoda, can also be found in the area. This system of sacred spaces dates back to village times. Most of the edifices are well-preserved. This may be a result of the ideological shift that took place in 1986; since then urban wards are in charge of the preservation of historical monuments, worship houses and Buddhist and Taoist temples in the locality (Koh 2006: 66).

In the villages of Ngoc Ha, Dai Yen and Huu Tiep, the main holy sites are the following:

1. Ngoc Ha Communal House belongs to the administration of the residential unit No. 2. The communal house was built under the Ly Dynasty in honour of the village deity Huyen Thien Hac De. According to legend, an eight year old boy fell from a tree and died and after his death he became a deity. When the Ly king had to fight the Nam Chinh Army he had a dream that the deity would come to assist him and he was finally successful in the campaign. He was able to make the enemy's ship sink. He was aware that Huyen Thien Hac De had helped him to achieve his victory because the colour of the water had turned black like the skin of the deity (Anon. 1996: 11 f.).

2. Huu Tiep Communal House belongs to the residential unit No. 3. During the French occupation it was completely destroyed but was rebuilt thereafter. Nowadays, Ngoc Ha's primary school occupies the main part of the former communal house's courtyard. Like the communal house of Ngoc Ha, it is dedicated to Huyen Thien Hac De. Every year on the saint's birthday (19.01.) and the day of his death (21.11.) the residents of Xuan Bieu, Ngoc Ha and Huu Tiep organise a feast in his honour.²⁰⁶ On his birthday the three villages bring the palanquin and the ancestral tablet of the deity to the hosting communal house. There the saint is worshipped for three days (Anon. 1996: 12).²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ In 1972, during the Vietnamese offensive called "Dien Bien Phu in the skies" (*Dien Bien Phu tren khong*) the US bomber was shot down by Vietnamese forces. The lake has turned into a famous sightseeing site for tourists.

²⁰⁶ These dates follow the lunar calendar and therefore vary each year.

²⁰⁷ The day of the 18th is referred to as *te yet*, the 19th as *te chinh* and the 20th as *te gia*. Thereafter, games and performances are held. On the first day of the first lunar month, the three villages organise a chicken competition. Months before one person from every village is selected to be in charge of feeding the chicken. On that day the chicken is cooked with sticky rice and fish sauce. The best cook wins (Anon. 1996: 12).

3. Cat Trieu Temple is located next to the communal house of Huu Tiep. It is dedicated to Hoang Thi Duc, Huyen Thien Hac De's mother. Her worshipping name is *Mau Cat Trieu*. The statuettes of the three mothers, *Ba Mau*, are located in the temple and each wears a different coloured robe. The first mother wears a red robe symbolising life, while the second wears green representing the forest, and the third wears white, signifying water.

4. Bat Mau Pagoda belongs to residential unit No. 3. During French occupation, the site of the Buddhist pagoda used to be a place for the French army to practice. In the realm of land reform in 1954, the land was transferred to peasants in order to plant flowers and vegetables. A further land plot behind the pagoda was assigned to the police to construct housing and working units for their employees. In recent years, parcels given to peasants have been transformed into construction land. The book about the history of Ngoc Ha highlights the pagoda's function as a place for the elderly to take a rest and for the young to play (Anon. 1996: 15 f.). However, as data from participant observation illustrate only few laymen actually spend their time there; even on the evening of the 1st and 15th of the lunar month it is usually not that crowded.

5. Dai Yen Communal House belongs to residential unit No. 7. It was built during the reign of the Ly Dynasty. Unlike the other communal houses in the urban ward, it is not dedicated to Huyen Thien Hac De, but rather Princess Ngoc Hoa. She is the female saint of the village. Each year on the 13/14th of the third lunar month the residents of Dai Yen village celebrate a feast in her memory (Anon. 1996: 23). According to the legend about Ngoc Hoa, she decided to help her father, a general under the Ly Dynasty, combating the enemy by disguising herself as a sales woman and therefore spying on the enemy's troops. With the information gathered, her father's troops were able to win the war. She died at the age of nine in her mother's hometown, Dai Yen village.²⁰⁸

6. Dong Nuoc Temple belongs to residential unit No. 5. The temple is also referred to as *Tam Phu Thanh Mau*. Its construction dates back to Tran times. It is dedicated to the female Saint Ngoc Nuong. Each year on the 17th of the 8th lunar month the people of Dong Nuoc village celebrate her day of death with a festival (Anon. 1996: 19).

FIGURE 20: COURT OF DAI YEN COMMUNAL HOUSE



Source: Private Photo (2008).

However, the question remains about how far these sacred spaces serve as arena of social interaction among residents. The holy sites are open to all residents of the ward as well as to strangers. Yet, the main problem lies in their restricted accessibility; most edifices are only opened to the public on the first and 15th of the lunar month, during New Year (*Tet*) or during festivals dedicated to the village deity. For example, the communal house of Ngoc Ha used to

²⁰⁸ Data were gathered during the festival at Dai Yen Communal House on the 18.04.2008.

be watched by a guardian, but after his death no successor among the younger generation could be found. Thus, the communal house's organisation committee took over the role of opening the hall to worshippers. Members of the board take turns watching the communal house. If residents wish to pray on a usual day, they will need to register with the committee in advance. Members of the committee report that most people would come to the *dinh* on their way to work, or to pray before they start building a new house, or also prior to a joyful event. On common days of worship, such as the 1st and 15th of the lunar month, only a few youth appear to visit the communal house. Mostly, elderly women and also females between the ages of 30 and 50 go there to pray. Yet, not much room is provided for social interaction; as no ceremony is held in the communal house on these days, most worshippers come to the hall on an individual basis.²⁰⁹

In general, there appears to be an occupation of the communal house by the elderly residents of the area. Both social activities organised in the communal house of Ngoc Ha, and cultural and religious festivities are for the most part frequented by elderly residents.²¹⁰

The domination of the elderly is also represented in the configuration of the organisation committee of *dinh* Ngoc Ha. The committee consists entirely of older people, for the most part women.²¹¹ These women not only organise the festivities on the village saint's birth and death day, but they also represent Ngoc Ha village in the annual procession of the 13 farms to Le Mat village.²¹² Additionally, the group goes on pilgrimages (*di le*) together.²¹³ Overall, social cohesion among the organisation committee and further affiliates, who regularly join religious celebrations, appears to be exceptionally high.

6.2 Locality and Social cohesion

According to Korff (1991: 14), a locality consists of loosely structured relations of mutual assistance between people living in a spatially demarcated area. A locality is formed through people's social creativity. "Social creativity is the ability to create new patterns of social relations and organisations" (Korff, Rothfuß 2009: 363), and therefore, the will to improve one's living conditions. In their study about social ties in slums in Bangkok and Manila Berner and Korff (1995: 214 ff.) determine that physical proximity and time are determinants of the development of solidarity, mutual trust and the feeling of a "we".

²⁰⁹ Interestingly, more social interactions among female worshippers can be observed in the central But Thap Pagoda, in Dai Yen village. However, this is only a single observation, and therefore cannot be generalised.

²¹⁰ Every morning from 8 to 10 a former resident group leader teaches a Chinese class of 8 old men and one woman in the right chamber (*phong huu*) of Ngoc Ha Communal House. Furthermore, in the early morning, around 6 am, the courtyard of the communal house is turned into a sports field for badminton. In the early evening the same courtyard is used by some old people to relax and chat or by mothers taking their children for a walk.

²¹¹ One reason for this is certainly the principle of seniority.

²¹² In Ngoc Ha village, the organisation committee of the communal house was in charge of the trip. On the community's blackboard, residents were informed about the schedule and were requested to register in advance. A mini bus was rented to take the delegation to the home of their founding father. Every passenger had to pay 70,000 VND for the ride.

²¹³ After the celebration at Le Mat, the delegation of women went on a collective pilgrimage to Phu Dong and Ghenh Temples. Phu Dong Temple is located in Giong village, about 17 km away from the centre of Hanoi in Soc Son District. The temple is dedicated to Saint Thanh Giong tuc phu Dong Thien vuong. In the back of the temple, Saint Chu dong tu is worshipped. He is one of the four major saints (*vi Thanh Tu*) that the Vietnamese honour. This saint is responsible for the trade profession. Ghenh Temple is situated on the banks of the Red River in Gia Lam District.

“A locality, then, is the focus of everyday life; it is not merely the place where people reside but where they spend much of their life, their *Lebenswelt* (life world)” (Berner, Korff 1995: 214).

In the study area, the various communal houses actually bear the potential to serve as basis of such a locality. Throughout Vietnamese history the relevance of the communal house for the collective was constantly stressed.²¹⁴ The reference to a common history and founding legend resulted in an identification with a specific community. In particular, nowadays within an estranged urban environment, this feeling of a “we” could be produced through social and cultural activities organised in the communal house. A member of the communal house committee in Ngoc Ha asserts that the residents of the 13 villages maintain close relationships with each other. Every year, on the 23rd of the third lunar month, 13 residents of the 13 villages return to Le Mat, the home land of Hoang Phuc Trung, to celebrate a feast in his honour. Here, a collective identity is created by the formation of a delegation from each village. The specific groups are distinguishable on the basis of the clothing they wear, and the offerings they make to the deity. For example, women from Ngoc Ha village wear the traditional dresses of medieval female flower vendors.²¹⁵ Consequently, the question arises about the ability of the communal house and the founding legend to exert an integrative function in times of increased migration.

FIGURE 21: DELEGATION OF NGOC HA VILLAGE AT LE MAT FESTIVAL



Source: Private Photo (2008).

It is remarkable that today many Hanoians still refer to Ngoc Ha as the “flower growing village” (*lang trong hoa*). Many residents, even young people, from the urban ward are at least aware of the area’s flower cultivating past. However, when it comes to specific knowledge, such as the founding legend or the date of the village saint’s birthday, only few residents, mainly older villagers, are cognisant of it.

²¹⁴ In order to pinpoint the importance of the *dinh* to the community, a respondent reports that during the fight against the French, the Vietnamese were willing to destroy their houses to avoid them being captured by the French. However, no one dared to destroy the communal house and the pagoda. The interviewee explained: “My grandfather destroyed his house in Bac Ninh himself. Everyone did so but nobody wanted to destroy the community hall or pagoda”. This clearly shows that the private space of the home was rendered less important than communal sacred spaces. Thus, after the war the whole village community participated in rebuilding the communal house (Interview with Duc, 24.04.2008).

²¹⁵ The costume consists of a pair of black silk trousers and a white blouse above which a brown *ao dai* is tied in front. Around their heads the women wear a headband made from black velvet.

For example, in June 2008 the communal house of Huu Tiep was decorated with flags and banners. When asked about what was going on in the communal house, Son, a man of 46 years who grew up in the area approximately 300 metres away from the hall, replied: “I do not know nothing about it. Go and ask the elderly. I am sure they would know”. His 18 year old daughter explains: “No I do not know. But if it is decorated I am sure there are festivities”.²¹⁶

Nghi, who just recently moved to Ngoc Ha from Nam Dinh Province, provides a more general appraisal: “Young people only care about how many children they have and how much money they make. The old people know about tradition”.²¹⁷

Linh, who is married to a native of Ngoc Ha and thus has been living in Ngoc Ha St. for more than 20 years, explains that she did not participate in any cultural activities in the communal house. She clarifies that only residents, who were members of the village for a really long time, would attend celebrations.²¹⁸

Cultural and religious activities in the communal house seemingly fail to attract other residents of the area, in particular the younger generations, except for those who have already been living in the ward for quite some time, and are actively engaged in the community.²¹⁹ Consequently, as the findings from Manila and Bangkok indicate, time appears to be a critical factor in the constitution of social ties in Ngoc Ha ward.

With respect to Manila and Bangkok, Berner and Korff (1995: 215) declare that social relations are based on, and maintained through, meeting friends, drinking together, chatting, and gossiping. In this context, the gender variable is critical as there is a noted difference in the appearance of men in contrast to women in Ngoc Ha ward’s public space. While women tend to meet their friends at home, men frequently go to public spaces such as the *bia hoi* or tea-stalls, the so-called *quan coc*. Men usually go there on their way to work or on their way home.

“That is the reason why women seldom go to the tea stall. Most of the time they stay at the house anyway. They do not go out for work like men do. They often stay home because they are responsible for the household and they have to care for the children and serve their husband” (Nghi, 09.04.2008).

In contrast, female respondents from Ngoc Ha responded by emphasising that social ties are mainly maintained through daily interaction in the alley or market. Particularly, an invitation from neighbours to tea is a crucial determinant.

“Neighbours say hello and invite each other home to have a cup of tea” (Mai Linh from Dai Yen, 07.05.2008).

“Women talk about that day’s market prices. Children play together” (Chi from Ngoc Ha, 16.04.2008).

However, the assessment of the quality of everyday social encounters among women appears to vary according to the interviewees’ age and duration of residence in Ngoc Ha ward. Older women, who are involved in community work, describe the relationship among neighbours as close and friendly. One interviewee states that neighbours would assist each other in building a house, etc. To emphasise their point, two respondents independently cite the same Vietnam-

²¹⁶ Interview with Son, 20.06.2008.

²¹⁷ Interview with Nghi, 09.04.2008.

²¹⁸ Interview with Linh, 16.05.2008.

²¹⁹ Drummond and Nguyen Thi Lien (2009: 178) depict a similar account when stating that more research needs to be done in order to determine “to what extent non-congregational religious life (i.e., that based on individual worship) offers associational life opportunities for any but the retired and elderly (mainly women) ...”

ese saying, *Ban anh em xa mua lang gieng gan*²²⁰, which means that the family is far away, but the neighbours are nearby to help. One of the respondents adds an additional saying: *Tat lua toi den co nhau*, which translates into “The fire is out, the night comes, but we have each other”. The stress on close relationships between neighbours becomes even more evident through two women’s application of the term *lang xom*, instead of *hang xom* for “neighbourhood”. The former comprises the word *lang*, the Vietnamese term for “village”, and is thus an obvious reference to village and non-urban life.

Conversely, younger respondents who are 40 years old or younger, depict the relationship with their neighbours as passing acquaintances.

“In general relationships are not very close. If one meets another person from the alley, one greets the other because one knows each other, but that is it. One does not talk to each other on the street and does not invite the neighbours to one’s home. When people come home they immediately close the door of their houses behind them” (Phuong from Ngoc Ha, 26.04.2008).

Phuong compares the neighbourhood of Ngoc Ha ward with her hometown in Ha Nam Province where, according to her, relationships were still “close”. She concludes that it was the city that changed relationships. While Phuong’s view of social relations might easily be interpreted as a kind of “neo-romantisation” of the countryside, it is emblematic of how many Hanoians experience the city. Frequently, the “community” in the person’s hometown is made the main point of reference.

Linh’s statement about the growing anonymity in the ward matches this appraisal; “In the past everybody knew each other, but now so many new people have come here that they do not know each other that well anymore” (Linh, 16.05.2008).

Through the immigration of new residents, social ties among neighbours appear to dissolve. People who recently moved to Hanoi, have social relationships outside their neighbourhood, as they maintain ties to relatives and friends in their hometown or build relationships with their colleagues at work, rather than becoming involved in their new neighbourhood.²²¹

The system of in- and exclusion, or who is considered part of the village community of Ngoc Ha and who is not, appears to be determined by the individual and collective possession of social capital. Social capital is commonly perceived to be a personal asset (Putnam 2000), but it can also be regarded a “collective property resource” (Korff, Rothfuß 2009: 363). The importance of both types of social capital is evident in the analysis of the biographies of the three women Chi, Mai Linh and Duc²²²: Besides being a member of the communal house’s organisation committee, Chi is a permanent member of the women’s union of Ngoc Ha urban ward. Additionally, her husband used to be the resident group leader for their neighbourhood. In comparison, Mai Linh had never occupied an important function in the ward, as she feels it is difficult for her to gain access to the communal house’s organisation board. To be included, she had to participate in a multitude of voluntary work in advance. Furthermore, she reports that she often invited the elderly women from her neighbourhood to her garden for tea. In contrast, Duc was asked to volunteer during the festival at the Dai Yen Communal House, despite having lived abroad for a long time and the fact that the elderly women from the village were obviously not well acquainted with her. However, as her husband is a high-ranking official in the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and she used to work in diverse Vietnamese embassies abroad, the couple seems to enjoy good reputation particularly among local authorities. This signifies that the personal asset of social capital is an important determinant

²²⁰ *Lang gieng* has the same meaning as *hang xom*, which is translated as “neighbourhood”.

²²¹ Interview with Ha Huu Nga, 08.05.2008.

²²² The presented data were collected during narrative interviews with the three women.

of people's inclusion in the village community. At the same time, it is the collective agency of the group, for example self-organisation of pilgrimages to sacred spaces or festivals, that maintains and enhances social ties among the group of the communal house. In this context, Korff and Rothfuß (2009: 363) state: "..., in self-organised groups social capital is maintained as collective agency through a process by which a socially cohesive collective maintains itself". In Ngoc Ha, the collective of the communal house is retained through cultural activities and the production of symbols²²³. Consequently, cultural activities related to the communal house do not produce "bridging social capital" as Robert Putnam (2000: 412) suggests, but rather "bonding social capital".²²⁴ Participation in festivals and religious rites "bonds" an already existent group together. Occasions such as the village deity's day of death/birth bring residents together who are already actively involved in the village's cultural life and thus, social cohesion among the group itself is enhanced. Likewise the founding legend that formerly used to have an integrative function by creating a collective identity among the residents of the 13 farms, has become an instrument of separation. Only "old" residents have knowledge of the legend, whereas "newcomers" hardly know the area's past. The reference to the founding legend and the ward's history assists in identifying what Elias and Scotson (1994) call "the established and the outsiders".

In conclusion, the communal house occupies an ambivalent role within the locality. On one hand, it constitutes a local public space bearing the potential for the development of the feeling of a 'we' and thus a collective identity, while on the other it remains an exclusive space failing to integrate the diverse social strata of the neighbourhood regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, etc. Additionally, local public spaces such as alleys and markets appear to be transitional spaces that only serve short-time interactions. In contrast, permanent relations seem to be established in the private space of the home, for example through an invitation for tea. Finally, spatial practices of local public space argue for the privatisation of society.²²⁵

6.3 The emptying of local public space: Retreat into intimacy

"Public space engenders fears, fears that derive from the sense of public space as uncontrolled space, as a space in which civilization is exceptionally fragile" (Mitchell 2003: 13).

The emptying of local public space parallels a retreat into intimacy favoured by a rise in living standards and technological advancement. As soon as households have the means they renovate or rebuild their houses, creating larger edifices. In these new houses, doors and windows primarily remain closed, even when someone is at home; entrances are additionally protected by grilles. Undoubtedly, private domiciles that house a shop are open for customers to enter. Nonetheless, there is also a division between private and public space within these shop-houses. In many houses the showroom in front hides the private space of the family located in the back. In other cases, the complete ground floor is used as shop area, while the

²²³ An important marker of belonging is the small plastic bag comprising sticky rice (*oan*) and a banana that every visitor receives, when visiting the communal house on a festival day. Another important symbol is the registration and public announcement of an individual's donation to the communal house. The amount of donation is an indicator of social status in the village (Endres 2000: 188). The contribution is honoured with the inscription of the family's name onto a marble table on the wall of the hall.

²²⁴ In his analysis of social capital formation in the USA Putnam declares that cultural activities take over a meditative function connecting socially heterogeneous groups.

²²⁵ Nguyen Duc Truyen illustrated that the general emphasis on the community in Vietnamese society had been replaced by – what he called - a "liberalisation of the individual". With this individualisation he also explained the tendency of more and more Hanoians to visit urban amusement parks or other parts of Vietnam in their free time than to hang out in local public spaces (Interview 24.07.2008).

private domicile is situated on the upper floors. Accordingly, the family's privacy is guarded against customers' intrusions. This clear demarcation of private space contradicts the former way of life, when front doors were left open, people gathered in front of their houses to chat with neighbours, and women cooked outside the house. Today, it is only in the smaller dilapidated houses of Ngoc Ha ward that the private space of the family is visible to the public eye. Linh and her son Anh have an interesting explanation for this. They argue that "[p]oor people are friendlier because they still help each other. Rich people do not need any help therefore they do not need to interact with the community".²²⁶

Similarly, Chua Beng Huat and Edwards (1992: 4) declare that "bad housing produces good street life". In turn, good housing seems to result in a privatisation of society. Bahrtdt (1974: 103) explains that the closure of the private sphere correlates with technological advancement. Households' direct access to tapped water and drainage systems no longer necessitates gathering water from the communal well, thereby reducing opportunities to mingle. Linh's account of the improvement of housing conditions illustrates this transformation quite well:

In the first years of her marriage she and her family lived in a very small house in a side alley in Ngoc Ha St. with only one floor. They did not have their own bathroom or a water tap in the house. Therefore, she needed to go out several times a day. She elaborates that "all everyday activities were located on the street, going to the public toilet, collecting water etc.". Consequently, she always kept her door open. However, now that she has access to what she needs inside her home, she shuts the door.

Linh's statement reveals a rather negative perception that public space produces estrangement, as she feels threatened by the fact that people no longer are acquainted with one another; neighbourly relations have turned into passing acquaintances. Furthermore, as more people move into her alley, her family fears an increase in thieves. Linh refers to the Vietnamese saying, *Mo cua bui vao*, which means that when opening the door, on one hand light shines into the house, but on the other dirt comes in, too. This evokes Sennett's account of the decay of public life in Western societies, as local public space in Hanoi becomes increasingly associated with crime and insecurity. In Dai Yen and Ngoc Ha villages, burglars and drug addicts are said to stroll around in local public spaces. The fear of this uncertainty crystallised into a very pressing issue among residents and now residents in the area usually take precautions. For example, every time they leave the house they would lock the door, motorbikes are always parked inside the house, and even windows on the ground floor have to be closed when family members go upstairs as a thief might try to steal something through an open window. This closure of the home diverges from the findings in Manila and Bangkok. In the localities described by Berner and Korff one important semi-public aspect was the openness of slum houses with terraces where people met and drank together so that others could see and join them.

6.3.1 The uncertainty of the stranger

"There are friends and enemies. And there are *strangers*" (Bauman 1990: 143)

In his appraisal of modernity and ambivalence, Bauman identifies the "stranger" as a major threat to modernity. The dichotomy of "friend" and "enemy", which has become the structuring element of any social entity, is shattered by the existence of a "third element", the so-called "stranger". The stranger does not withstand this dichotomy because he is neither friend, nor enemy, and that is what makes him unpredictable. The stranger transgresses spatial ordering as he is physically near, but remains psychological distant (Bauman 1990: 148 ff.). Outside the

²²⁶ Interview with Linh and Anh, 16.05.2008.

city, no other place presents the opportunity where encounters among strangers are more likely to occur and to accumulate. Therefore, Bauman (1997: 205 f.) refers to urban life as a life among strangers. In the urban context the stranger is created through the knowledge gap between what one is required to know to navigate within urban space and what one perceives to be the real or possible movement of others. Life among strangers confronts the urban dweller with the ambivalence of danger and liberty. Bauman outlines different strategies for coping with, or more appropriately, to eradicate this ambivalence. He differentiates between rational strategies and strategies lacking rationality. The first rational strategy consists of the reduction of the element of surprise in the stranger's behaviour. The second consists of drawing stranger's behaviour into the background, so that one is able to disregard it. The objective of both strategies is to transform the city into what Lyn Lofland calls a 'routine world of strangers' (Bauman 1997: 208). The term routine implies that to make the city a liveable place the city dweller needs to adjust to the fact that he is surrounded by strangers. Bauman concludes that all utopias are based on the first strategy. "Utopias of architecture and urban planning" (Bauman 1997: 208) aim at the coordination and governance of urban residents' arrangements and movements within urban space. Architecture and urban planning are then employed as instruments to antagonise strangers. The aim is to create an orderly and predictable world.

For Bauman (1997: 205, 207), an irrational strategy is one that projects the threat of the "uncertain" on one specific group of strangers, which may consist of migrants, ethnic minorities, vagabonds, etc. Empirical evidence of Bauman's assertions are present in Ngoc Ha, as it appears that residents seem to adopt the latter 'irrational' strategy to deal with ambivalence. In Ngoc Ha, the label of the 'uncertain' is assigned to migrants. Newcomers to the area are generally referred to as "tenants" in contrast to "homeowners". The term tenant connotes the uncertain; furthermore, it hints towards economic capital as the basis of integration into the neighbourhood, or in other words, money in the form of rent or ownership. Due to the urban ward's vicinity to the city centre, it has turned into a housing area that attracts newcomers to the city, many of whom cannot afford to buy land, and therefore often temporarily rent a dwelling. Thus, anyone who is new to the area is considered a stranger and unknown to neighbours. Within all three of the former villages, Ngoc Ha, Huu Tiep and Dai Yen, marginal settlements have evolved providing shelter for migrants.

For example, in Dai Yen these settlements developed around the communal house; the former centre of village life has been stripped of its location. The outer areas have been appropriated by more affluent residents, and thus a "new" centre has been established. For example, Mai Linh moved to the area located outside the Dai Yen village gate 26 years ago. She explains that at that time most of the land was undeveloped. Subsequently, it was bought by Vietnamese who had returned home from abroad, for instance from Hungary or Germany where they had made money and thus were able to build their own houses on the site.²²⁷ Mai Linh reports that in the past those who lived outside the gate (*ngoai cong*) were referred to as *dan tu su* or *dan ngu cu*, which literally means "people residing in a strange place".²²⁸ These strangers were not allowed to participate in any of the communal house's activities. However, with the integration of the village into the city, this former outer area or 'strange place' was turned into a housing area popular among well-off citizens. In contrast, the communal house is now surrounded by strangers.

²²⁷ Most of the purchasers of land plots in Ngoc Ha and Dai Yen are believed to be employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

²²⁸ Analogous to the "inner" and "outer" spheres of the traditional city, this socio-spatial system of in- and exclusion is also present in the village.

FIGURE 22: CANAL IN NGOC HA



Source: Private Photo (2008).

Similarly, in Ngoc Ha marginal settlements have evolved, especially along the canal and the shores of Bay Gian Lake. Hung, who lives next to the settlements, explains that “[t]hose are *nguai que* that have come to Hanoi to make a living. They work all day and only come to these huts to sleep. Me and my family do not know these people. The owner of the huts lives opposite of them”. Therefore, the permanently stressed “neighbourly relationships” in old village communities are increasingly undermined by the influx of new residents, and have thereby initiated social segregation within the urban ward.

Apart from tenants, “drug addicts” appear to be another unpredictable element in the area; rising crime rates are ascribed to both social groups. Most interviewees identified adolescent males, or at least young people, with drug addicts.²²⁹

A young girl from Ngoc Ha insists that drug addicts mainly comprise young boys and girls.

“In Dai Yen there are many [drug addicts] because this is an area where the living standard is not that high. Most people live of trading. (...) In Dai Yen many people from other provinces move to Hanoi just to make a living. They rented houses there” (Hang, 28.05.2008).

For Mai Linh drug addicts were also the reason why she did not want to open a coffee shop in her garden. She reports that in her friend’s café next door, drug addicts, coming from different parts of Hanoi, regularly mingle. The police are aware of this problem and monitor her neighbour’s coffee shop. According to her, these young people do not have much money and only order a coffee or soda and then take heroin or cocaine.

Likewise, Anh, an 18-year-old man, explains that young people who normally hang out in the quarter’s alleys are usually “no good people”, adding that “[t]o be honest many young people in Ngoc Ha are drug addicts”. In contrast to Mai Linh, Anh and his family argue that those young people are primarily the children of villagers who ‘got rich quick’ by selling their land

²²⁹ Interestingly, the association of young people with drug abuse corresponds to the recent national appraisal of the “decadence” of urban adolescents. Drummond and Nguyen Thi Lien (2009: 179) report that in 2005 the National Assembly put the “‘issue’ of youth” on the agenda, followed by a media campaign that focused on young people’s involvement in diverse “social evils”. Consequently, the Prime Minister issued a Decree authorising the police to conduct raids on drug users. Drummond and Nguyen Thi Lien (2009: 179) contend that this rush on the “‘decadence’ of urban youth” was an attack on the middle classes. This would affirm interviewees’ evaluation that drug addicts were in many cases rich kids that do not know what to do with their free time.

for development. The children received a lot of money from their parents, but did not know what to do with it and as a consequence bought drugs.²³⁰

Accordingly, Linh, Phuong and Thuyen want their children to stay home in the evening. Linh explains: “I want my children to stay in the house. If they go out I want to know where they go”.²³¹ Public space in the neighbourhood has come to be associated with crime; younger people who hang out in the ward’s streets and coffee shops are especially believed to be “no good people”, as Anh formulates it. Instead of having their children hanging around in the neighbourhood, they prefer that they visit public spaces such as Hoan Kiem Lake or semi-public spaces like cinemas, swimming pools, etc. Interviewees’ statements also match the general observation that the local public space empties in the evening between 8 and 9 pm. At this time families retreat into their private space within the home, shutting windows and doors. After this time, dark alleys are only used for transit, to reach the public spaces in the centre or to return home from work. Eventually, they are not longer used for lingering and interacting.

This development diverges from the common appraisal of a high degree of social control on the local level in Vietnam. It appears that self-control in the form of collectives finds itself in a state of dissolution. As the majority of neighbours are no longer acquainted with each other the regulating mechanism of social control, for instance the watchful eyes of neighbours, increasingly loses its potential. Korff refers to this as the “semi-public sphere of the locality”.²³² Within the spatially demarcated area of the locality an element of anonymity constantly prevails creating uncertainty among residents. Consequently, the feeling of a loss of order in public space in the Ngoc Ha ward results in an appreciation for the home as a safe and ordered place. Sennett (1991: 48) calls this “trautes Heim”, as it shelters the intimate from the disorder of public space. Private space is regarded to be the core of family life that needs to be protected.

6.4 Retreat from social and state control

In the city, any behaviour and activity can be externally observed. To Koenen (2003: 158) observation is an instrument of civilisatory control prevalent in urban environments. In this context, he refers to Goffman’s (1971) work on “Interaktionsöffentlichkeit” which requires anonymity among actors. In Hanoi, this general instrument of civilisatory control is joined by instruments of the state; while urban public spaces like Ly Thai To Square are watched by the municipality’s guards, supervision on the urban ward’s local level is organised in the form of police and resident groups (*to dan pho*). Local police are in charge of households’ registration with the authorities, as well as the maintenance of security and order in the area (Harnois 2000: 110). In contrast, the resident group has multiple functions; it is the smallest administrative unit in the urban ward, with each group comprising about 25 to 30 households, whereas an urban ward comprises 50 to 100 resident groups.²³³ The group head works closely with the chairman of the ward’s people’s committee. He acts as the mediator between local authorities and residents and is in charge of collecting money for the ward as well as the registration of birth, marriage, residence, and propaganda, etc. Furthermore, the resident group leader mediates conflicts between residents (Koh 2006: 47 ff.; Waibel 2002: 44). Since the leader is elect-

²³⁰ Interview with Anh, 16.05.2008.

²³¹ Interview with Linh, 16.05.2008.

²³² Discussion with Rüdiger Korff, 08.06.2010.

²³³ Koh (2006: 47) explains that newly created wards such as Phu Thuong would consist of about 50 resident groups, while older wards in the urban core area are made up of 70 to 100 resident groups. For example, the research area of Ngoc Ha, which became an urban ward in 1980, consisted of 63 resident groups in 1996 (Anon. 1996: 10).

ed by the locality, the resident group also has an informal connotation.²³⁴ This becomes particularly evident with regards to the domination of horizontal ties in the relationship between leaders and residents in contrast to the vertical ties prevalent in citizens-state relations. Koh (2006: 48) declares that “[r]esident groups emphasize informality”; leaders do not have to be party-members or of a high socioeconomic status. Most leaders are middle-aged or older and have been living in the area for quite some time. Moreover, they are “amiable, behave well, and possess good family background” (Koh 2006: 48). However, it is exactly this comingling of formal and informal structures and responsibilities that makes the position of the group leader not very popular.²³⁵ Koh (2006: 49) quotes an observer who characterises the status of the head of the group as follows: “powers light like straws but responsibilities [are] heavy like stones”. This means that group heads are not assigned sufficient power to appropriately conduct their responsibilities. Consequently, they are often criticized by both officials and residents for bad performance and since the leader of the group is obliged to report to the ward even minor violations of the law, he is particularly blamed by fellow citizens. Conversely, for the state resident groups are an efficient instrument of state control on the local level; “[g]roup heads are the only state agents in Vietnam that reach right into homes” (Koh 2006: 49).

“They can mobilize people personally, and in this sense the state is not “faceless” but comes in the form of the eagle-eyed, amiable elderly neighbour, who, even without being the group head, already has some authority over younger neighbours” (Koh 2006: 49).

Apart from group heads, the newly established neighbourhood watch groups (*to bao ve dan pho*) further institutionalise the control of the collective over local public space. Decree No. 38/2006/ND-CP promulgates the enforcement of public order (*an ninh trat tu*) in the neighbourhood through the foundation of neighbourhood watch groups. The groups need to cooperate closely with the ward’s people’s committee, party committee and the ward’s police. Its leaders, as well as its members, are elected by representatives of the residential unit (ANTD 12.06.07). The state-ordered establishment of these groups on the local level corresponds to citizens’ association of public space with criminality and insecurity.

Both the existence of resident groups and the introduction of watch groups illustrate that it is difficult to distinguish between social and state control on the local level. Although initially introduced by the state, the informal function of the resident group further hints towards a kind of self-regulation through the collective. There is little differentiation between a citizen who watches the neighbours’ house and activities as the resident group leader or as the “caring neighbour”, as it is only a question of formal assignment. This is recognisable through such figures of speech as, *Ban anh em xa mua lang gieng gan*, which implies that the family might be far away, but the neighbours are near. On one hand this means that the neighbours are always there to help; on the other, it also connotes that the neighbours are always present to watch.

Women and children are particularly subjected to the social control exerted by family and neighbours. Rooted in the Confucianist configuration of society, the roles of both women and children are determined by dependencies and subordination. While children’s subjection to the parents is ascertained through the imperative of child piety, women’s dependence is based on the so-called “threefold” obedience (*tam tong*), which requires women to pay respect to the father as a daughter, to pay respect to the husband as a wife, and to pay respect to the eldest

²³⁴ Group heads (*to truong*) and assistant group heads (*to pho*) are annually elected based on neighbours’ nominations. Nominations are not supervised by higher level authorities, and thus give them an informal character (Koh 2006: 48).

²³⁵ The compensation for a group head is rather low. According to Koh (2006: 99) in 2005 group heads received 100,000 VND/month, whereas assistants only received 70,000 VND.

son as a widow. Correspondingly, Ngo Thi Nhan Binh (2004: 48) outlines three roles that are traditionally assigned to women; the role of the self-sacrificing mother (*me hien*), of the devoted daughter-in-law (*dau thao*), and the dedicated wife (*vo dam*). Traditionally, a woman's place in society was clearly associated with the home: "In the public eye, a woman behind 'high walls and closed gates' (*kin cong cao tuong*) was viewed as a virtuous one" (Ho Tai 1992 cited Ngo Thi Nhan Binh 2004: 50).

However, demands resulting from preceding modernisation and technologisation increasingly contest this traditional account of a woman's role. Advances in economic liberalisation, while opening up a manifold of possibilities, also pose new challenges to the traditional relationship between men and women. Nowadays the female labour force is additionally needed to ensure a household's income. Not only are women in charge of the household, but they also have to engage in wage labour or informal economic activities and thus they are required to have a high degree of mobility. This is evidenced by the fact that many women no longer stay with their parents until they get married. Instead they seek employment or a place to study far away from home. Some women leave their rural hometowns to migrate to the city in order to find work in industrial zones, for example in garment factories, while others move to the city to attain higher education at universities. This enables females to escape supervision by family and neighbours, at least until they marry. To these young women, urban public spaces offer at least a temporary escape from the social control of the home. Ngo Thi Nhan Binh contends (2004: 57) that a great number of younger women tends to spend more time away from home than at their domicile. Out of the reach of their parents' control and traditional norms they are able to express their individualism in speech and behaviour. The same is true for married women, as they usually move in with their husband's family, at least until the couple can afford to build its private home. From that time onwards, most women are persistently watched by, and responsible to, their in-laws. In order to get away from this constant supervision strolling and exercising with friends in the public space has become a common strategy to create spheres of privacy. These are rare opportunities for women to liberally talk about intimate issues with people other than family members. During this field research, specifically in the early evening hours, women were observed meeting and chatting with their girlfriends on streets and sidewalks. Thuy substantiates this observation: "Especially women tend to go out to talk about private affairs. In the house there is always a third person that listens. That is why you see so many women walking or sitting together on the streets chatting" (Thuy, 07.07.2008).

Here, the gender variable is once more critical for determining spatial practices. While women appear to deliberately employ public space to talk about personal issues with their friends, men are more likely to refrain from discussing private affairs at public gatherings.²³⁶ Thuy says: "Men go to the *bia hoi* and talk there. Although in *bia hoi* men never talk about their private affairs. Conversations are always very superficial" (Thuy, 07.07.2008).

The gender specific choice of public space is striking. Whereas women mainly meet on streets and sidewalks, men tend to frequent cafés and the popular *bia hoi* drinking stalls.²³⁷ Furthermore, women show a tendency to stay adjacent to their home. Female residents of Ngoc Ha report that they sometimes took a stroll around urban public spaces like Ba Dinh Square or the Botanical Garden nearby.

²³⁶ Wood (2005: 173) explains that these gender specific practices of closeness between friends have already been pointed out by Paul Wright (1982). He declares that direct verbal communication, including sharing feelings, is important for women's friendships. In contrast, men's friendships are more likely to be based on common activities.

²³⁷ Cafés in the city centre are also populated by women; conversely the *bia hoi* is primarily male-dominated.

In conclusion, in contrast to the formerly described “emptying of local public space”, which is paralleled by a retreat into intimacy, urban public space can also offer an escape from social control exerted in the private space of the home. In this case, the anonymity of the urban environment is not seen as a “threat”, but on the contrary, as a chance to create a place of privacy outside the private sphere of the family. The temporary “escape” strategies employed by women demonstrate this “liberating” aspect of public space in Hanoi.

6.4.1 Retreat into virtuality

In the discussions about the retreat from social and state control, the dimension of digital space also needs to be taken into account. In Vietnam, the digital space of the internet continually shows the potential to become the location of public spheres. Discussion by private individuals about the common good increasingly takes place in digital space; users are particularly attracted to the possibility for discussions outside direct state control. However, the internet is also increasingly used to escape social control. From interviews and newspaper analysis it became clear that the internet is frequently used by young people to create spheres of privacy.

“In the narrow homes that line Ha Noi’s winding alleys, secrets have long been a scarce commodity - an ideal situation for fretful parents.

That, however, is changing with teens’ widening access to a world that remains mysterious to many parents: the internet. Now, any adolescent with a computer at home (or a spare VND 3,000 to spend on an hour at an internet cafe) has access to a practically unlimited bank of information, as well as a private forum for chatting with friends” (Vietnam News 16.12.07).

In the anonymous space of the internet, young people can share their most intimate secrets and problems with friends, or even the whole cyber community.

Catering to the demand for anonymous counselling, in recent years numerous consultation programs were introduced by newspapers and radio programs and many young people get their information from there. The discussion of private matters in digital and virtual public space is taken as a further sign of the growing “intimisation” of public space. Thus, a great number of young people employ blogs exactly in the way as the state wishes it to be used, as personal online diaries. However, while the government might be pleased with young users’ employment of the internet for merely private affairs, parents have a quite diverging opinion on this development. The increasing demand by young people for individual privacy poses new challenges for the traditional ways of raising children.

“Bui Hong Hanh, a mother of two living in HCM City, is puzzled with the behaviour of her second daughter. She never had any trouble communicating with her first-born, but her second child only grows more distant the more Hanh attempts to reach out to her. “She never opens her heart to me,” she complained. “Her closest friend is her laptop that her father gave her when she turned 16. I feel like the internet has replaced my role as her mother” (Vietnam News 16.12.07).

The access to an uncontrollable amount of information through the internet and mass media is also blamed for the decay of morality and values among Vietnamese youth. Within this context, the rising rate of child-criminality is also discussed. The Ministry of Public Security reports that 20,000 school-aged children live on the streets engaging in youth gangs. Apart from the children’s poor education and the lack of structure in family life and school, the negative impact of the internet and mass media are said to encourage youth crime (TN 25.05.08). This ongoing discussion was further fuelled by the circulation of a private sex video of a young

Vietnamese actress on the internet in 2007. Hoang Thuy Linh was the leading actress in a series dealing with teenage issues named *Vang Anh's Diary*. In the daily soap opera, she played a school girl who in spite of her modern appearance referred to the traditional Confucianist female virtues of *cong, dung, ngon, hanh* that determine woman's labour, appearance, speech, and behaviour. In discussion platforms on the internet and newspapers, she was condemned for not following this moral lifestyle in real life (The Associated Press 24.10.07). It was the latest internet scandal in Vietnam and aroused a public debate about morality and gender. Viewers were mobilised to vote on moral and lifestyle issues by short text messages and e-mails (TN 26.10.07); thus digital space was once again employed as a public space to discuss an individual's private life.

The state has anticipated parents' fear of the internet, and their belief that it has a negative impact on their children's moral conduct. Therefore, in an attempt to prevent young people from having access to violent and pornographic websites, the government set up web-filtering programs. The so-called "Green Internet Services" was introduced in order "to block website containing pornographic, violent or other objectionable content by blocking access to sites both inside and outside Vietnam at the level of the ISP network with a blocking rate of 99 per cent". Of course, this technique of blocking "harmful" websites can be easily applied to weblogs expressing opposing political views. Once such firewalls are installed, it is difficult to determine the purposes they actually serve. Nonetheless, the protection of the common good is taken as a pretext by the official sphere to legitimise this measure of supervision. The Director of the Vietnam Datacommunication company declares: "The introduction of the Green internet service is our commitment to families and society to keep the internet environment green for our next generation" (BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 20.05.08).

6.4.2 Conclusion

Bauman (1997: 205) speaks of urban life as a life among strangers. Although the stranger is physically near, he stays psychologically distant. Because the stranger cannot be integrated into a known social system, an unpredictable element constantly prevails in urban encounters.

"Strangers meet in a fashion that befits strangers; a meeting of strangers is unlike the meetings of kin, friends, or acquaintances – it is, by comparison, a *mis*-meeting. In the meeting of strangers there is no picking up at the point where the last encounter stopped, no filling in on the interim trials and tribulations or joys and delights, no shared recollections: nothing to fall back on and to go by in the course of the present encounter. The meeting of strangers is *an event without a past*. More often than not, it is also *an event without a future* (it is expected to be, hoped to be, free of a future), a story most certainly 'not to be continued', a one-off chance, to be consummated in full while it lasts and on the spot, without delay and without putting the unfinished business off to another occasion" (Bauman 2000: 95).

Thus, life among strangers confronts the urban dweller with the ambivalence of danger and liberty (Bauman 1997: 205 f). On one hand, the anonymity of the city produces insecurity, while on the other, it favours individualisation as Simmel (1903: 131) points out. This ambivalence is reflected in urban landscapes, and more precisely in public space.

The ambivalence of urban public space is expressed in the emptying of local public space, and the emergence of national public spaces. Local public space appears to be emptied in favour of national public spaces that cater more to the demands of urban residents for leisure activities. Additionally, local public space becomes associated with crime and insecurity leading residents to protect the private space of the home from outside intrusion. As a result, people retreat into intimacy. To depict the estrangement and anonymity of urban life and its per-

ceived negative effects, references are made to the former village community or the community of the hometown. The members of the communal house for example, constantly uphold the neighbourly relations and the importance of the *dinh* for the community in the area. Yet, Bauman (2000: 92) explains that the “community” has become a utopia:

“‘Community’ is these days the last relic of the old-time utopias of the good society; it stands for whatever has been left of the dreams of a better life shared with better neighbours all following better rules of cohabitation. For the utopia of harmony slimmed down, realistically, to the size of the immediate neighbourhood. No wonder ‘community’ is a good selling point”.

Apart from coldness and estrangement, public space also appears to connote liberty and freedom. It provides an escape from the supervision exerted in the private sphere of the family. The examples of women and young adolescents show that public space is employed to create spheres of privacy, which they cannot obtain at home. For women public space offers a retreat from the control of in-laws and their husbands. In public space they are able to talk and chat freely with their girlfriends. Young people also make use of the digital space provided by the internet to discuss intimate matters while escaping the social control exerted by their parents.

7 Privatisation of Public Space

The commodification of space has turned urban land into a highly competitive resource. Within the global system of cities, diverse municipalities strive for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). The abstraction of space driven by advances in communication technology is not only recognisable on the global level, but also has a direct impact on the local level.

“Through abstract space the symbolic meaning of a locality or a construction, deriving from communication, is replaced by the market or symbols defined by the administration. The rationale for the production of space is its exchangeability and the profitable usage of space, while the administration tries to develop the cities following the rationality of their plans” (Evers, Korff 2003: 13).

In favour of investments, localities, as well as public spaces, are continuously destroyed. Private capital shapes the urban environment (Davis 1990 cited Goheen 1998: 488). Mitchell (2003: 167) argues that municipalities actually provide the legal basis for this “annihilation of space”. Consequently, the entanglement of politics and economy deserves special consideration.

“In city after city concerned with ‘quality of life’ – with, other words, making urban areas attractive to both footloose capital and to the footloose middle and upper classes – politicians and managers of the new economy have turned to what could be called ‘the annihilation of space by law’ – the space to live, sit, and take care of oneself if there is no house or home in which to do so” (Mitchell 2003: 167).

In her book, *The Culture of Cities*, Sharon Zukin (1995) presents the replacement of the ‘public sector’ with ‘private sector’ in the definition of public space.²³⁸ Under the guise of municipalities’ beautification and “purification” measures, public spaces are gradually turned into controlled spaces, thus overturning the common ideal of public spaces’ unlimited accessibility and openness. Conversely, rules or entrance fees determine access to these spaces and therefore, in current literature the privatisation of public space is often referred to the “End of Public Space”.²³⁹

In recent years, Vietnam has also experienced this privatisation process in urban development. In general, privatisation is an integral part of the economic liberalisation process brought forward by the state. Yet, more specifically, it is pushed by the state’s withdrawal from the provision of social services, including such primary examples as the educational and health sectors. The so-called *xa hoi hoa* policy, “socialisation”, provides the legal framework for the transfer of public amenities to the private sector in order to relieve the state budget. In this scope, existent public spaces in Hanoi are privatised and increasingly, “semi-public spaces” like shopping malls, corporate plazas, amusement parks, etc. are produced. These spaces generate carefully planned landscapes that undermine social interaction instead of supporting it. Thus, Mitchell (2003: 139) refers to these places as “pseudo-public spaces”. Here, he argues that diversity within these places is determined by the unifying forces of consumption and commodification, resulting in the “homogenization” of the public (Mitchell 2003: 141). Marginalised groups and political movements are systematically excluded from these pseudo-public spaces and what remains is a public consisting of passive recipients. Mitchell (2003: 141) concludes that representations of space have come to dominate spaces of representation.

²³⁸ Zukin presents the example of New York’s Central Park. In the late 1980s, the management of Central Park was assigned to the private Central Park Conservancy Organisation which demanded the demolition of the Naumberg Bandshell. This area used to be the location for popular concerts but then it had also become a site where homeless people gathered.

²³⁹ See for example Mitchell (2003) who dedicates a whole chapter to “The End of Public Space? People’s Park, the Public, and the Right to the City”.

As those who control knowledge, signs and codes create representations of space, it is considered an immediate outcome of planning. Through planning, it is possible to restrict movement within space as well as to determine the rules of in- and exclusion.

“Architects seem to have established and dogmatized an ensemble of significations, as such poorly developed and variously labelled as ‘function’, ‘form’, ‘structure’, or rather, functionalism, formalism, and structuralism. They elaborate them not from the significations perceived and lived by those who inhabit, but from their interpretation of inhabiting. It is graphic and visual, tending towards metalanguage. It is graphism and visualization. Given that these architects form a social body, they attach themselves to institutions, their system tends to close itself off, impose itself and elude all criticism. There is cause to formulate this system, often put forward without any other procedure or precaution, as *planning* by extrapolation” (Lefebvre 1996: 152).

According to post-developmental Arturo Escobar (1992: 132), “the concept of planning embodies the belief that social change can be engineered and directed, produced at will”.²⁴⁰ He argues that planning is an instrument of domination and social control that is based on the belief that social problems require scientific and technological knowledge in order to be dissolved.²⁴¹ Accordingly, planning relies on ideological and political practices, which are actually “regarded as rational or objective” (Escobar 1992: 140).²⁴² Escobar (1992: 133) names the reification of space and objectification of people as specific practices for town planning that, together with urbanism as a science, have an enormous impact on the social and spatial environment of the city. Lefebvre (1990: 174) determines the urbanistic illusion to be a state utopia, while at the same time anti-theory and anti-praxis in nature. For Lefebvre (1990: 168, 181), the science of the city, urbanistics, is an ideology. Furthermore, it is a doctrine as it dissolves the dialectic movements immanent to the urban. In other words, urbanistics is a tool that serves particular interests while hiding behind a specific socio-logic. Thus, urbanistics comprises both ideology and institutions (Lefebvre 1990: 174, 198). Lefebvre’s critique also focuses on the instrument of planning. He defines “[p]lanning as doctrine, that is, ideology, interpreting partial knowledge, justifying its application and raising these (by extrapolation) to a poorly based or legitimated totality” (Lefebvre 1996: 97). He argues that the commercial and cultural infrastructures provided by planners are not able to satisfy the “need for creative activity, for the *oeuvre* (not only of products and consumable material goods), of the need for information, symbolism, the imaginary and play” (Lefebvre 1996: 147).

In fact, planning facilitates the manifestation of ideology in concrete space; it is the modern instrument employed by the state to erase diversity and replace it with homogeneity or national culture. According to Louis Wirth’s (1964) definition of the city, dimension, density and heterogeneity are its main determinants and thus, modern urban planning assists in dissolving the most crucial characteristics of the city.

²⁴⁰ In his contribution “Planning” in *The Development Dictionary*, Escobar (1992: 144) elaborates upon planning as “totalizing universal[s]”. Starting in the West, planning has been linked to the rise of modernity since the 18th century. In the post-war period, planning techniques and practices were transferred to the Third World, thereby—in Escobar’s perception—contributing to so-called “underdevelopment” (Escobar 1992: 132).

²⁴¹ For Southeast Asia, modernisation has become an indisputable premise. In Vietnam, planning is a recognised instrument for reaching the goal of modernisation, as indicated by the five-year socio-economic development plans, as well as Master Plans, in the field of urban development.

²⁴² Ananya Roy (2009: 10) further criticizes planning as a premise for development and the solution to social problems. In her recent article, “Strangely Familiar: Planning and the Worlds of Insurgence and Informality”, she declares: “While it is tempting to envision planning as that which can and must regulate the urban crisis, as the rational keeper of the public good, my analysis demonstrates the ways in which planning itself is a state of ambiguity and exception”.

However, how is it possible that, in spite of urban planning, cities worldwide thrive based on their diversity and unplanned encounters between all sorts of actors? In the following it is argued that this is possible through a constant re-negotiation of the relationships between state, society and economy. As long as vibrant public spheres are present, representations of space are not likely to dominate spaces of representation. Thus, I suggest that the concretisation of representations of space, and thus their ability to determine spatial practices is dependent on processes of negotiation between citizens, state, and the economic sector. Here, the “active” involvement of citizens in the production of urban space is critical. The case study of Thong Nhat Park demonstrates how an active engagement in public spheres has the potential to prevent planners and investors from superimposing their ideas and ideologies, or enforcing the conceived onto the lived spaces of urban users.

7.1 Symbolic Economy

According to Zukin (1995: 3) the production of space is accompanied by the production of symbols. With respect to the configuration of public space, she highlights “the intertwining of cultural symbols and entrepreneurial capital”. In order to define the interplay between economic factors--land, labour and capital--and the symbolic languages of ex- and inclusion, Zukin (1995: 2) introduces the concept of an urban “symbolic economy” that denotes a city’s “visible ability to produce both symbols and space”.

“So the symbolic economy features two parallel production systems that are crucial to a city’s material life: the *production of space*, with its synergy of capital investment and cultural meanings, and the *production of symbols*, which constructs both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity” (Zukin 1995: 23 f.).

The symbolic economy is determined by growth in cultural consumption and its industries. Thus, every effort to restructure urban space should also be regarded as an attempt at “visual re-presentation” (Zukin 1995: 10, 24). Both architects and developers have concrete ideas about the usage as well as the symbolism of their objects.

Recently in Hanoi, diverse projects corresponding to Zukin’s symbolic economy were realised. Heightened demand for both luxury housing and leisure space accompanied an increase in income in Vietnam’s largest cities. Accordingly, the consumption of leisure has come to signify social status among urban residents in both Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, as the following quotation indicates:

“An aspiring young person may enjoy a familiar leisure activity but at the same time produce and display status via the choice of an exclusive leisure space. In these cases, it is the place rather than the activity that convey the new aesthetic language employed by urbanites in their leisure practices” (Earl 2004: 367).

Projects that seek to satisfy the rising demand for exclusive spaces are initiated by officials and investors, ‘place entrepreneurs’ (Molotch 1976 cited Zukin 1995: 7), whose “ability to deal with the symbols of growth yields ‘real’ results in real estate development, new businesses, and jobs” (Zukin 1995: 7). Housing projects targeting the New Rich and middle-classes in Hanoi include the Ciputra Westlake constructed by the Indonesian Ciputra Group as well as Trung Hoa-Nhan Chinh built by the state-owned VINACONEX company. With regards to leisure space, the planned transformation of Thong Nhat Park into an amusement park is an obvious expression of the ongoing substitution of public space with “spaces of controlled spectacle” (Mitchell 2003: 141).

7.1.1 “Socialisation” of Thong Nhat Park

In Hanoi, the municipality is responsible for the planning and management of urban parks. The two major municipal authorities involved are the Hanoi Authority for Urban Planning and Architecture (HAUPA) and the Transport and Urban Public Works Services (TUPWS). While HAUPA is in charge of the overall planning of parks on the city level, TUPWS is responsible for the detailed design, maintenance, as well as the construction of parks. TUPWS’s budget includes the construction of new parks, the maintenance of parks, and street trees. Additionally, entrance fees collected from large urban parks are used for maintenance services. However, the existing funds²⁴³ are still insufficient to serve the growing demand for open green spaces in the city (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-9 f.).

In cases where the private sector is involved, HAUPA needs to issue the construction permit. Since an official catalogue of planning criteria does not exist, permits are granted according to the authority’s discretion and once a permit is obtained, the investor is in charge of the construction works. After the implementation of the project, the park’s maintenance can either be transferred to TUPWS and one of its public companies, or to a homeowners’ or residents’ association under the responsibility of the investor (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-7).

Accordingly, three different budget sources for the construction of parks can be identified. First, a budget is provided by a municipal authority, second by an investor, and third through a state-private combined budget (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-10). The second category of budget allocation has recently been promoted by the so-called *xa hoi hoa* policy. In recent years, the management and preservation of diverse urban parks like Tuoi Tre and Yen So was assigned to private enterprises (Tuoi Tre 11.08.07). The legal basis for the privatisation process is composed of diverse decisions passed by the People’s Committee of Hanoi in the period from 2000 until 2005. With Decisions 3416/QD-UBND in 2000 and 7603/QD-UBND in 2001, the legal basis for the redevelopment of Thong Nhat Park with a scheduled budget of thirty billion VND was established. At that time, the focus was on the provision of new infrastructure. Approximately three years later, 16.02.2004, the leader of the People’s Committee in Hanoi passed Communiqué No. 09/TB-VP on the socialisation of Thong Nhat Park with the aim “to improve and more effectively develop” the park (VietNamNet 19.03.04 translated from Vietnamese). At first Tan Hoang Minh Company was selected to take over the maintenance and improvement of the park. Then, three years later, on the 24th of January 2007, the People’s Committee of Hanoi appointed Vincom Company as a second investor.²⁴⁴ The two entities are requested to cooperate closely with the state-owned Green Park Company (TNHHNN). Furthermore, they need to present their plans to the People’s Committee for official approval before implementation. The municipality has to report to the city’s Party Standing Committee, a special requirement as the project has a budget of more than one billion VND (VietNamNet 27.01.07; VietNamNet 21.02.07).

The investors’ objective is the construction of a theme park on Thong Nhat Park’s land plot. Both enterprises are eager to improve the green space so that “it becomes the largest centre of culture, festivities and leisure activities in the country, as well as a symbol of the capital of Hanoi” (Do Thi Net 12.03.07 translated from Vietnamese). The president of Vincom declares: “We will build newly developed merry-go-rounds in Thong Nhat Park so that no visitor to the park can ever say that he rode on such a carrousel in Singapore or Thailand before” (Vietbao 12.03.07 translated from Vietnamese). His statement indicates that the production of cultural consumption symbols is the driving force behind the project.

²⁴³ In 2005, TUPWS had a total maintenance fund of 35,730 mio VND (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-10).

²⁴⁴ The assignment was published in Communiqué No. 21/TB-UBND.

The aim of ‘visual re-presentation’ becomes even more evident when examining the details of the plan. In August 2007, the Vice-Director of the Municipal Office of Planning and Architecture announced that the redeveloped park would consist of three areas: 1. an area for public services and leisure facilities; 2. an area consisting of a flower garden and floating boats; and 3. a quiet area for relaxation and sports (ANTD 08.08.07). However, one week later the Director of Tan Hoang Minh Company revealed the project’s real dimension. Tuanvietnam (13.08.07) reported that the planned amusement park would be composed of 7 major areas: 1. an area for public buildings; 2. a club for culture and sports and ice-cream shops; 3. a “Beautiful Vietnamese landscape” with a model of its provinces; 4. a water area with music and carousels; 5. a leisure park; 6. a winter leisure park; and 7. a small water park. Furthermore, the leisure park should include diverse facilities like a mini-golf park, a cinema, a dance club, a two-storey parking space, cars for rent, etc. The winter leisure park would comprise a snow house, a park displaying famous edifices from Europe, as well as other amenities.

Although the Walt Disney Company is not an official investor in the project, the plan is evidently influenced by the “Disney Land” role model (Tien Phong 02.02.07). The term “Disney” has become very prominent in the public discourse about the project, particularly among opponents to the park’s redevelopment. The term’s negative connotation is striking. Disney appears to be associated with economic profit. The definition of Disney Land, as proposed by the Director of the private company OIKOS, clarifies the negative implications surrounding the development. Mrs Tran Thanh Van (2007: 30 translated from Vietnamese) defines Disney as a “project from the US, imitating nature, used in many countries; a big machine located in the open air to create artificial animals swimming under water or flying in the air”.

Zukin (1995: 8) highlights the economic success of Disney World and its negative implications for the development of public space. She explains that the Disney Company, being both a film production company and a real estate developer, has succeeded in creating a national public culture that anyone can identify with. This public culture is displayed in Disney theme parks. A collective identity is achieved through the transgression of both ethnic and class boundaries. Disney World represents a way of life that is suitable to anybody. However, despite their unifying character, these spaces are only open to those social groups that can afford the entrance fee and are willing to obey to the regulations set up by the private company (Zukin 1995: 49 f.).

Soja (1996: 160) refers to amusement parks like Disney Land as so-called “other places”, referring to Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia”²⁴⁵. According to Foucault (1994: 181), one principle of heterotopias is that they have the “ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves”. In theme parks diverse places come together to form one; the planned construction of a Mini-Vietnam next to a Mini-Europe is an example of the production of a heterotopia, as a mini model of Vietnam communicates a collective identity on a national scale, the construction of a Mini-Europe next to it hints towards Vietnam’s integration into the global society. This equation of the whole of Vietnam with Europe is only made possible within the scope of heterotopias.

In sum, if the plans presented above were to be realised representations of space could soon be superimposed onto the lived space of urban users, resulting in spaces of controlled spectacle. Access to the park and movement within it would be determined by conceived design and market principles. In these representations of space, limited room would be provided for free

²⁴⁵ In his article “Des Espaces Autres”, Foucault (1994) differentiates between two kinds of spaces: “utopias” and “heterotopias”. Utopias are emplacements that lack a real place, while in contrast to a utopias’ lack of physical space, heterotopias are real places. In fact, they are realised utopias in which all the real emplacements of a culture are represented, contested and reversed at the same time (Foucault 1994: 178). According to Soja (1996: 157) they function as “counter-sites” for existing places.

social interaction and activities currently conducted in the park, such as sports. The result would be the loss of an “intrinsic” public space for recreation in the city centre. Therefore, the news about the park’s privatisation provoked immense public opposition.

The opposition to the park’s redevelopment can only be understood with respect to the park’s history. Thong Nhat Park was one of the first people’s parks established in Hanoi. It was built in the years following the First Indochina War with the aim to raise the amount of open green spaces in the city. The area around Bay Mau Lake, which at that time was a landfill site, was redeveloped from November 1958 until the end of May 1961 (Dang Thai Hoang 2000: 77; Ho Chi Minh 1985: 137). The project could only be realised with the help of Hanoi’s citizens; they contributed labour to create the first public space. In an interview with *VietNamNet*, the architect Tran Thanh Van remembers how she, as a young person, was educated that “[t]he park is a project of public benefit for society”. She remarks that “[o]ur state was still poor and did not have money to invest, therefore, the youth like us had to contribute labour to build the park ourselves“. Therefore, she demands that the park remains a place for the people who built it. To her, Thong Nhat Park is distinct from other “parks”, such as Dam Sen and Suoi Tien Park in Ho Chi Minh City, because of its link to the “mission of public welfare” from its inception. Furthermore, she argues that the other parks were all related to economic profit-making (VietNamNet 07.08.07 translated from Vietnamese).

FIGURE 23: PLAYGROUND IN THONG NHAT PARK



Source: Private Photo (2007).

Thong Nhat Park was conceptualised as a park “of the people, by the people, for the people” (VietNamNet 05.02.07 translated from Vietnamese). Its symbolic communicative function is closely linked to nation-building, as the government succeeded in mobilising citizens to voluntarily engage in construction for the sake of society. Furthermore, the park’s symbolism is manifested in trees planted by honourable figures like President Ho Chi Minh, high-ranking members of the Communist Party, as well as foreign leaders visiting the country (Tuanvietnam 13.08.07). Interestingly, this symbolism was only recently resumed, when the two statues of Presidents Ho Chi Minh and Ton Duc Thang were planned to be installed in the park. The sculptures are a gift from the People’s Committee of Ho Chi Minh City to the city of Hanoi on the occasion of its 1000th anniversary. The statues, made from copper, show President Ho Chi Minh shaking Ton Duc Thang’s hand congratulating him on his election as Vice-President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1960 (Vietnam Discovery 31.08.09).

The founding history of the park illustrates that it always was a people’s park that favoured social interaction and recreation among urban dwellers. Accordingly, it is not surprising that Hanoians fear the loss of the park’s openness to citizens from all social strata. In particular, the elevation of entrance fees is a main point of critique. According to a survey conducted by

VietNamNet in 2004 and 2005, citizens would feel uncomfortable paying a fee that was higher than 2,000-3,000 VND. Many declared that if fees were raised the park would no longer be a park “of the people, by the people, for the people” (*VietNamNet* 05.02.07). In 2008, a general entrance fee of 2,000 VND (app. 10 Cent) per person was levied, while additional costs arose for parking a motorbike (2,000 VND) or bicycle (1,000 VND). It is striking that only two years later, at the beginning of 2010, the entrance fee had already doubled to 4,000 VND per person. However, respondents stated that there were times of the day, when they were not required to pay anything. They explained that before 8 am and after 5 pm visitors in sports clothes, coming to the park by foot were able to enter the park free of charge. The park’s guards recognised that they were neighbours, who come here regularly to do sports. Of course, people fear that if the public park was transformed into an amusement park, this free-of-charge access would be completely dissolved, and the fee would be raised to a much higher amount. Rising costs would not only affect citizens living in the immediate neighbourhood, but it would also affect the liveability of the city as a whole.

Apart from residents living adjacent to the park, a visit to the park has become an integral part of the daily or weekly routine of citizens from all over Hanoi, as, particularly on weekends, residents from other parts of the city frequent Thong Nhat Park. Data from 2002 until 2005 show a steady increase in the number of visitors to the park. While in 2002 only 355,000 people visited the open space, the number rose to 500,000 in 2005 (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-10). This indicates a rising demand for open green spaces in Hanoi, especially given the low rate of per capita green spaces.²⁴⁶ In 2003, recreational areas and parks represented only 284 ha, which is 0.3% of the total urban area (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-3). The HAIDEP study²⁴⁷ found that the demand for parks and green spaces is highest among the people living close to the city centre. Hence, Thong Nhat Park plays a significant role in the system of green spaces in Hanoi.

“In general, daily users account the majority among the users for major activities. It showed that residents who had easy access to parks and green spaces use them very frequently for daily activities like walking, exercising, and resting. On the other hand, people without easy access to parks and green spaces rarely enjoy those activities” (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-12).

Among the interviewee’s main activities, urban park visitors generally frequent parks “to exercise” (37%), “to take a walk” and “to take a rest”. These activities are reported to be carried out on a daily basis. Other activities, such as “to play with children”, “to see a performance”, or “to gather”, seem to be conducted less frequently (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-11 f.). In addition, a survey conducted by a reporter from *VietNamNet* (11.08.07) in Thong Nhat Park illustrates that many users regularly come to the park without having an appointment. Consequently, the park has become a regular meeting point in the city, where on one hand strangers mingle, and on the other, meetings have been institutionalised.

Thus, when confronted with Thong Nhat Park’s redevelopment, citizens of Hanoi actively engaged in diverse campaigns against the plan. In public discourse, media-in the form of both

²⁴⁶ According to the HAIDEP study (2007b: 3-3) green spaces accounted for 67.6% of Hanoi’s total area in 2003. However, this number not only included parks and forests, but also paddy fields, and other agricultural land, as well as water surfaces.

²⁴⁷ The presented data are based on the Household Survey conducted by the HAIDEP team in 2005. In preparation for the Hanoi Master Plan 2020, 20,000 households in Hanoi were studied in order to analyse the latest socio-economic conditions of the residents, the provision of infrastructure, as well as people’s assessment of urban services and issues. Apart from the household survey an additional park user survey was conducted, resulting in 1,096 randomly chosen samples. One result, which marks the high demand for public green spaces, is that 38% of the respondents come from more than 5 km away, whereas 33% of the interviewees live in the surroundings of 1 km. The most favoured park types are small parks within walking distance, followed by amusement parks and large parks with green spaces (HAIDEP 2007b: 3-15 ff.).

virtual, and digital space—has come to play an important role. In 2007, when Vincom was appointed an additional investor, newspapers, such as *Tien Phong*, *Tuoi Tre*, *An Ninh Thu Do*, *Lao Dong*, online papers like *Dan Tri*, as well as internet news providers like *VietNamNet*, *Tuanvietnam*, etc., constantly reported the latest news concerning the project. Reports ranged from interviews with investors and experts to letters to the editor. Internet platforms like *Tuanvietnam* even opened up discussion platforms inviting citizens' opinions. The following information from a survey conducted by *VietNamNet* (11.08.07 translated from Vietnamese) in August 2007 sheds light on this public discourse:

Mr. Tran Khac Ke, retired teacher, states: “To be honest, people that come to this park frequently are workers. Rich people go to other places, but certainly not here, or only come occasionally. Furthermore, it is foremost a park of society. That is why in my opinion it should not cost any fee”.

Mr. Le Cuu Long, retired cadre, outlines: “I think Thong Nhat Park is in the process of economisation, while the park is vanishing it is transformed into a place for business. When the aim is the economisation of the park, then it is only essential to get money from rich people. It will discriminate between rich and poor. It will prevent the old and workers with little money from entering. I find the park like it is now, with its natural landscape comprising trees, water and paths, beautiful already. What is needed most in the ‘improvement process’ is to maintain its clean and safe environment, thus no extra constructions need to be added”.

Mr. Tran Khac Nhiem, business man, describes: “In the past my parents contributed their labour power to build Thong Nhat Park. It is now improved and thereby changed, it will lose the original meaning that it had for them, and we need to worry about the mental health of everybody”.

As citizens' opinion and ideas were published in digital and virtual space, the two investors Tan Hoang Minh and Vincom, used the opportunity to respond to readers. On the 13th of August 2007, *Tuanvietnam* published an official correspondence from the two investors. Yet, instead of providing detailed information about their plans, the representatives of the enterprises activated the collective memory of Hanoians by highlighting the history of Thong Nhat Park and Hanoi's role as national capital. In particular, in the first part of their statement they focused on the park's construction using the citizens' labour force mobilised by President Ho Chi Minh. This was followed by a commemoration of the trees planted by Uncle Ho and other important domestic and foreign personalities. Finally, they indicated that the park's redevelopment is a necessary prerequisite for Vietnam's global integration. It was not until the second part of the correspondence that they actually took up some of the questions readers appeared to be most concerned about. They guaranteed the following points: 1. not to cut any trees in the park; 2. not to build any big restaurants in the park; 3. not to construct any high-rise offices or hotels in the park except for the hotel and office system of SAS²⁴⁸; 4. not to cut the park into pieces; 5. to only use 2,5 ha of the park's total area for construction, while the remaining 47,5 ha would remain water surface, green space, etc.; 6. to build an underground at the entrance of Tran Nhan Tong to regulate the traffic and to serve as parking space that would not affect the park's trees; 7. not to build a big supermarket on the plot of the park; 8. not to construct a big 3D-4D cinema in the area; 9. to open the park for free so that everyone

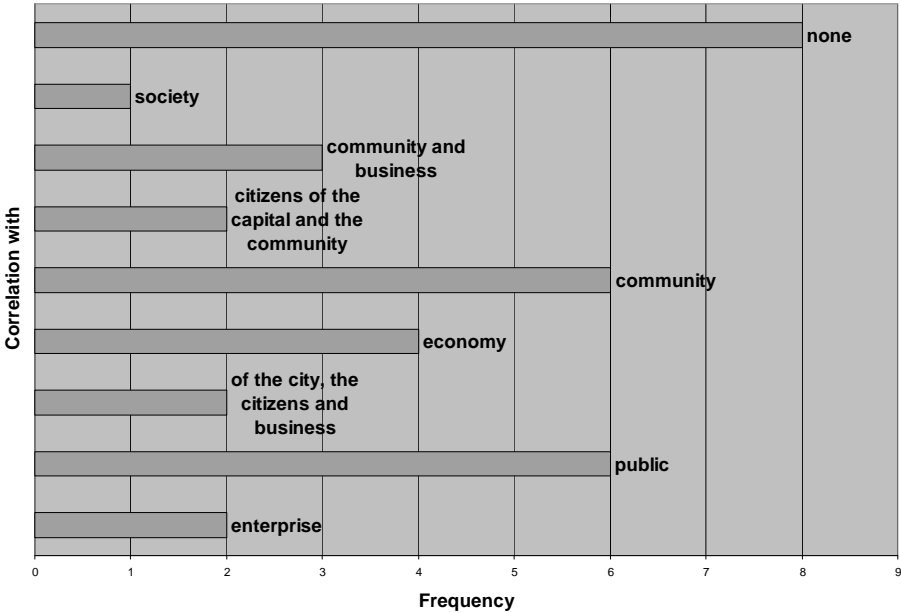
²⁴⁸ With respect to the hotel, they made it quite clear that it was not their project but rather the project of the Water and Electricity Company that had already been granted permission 10 years ago.

can use the park for sports, walking and relaxation²⁴⁹; and 10. to organise a public meeting to attain citizens’ opinion and to publish the plans as soon as they were completed.

The intention behind this list of 10 points is evident; the investors wanted to calm public opposition by ensuring the park’s preservation as a people’s park. The media was used by the economic sector to communicate with the public, as a sphere of mediation between economic and public interests.

The following analysis shows that the media is also employed by citizens to articulate their concerns. The data presented are based on a sample of 40 articles collected between January 2007 and August 2007.²⁵⁰ In public discussions, the frequent reference to the “common good” is striking. In the sample, the two terms most often applied in this context are *loi ich*, meaning “Good, welfare, benefit” (34 times), and *phuc loi* translating into “Welfare” (13 times).²⁵¹ In order to capture the connotation that goes along with both terms, it is important to analyse them in their connection to other phrases, and thence the context in which they are used.²⁵² In the reports *loi ich* was employed in association with the following expressions: “public” (6), “community” (6), “the people of Hanoi and the whole community” (2) and “society” (1). Although this argues for an understanding of the common good with regards to society and the public sphere, it is also noteworthy that in six other cases it was applied with respect to economic interests. The term *loi ich* was adopted four times in relation to the word “economy”, and two times relating to “enterprise”. In the remaining cases, the term was employed without further correlation to another noun or adjective (8), or it was referred to in a comprehensive way connoting the “public interest of the municipality, citizens of the capital and business” (2) or “the community and business” (3).

FIGURE 24: FREQUENCY OF THE APPLICATION OF *LOI ICH* IN RELATION TO...



²⁴⁹ Already in February of the same year, Tan Hoang Minh Company had announced the introduction of a so-called “open door” policy to ensure that “the people can enter the park freely at any day, any time and do not have to pay to enter” (VietNamNet 05.02.07 translated from Vietnamese).

²⁵⁰ The precise time period was from 27.01.2007 until 25.08.2007.

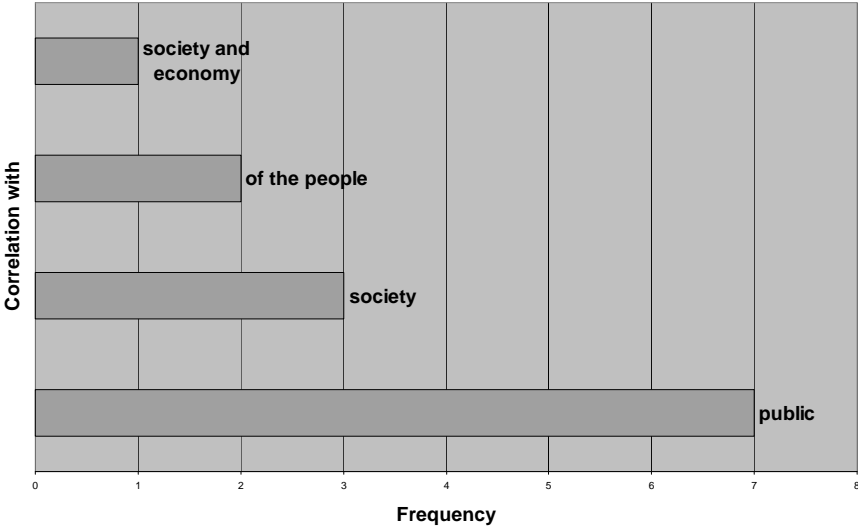
²⁵¹ For the translation of the terms see Dang Chan Lieu et al. (1997: 438, 590).

²⁵² In order not to rely on a direct translation taken from the dictionary, the terms ought to be interpreted in their context of application. This is deemed necessary because the analysis will show that according to the dictionary *loi ich* is translated as “Good, welfare, benefit” (Dang Chan Lieu et al. 1997: 438). However, it is also applied to designate the interest of only a small group, for example investors or economic interests, and thereby, is actually in conflict with the public interest.

Particularly, the use of the term “good, welfare” vis a vis economy and enterprise appears to be rather irritating. However, it needs to be clarified that the correlation only occurred in contra-arguments to the redevelopment plans, implying that the project should not favour just the investors’ interests (*loi ich cua nha dau tu*) (Tuoi Tre 16.08.07). In contrast, analysing the use of the term *phuc loi* (welfare) a more distinct picture evolves:

In the 13 cases that the term *phuc loi* was adopted, it was referred to in connection to “public“ (7), “society“ (3), “of the people” (2) and “society and economy” (1). The examination clearly shows that *phuc loi* appears to connote a more general comprehension of welfare in the sense of the common good. In contrast, *loi ich* seems to be used to refer to the particular interests of a specific group.²⁵³

FIGURE 25: FREQUENCY OF THE APPLICATION OF *PHUC LOI* IN RELATION TO...



The above analysis demonstrates that references to the common good are largely relevant for the debate about the redevelopment of Thong Nhat Park. At this point, the correlation between public space and public sphere is extremely explicit. It is citizens’ concern for public space that leads to the development of public spheres that negotiate the common good. Most interestingly, these public spheres are not formed in the concrete public space they are concerned with, but rather in digital and virtual public space. Print media and internet news platforms present citizens with the latest news about the redevelopment plans, while at the same time providing fora for discussion. Particularly, the contributions to the discussion platforms as well as the letters to the editor show that the accessibility of Thong Nhat Park is a primary concern for citizens of all societal strata. Apart from these platforms, journalists present citizens’ and experts’ opinions about the project in their reports. In the end, an overall understanding of the park as a public space that first and foremost serves the public benefit crystallises.

Furthermore, the park can be considered one of the few “civic spaces” in the city, as defined by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS). It denominates a space that favours social interaction among residents, whether in private or public space. Civic space is both inclusive and autonomous from the state and private business (Douglass et al. 2002: 4-37).

“In the broadest sense, inclusive space is open to people of every age, income, education, and ethnic group, including life styles; it allows maximum freedom of interperson-

²⁵³ It is used to argue that the objective of the redevelopment must not be the benefit of the investors (*loi ich cua nha dau tu*) (Tuoi Tre 16.08.07).

al interactions that go beyond the purposes of making money, consumer shopping or employment” (Douglass et al. 2002: 4-37).

The strength of the concept, its emphasis on the absence of the state as well as the exclusion of private economic interests, is now challenged by the privatisation process. Consequently, citizens fear that economic interests will come to outweigh public interests. Thus, the redevelopment of the park is declared a public affair, which is not left to the state and private sector alone. Here, according to Eisenstadt’s and Schluchter’s definition, public spheres evolve. Public spheres are located in between the official sphere, the state or the People’s Committee of Hanoi, and the private sphere. Moreover public spheres monitor the common good (*phuc loi*), which is in this context the preservation of the park’s openness to the public. At the same time, features of the Habermasian concept can be detected as well. People from the private sphere assemble to form a reasoning public. Habermas’ accent on the role of the print media in public discourse is retrieved in the empirical example. Additionally, experts and professionals like architects and scholars support public opinion. At this point, once again, the role of professionals in the constitution of public spheres in Vietnam becomes apparent. Professionals and their associations are able to communicate their interests and opinions through institutionalised channels towards state agencies, thus bearing the potential to mediate between citizens and state. At the workshop, “System of public green spaces in Hanoi capital”, held in Hanoi on the 3rd of August 2007 representatives of the Federation of Construction, the Architects’ Association and the Community Health Organisation were brought together with representatives of the official sphere such as the leadership of the Ministry of Construction and the People’s Committee of Hanoi.²⁵⁴ During the meeting, the assembly issued a statement with the title “Rescue green spaces of Hanoi”, proclaiming that public spaces must serve the public welfare without a profit-making purpose. Changing these places into leisure facilities serving economic interests would endanger the common good. Aside from Thong Nhat Park, representatives argued that Thu Le, Bach Thao, Tuoi Tre and Yen So Parks were crucial to Hanoi’s system of green public spaces, and therefore needed to be preserved (Tien Phong 04.08.07). During the workshop, lawyers and scholars declared that they were even willing to go to court if Hanoi’s green spaces were taken advantage of in order to make profit. In this context, the deployment of the term *khong gian xanh cong cong* (green public space) is striking. As already stated in the introduction, the expression *khong gian cong cong* and its literal translation of public space, is not used colloquially. In the overall debate, Thong Nhat Park was most commonly referred to as *cong vien* (park) or *khong gian xanh* (green space). The application of the term “public space” might be a result of the setting of the workshop, as the majority of participants were professionals. However, the professionals’ use of the phrase “public green space” in connection with the words *loi ich* and *phuc loi* argues once again for a comprehension of public space as part of the common good and welfare of society, and not merely as the vocabulary of urban planning.

²⁵⁴ The workshop was organised by the Association of Planning and Development of Vietnamese Cities in cooperation with Health Bridge, a US non-profit health information exchange serving Greater Cincinnati.

7.2 Action for the City: Mobilising People's Participation

With respect to the emergence of public spheres within the scope of the privatisation of public space, the work of “civic organisations” (Wischermann, Nguyen Quang Vinh 2003: 186) also needs to be considered.²⁵⁵ One such civic organisation in Hanoi is *Action for the City*, which was founded in December 2006 with the primary objective to improve urban dwellers' living conditions. The official mission statement is:

“Our mission is to improve the quality of life for all in Hanoi and other cities by increasing community participation, bringing common voices to policy-makers, and using a variety of creative forms and media as tools for social change” (Action for the City 2009).

The organisation initiated a project that focused on the preservation of Thong Nhat Park. The overall aim is to formulate a guideline to ensure people's participation. The organisation first became concerned with the preservation of public space when it was working with a community located on the banks of the Red River. In the locality, a resident had transformed communal space into a private parking place for personal profit-making. In this case, *Action for the City* assisted the community in winning back the communal space. The director indicates that within the community the private appropriation of public space is relatively easy to handle because residents know which authority to address.²⁵⁶

In contrast to communal space, the redevelopment of a centrally located park like Thong Nhat Park is far more complicated. The problem is that citizens are not informed about where they should hand in suggestions, comments, complaints, etc. Since the park is managed by the municipality, people are not aware of which agency is actually responsible for the park, particularly whether they should address the park management board or the Hanoi's People's Committee. Thus, the first step in their project was the assessment of the responsibilities concerning the management and maintenance of public space at the municipal level. Although they were able to detect general institutions that handle citizens' complaints, they were not able to identify which institution is specifically in charge of municipal public space. General institutions included newspapers and public hotlines as well as the local authority, *phong tiep dan*. The *phong tiep dan*, of which several exist in the city, at first glance appears to be the right institution to turn to because its principal function is to handle petitions. Yet, a staff member remarks that the primary objective of people going to these offices is of a private nature. Her colleague argues that generally, when a dispute over private land occurs, people are more likely to take initiative than when it is a public space not located within their community. It appears that the awareness about public concerns is not as pronounced as it is for private interests. Thus, the organisation is not certain if citizens are willing to participate in their project, as their organisation represents the first time that an organisation attempts to activate citizens' participation in a public matter at the municipal level. They want to mobilise citizens through the collection of signatures and in the end, present a petition.

In order to know on which legal basis to base their operations, staff members conducted a study about the legal framework for public space. The study comprised a review of existing laws and regulations. Interestingly, they concluded that no legislation concerning public space

²⁵⁵ The term “civic organisation” is applied, according to Wischermann's and Nguyen Quang Vinh's (2003: 186) definition, denoting non-state, voluntary, non-profit oriented social organisations that articulate social interests and thereby affect policies.

²⁵⁶ Yet, she explains that according to her own experience, in the end no authority would really feel responsible for handling private individual's encroachment on private property. She reports that she first addressed the ward authorities, who sent her to the district authorities, who in turn sent her back to the ward. This further indicates that responsibilities among the diverse state agencies are not yet clearly defined.

management within the city exists whatsoever. This is quite astonishing because according to the HAIDEP study (2007b: 3-7) there is at least a division of labour between the two state agencies, HAUPA and TUPWS, which would need to be determined by a directive. Thus, the reason for not finding any legislation dealing with municipal public space may result from the fact that current legislation is not transparent and public, or that it entirely fails to exist. In addition, the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance passed in 2007, whose function is to enhance people's participation on the local level, is not of assistance in this particular case, as it only applies to the communal level, not the municipal level. Therefore, in the case of urban public space people's participation has not yet been institutionalised.

Since the development plans lack transparency both from the side of the investors and the People's Committee, the media appears to be the only reliable source for obtaining information about the current state of plans. Accordingly, *Action for the City* collected articles on the redevelopment of Thong Nhat Park published in national media over a period of three years, in preparation for entering negotiations with redevelopers as soon as the plans are promulgated. Apart from media research, they also conducted a stakeholder assessment. Interviews with state agencies, representatives of the media and park users should help to develop an understanding about diverse stakeholders' interests. As such, one appealing aspect of *Action for the City* is its understanding of public space as one form of public service for which citizens pay taxes. As they pay taxes, they expect the state to deliver the goods in return. One reader's comment, Bui Tung Anh indicates that this perception of public space is also shared by other citizens: "We are citizens working and paying taxes to the state, we only hope that there is a public space that does not look for gains" (VietnamNet 08.08.07 translated from Vietnamese). Furthermore, this attitude, combined with the demand to be actively involved in the decision-making process, argues for a rule of law-based understanding of citizenship. This corresponds to what Holston (2002: 325 f.) refers to as "urban citizenship". Holston argues that the role of the nation-state as "the locus of primary affiliation" is diminishing and gradually replaced by more local or shifting memberships.²⁵⁷ He regards cities as strategic arenas for the creation of new forms of citizenship because it is in urban agglomerations that masses of people live together and experience the same conditions of urban life. Consequently, people's mobilisation centres on right-claims concerning inequities of urban life rather than addressing inequities on a national level, which often overlap. Since the urban is their common locus of everyday life, they are preoccupied with difficulties and experiences of the daily struggle in the city. "In the process, they become active citizens, developing new sources of rights and new agendas of citizenship" (Holston 2002: 326). Thus, the term urban citizenship can be applied if: 1. "the city is the primary political community"; 2. "urban residence is the criterion of membership and the basis of political mobilization"; and 3. "right-claims addressing urban experience and related civic performances are the substance of citizenship" (Holston 2002: 326). All these requirements are present in the debate about the privatisation of Thong Nhat Park. First, the actors who actively mobilise against the redevelopment are urban residents, for whom the park is a civic space relevant to the liveability of the city. Accordingly, their right-claims focus on the improvement of urban living conditions. Second, the city is the political community, in which the negotiation takes place. Claims are foremost addressed to the People's Committee of Hanoi that is in charge of the privatisation process. On the basis of citizens' individual claims to improve urban living conditions, the civic organisation, *Action for the City*, seeks to organise people's participation. By formulating a guideline to ensure people's participation in public matters, the association aims to encourage citizens' self-organisation. They have recognised the necessity of an articulation of urban dwellers' inter-

²⁵⁷ Holston (2002: 326) claims that urban citizenship does not necessarily replace or exclude national citizenship, but it can result in a "reformulation of national citizenship". This is also applicable to non-nationals.

ests beyond the communal level. In the case of Thong Nhat Park, the conditions for the formation of self-organisation beyond a spatially demarcated area, here the park's immediate neighbourhood, is most likely because it is a public green space of significance to the whole urban community.

7.2.1 Reconceptualising public space

The case study of Thong Nhat Park indicates a reconceptualisation of public space in Hanoi. Diverging from the emic perspective that public spaces are constituted by sacred spaces that used to be exclusive spaces only open to a particular social group, public space is defined as a space open to everyone. In this context, the variable of “accessibility” or “openness” is critical. First, it denotes that citizens ought to be able to enter the park free of charge. Citizens demand that the park opens for free and that fees are only enacted when special amenities are available within the park (VietNamNet 27.01.07). Second, accessibility designates the physical openness of the park. Thong Nhat Park is surrounded by an iron fence and is only accessible via four gates where guards collect the entrance fee.²⁵⁸ Giang explains that the authorities think that the park is safe because it is fenced, but actually the complete opposite is true. She declares that “because it is fenced, it is unsafe”. Consequently, public space ought to be accessible to everyone, at anytime and from anywhere. Furthermore, it is regarded a public amenity that needs to be serviced by the municipality on the basis of citizens' taxes.

This reconceptualisation of public space further argues for a reconfiguration in the triangular relationship between state, economy and society. In times of so-called “Market-Leninism” (Logan 2000: 254), the relationship between the three sectors and their exchange with one another has changed. In particular, the transfer of public amenities and social services from the state to the private economic sector results in a modification of state-society relations. In his work on “The Voluntary Sector”, Wuthnow (1991: 11) outlines the overlapping of the three sectors. According to him, it is important to look at the transactions occurring between the sectors in the form of competition or cooperation, and the exchange of resources. The sectors' symbolism is at stake in these exchanges, particularly concerning their identity, their ability to make claims on public resources, as well as the legitimacy of the values they espouse. The empirical example illustrates that while the state and economic sector seem to cooperate closely²⁵⁹ – favoured by the so-called “socialisation” policy – the voluntary sector in the form of civic organisations like *Action for the City* is hardly able to make claims on public resources due to the non-transparency produced by the state and the economic sector. However, with regards to the legitimacy of the values the three sectors espouse quite a different picture evolves. Contributions in discussion platforms, as well as statements by civic organisations and professionals, point to the incompatibility of public space with the private interest of companies:

“Just recently at the workshop on public green spaces in Hanoi, a number of experts declared that the city of Hanoi ought to open all public green parks like Thong Nhat Park. In particular, all fences separating these parks from the surrounding spaces as well as the system of entrance fees ought to be abolished ... But, suggestions of this kind are hard to realise when one aims at mobilising the source of funding through the ‘socialisa-

²⁵⁸ The experts from *Action for the City* declare that currently the park is closed after 10 pm. After 8 pm it is emptied, in contrast to other public spaces in the city centre like Ly Thai To Square and the Lenin Monument, where citizens tend to mingle until 11 pm. Like the Botanical Garden close to Ngoc Ha ward, Thong Nhat Park is well known among Hanoians to be a meeting place for young-love couples and drug addicts after dark. That is why citizens usually refrain from visiting the park in the late evening hours, as they feel unsafe there.

²⁵⁹ Overall, the dominance of the state prevails as it determines the legal framework for privatisation.

tion' policy because investors are unable to care for public interests" (ANTD 08.08.07 translated from Vietnamese).

These critical voices signify that the values advocated by the state and economy actually lack legitimacy. This argument becomes clearer when looking at two theoretical implications put forward by Wuthnow (1991: 14) in reference to Habermas' concept of public sphere.²⁶⁰ The public sphere is regarded to be a place or process where communication about collective values can take place, resulting in what Habermas calls "communicative rationality". It is this communicative rationality that poses a challenge to technical and instrumental rationality prevailing in modern societies. The first implication that Wuthnow (1991: 14) draws from Habermas' theory is that advanced industrial societies are faced with a "legitimation crisis" because the state increasingly involves itself in the economic sector which results in "normative contradictions" as the state serves specific interests and the common good at the same time. Consequently, questions about the conceptions of the common good arise. The socialisation policy of the Vietnamese state points towards the state's growing engagement with the economy. The state, which is expected to focus on public benefit, thereby turns away from delivering the goods to society and focuses on catering to the interests of the economic sector. With respect to public space, the result is the establishment of an exclusive space only accessible to particular social groups who are able to afford the entrance fee. Wuthnow's second theoretical implication refers to the colonisation of people's "life-world", the social space where people live, by the state and market. It is colonised by norms prevailing in these spheres, which are bureaucratisation for the state and instrumentality and technical efficiency for the market. In particular, the latter norms of the market form the motive force behind the redevelopment plans for Thong Nhat Park. Here, economic interests have come to outweigh the public interest, thereby endangering the common good, particularly as Thong Nhat Park is perceived to be a civic space that needs to remain open to the public as well as autonomous from private business. Accordingly, public spheres comprising a wide range of social actors have evolved. The actors range from Hanoi's citizens to professionals, and the civic organisation *Action for the City*. The park's future is not left to the official sphere or private economy to determine, but rather is taken care of by public spheres.

²⁶⁰ Here, it should be remarked that Wuthnow (1991: 15) takes Habermas' theoretical elaborations rather as an "orienting device" than as "a set of empirically testable hypotheses": "Habermas has clearly paid more attention to master cultural tendencies than to the variations in social arrangements among advanced industrial societies. For that reason, and because of other assumptions (for example, about consensus and rationality) inherent in his analysis, his perspective appears more useful as a sensitizing or orienting device than as a set of empirically testable hypotheses". (...) "Nevertheless, it is possible to follow Habermas' lead in identifying tendencies within the state and the marketplace, albeit at a lower level of theoretical abstraction, that may be particularly consequential for the voluntary sector and for the articulation of collective values" (Wuthnow 1991: 15).

8 Conclusion

The charismatic centre Hanoi has become the “point of articulation” (Evers, Korff 2003: 6) for diverse social groups. It is the political arena where negotiations between citizens and the state take place. Since the introduction of the economic reform program, a multiplicity of spatial producers has emerged leaving their imprints on the city’s physical environment. Through everyday practices and the ascription of meaning, they continuously redefine the urban landscape.

When looking at the city as a “medium and outcome of power relations” (Kong, Law 2002: 1505), the social production of public spaces in Hanoi indicates a shift in state-society interactions. In order to grasp the different facets of public space in Hanoi, this study develops a three-dimensional model. As a result of the emic reconstruction of public space, sacrality is identified as one dimension. Religious activities constitute an integral part of everyday practices in public space; many public spaces are actually dedicated to national heroes, such as Ly Thai To, the Hung kings or to local saints. Furthermore, social cohesion on the local level is often achieved through religious references and the production of symbols.²⁶¹ The second dimension critical to the analysis of public space in Vietnam is officialdom. The public, or official space, mainly serves the demonstration, and thus, the maintenance of state power. The state manages and orders the design and construction of public space within the city. However, the party-state’s dominance is challenged with respect to the creation of meaning, as meaning is defined within and through the daily interactions between the spaces’ users and their practices.

Additionally, privateness constitutes the third dimension of public space. In recent years, as a result of economic reforms, private sector activities have increased. Interestingly, this development is accompanied by a massive private appropriation of public resources such as public or sacred space. The existence of the pavement economy is only one example of the private appropriation of the public sphere. Another aspect of privateness is, what I refer to as, the “intimisation” of public space. The anonymity of public space provides shelter from social control exerted by the family and neighbourhood at home. Thus, couples increasingly seek refuge in parks and at lakesides creating spaces of intimacy in public space. The last variable of privateness particularly signifies the ambivalence of public space’s function as the basis for the development of public spheres. Public space is frequently employed to create privacy and to conduct private activities, thereby hampering the formation of new communities and social groups. This hints to the privatisation of society. Yet, at the same time, the analysis shows that the traditional linkage between officialdom and sacrality manifested in space is altered as the public increasingly overtakes the position of the state in its relationship with the sacred.

In sum, this study illustrates that a multiplicity of public spaces is emerging in Hanoi, with differing degrees of publicness. Thus, public space in Hanoi can be both an arena for the formation of public spheres and an expression of the latter.

Public space in Hanoi has the potential to serve as an arena for citizens’ self-organisation. Face-to-face interaction enables the collective to become aware of itself; as citizens recognise that a common interest is shared by others, citizens are able to form a reasoning public. Sidewalks and parks in front of government institutions are transformed, through action in concert, into associational public spaces. Urban space becomes the site of public spheres in cases such as the assembly of street vendors in front of the Government Office or the vigils held by Catholics. According to Benhabib (1992: 78), public spaces are “sites of power, of common

²⁶¹ However, in the case study cultural activities in the form of religious festivities served as ‘bonding’ social capital rather than as ‘bridging’ social capital, thereby illustrating the limits of religious activities to serve as a basis for people’s self-organisation.

action coordinated through speech and persuasion”. However, in multiple cases the premise of collective action is not recognised, as many claims by citizens rest on an individual basis. Individuals from all over Vietnam gather in front of government institutions in order to denounce their personal or family’s misfortune. However, mobilisation based on the common good appears to be missing.

In their study about public spheres, Eisenstadt and Schluchter (2001: 11) identify three processes through which public spheres are constructed. First, they identify a process of “categorization”, which implies the formulation of a “discourse beyond face-to-face interaction”. Here, Eisenstadt and Schluchter implicitly distinguish between public space and the public sphere; public space offers an arena for face-to-face interaction, whereas the public sphere specifically “invites a debate on the problems of the common good, on criteria of inclusion and exclusion, on the permeability of boundaries, and on the recognition of the ‘other’”. Eisenstadt and Schluchter (2001: 11) refer to the latter as a process of “reflexivity”. The final process comprises the stabilisation and institutionalisation of public spheres. Public spheres tend to have their own dynamics that are not governed by the political arena. In the case of citizens’ individual right claims in Hanoi, the processes of categorisation and of reflexivity are not yet engaged. Accordingly, citizens’ individual demands in the public sphere are often not perceived by urban citizens or political institutions.

With respect to the symbolic communicative function of public space a growth in the publicisation of official spaces can be observed in Hanoi. Citizens’ occupancy of Ba Dinh Square, a space formerly governed by state dispositifs, can be considered an expression of an emergent public sphere, as already pointed out by Thomas (2002). As Prigge (1991: 101) contends, the symbolisation of societal power through the appropriation of space can only be analysed in terms of a relationship of meaning. Similarly, Löw et al. (2008: 64) argue that the materiality of space is perceived through symbolic references, and thus a system of *Sinngebung*. Staged state performances seem to have lost their unifying appeal; instead of participating in such forms of mass mobilisation, citizens tend to make their own choices about when and where to engage in public life. The public increasingly organises itself, attending cultural and sporting events and thus, official celebrations apparently fail to create an “official” public sphere (Oswald, Voronkov 2003: 46) legitimising the current order.

“Die legitimationswirksam hergestellte Öffentlichkeit hat vor allem die Funktion, die Aufmerksamkeit durch Themenbereiche zu strukturieren, d.h. andere Themen, Probleme und Argumente unter die Aufmerksamkeitsschwelle herunterzuspielen und dadurch der Meinungsbildung zu entziehen. Das politische System übernimmt Aufgaben der Ideologieplanung (Luhmann). Dabei ist allerdings der Manipulationsspielraum eng begrenzt, denn das kulturelle System verhält sich gegenüber administrativen Kontrollen eigentümlich resistent: es gibt keine administrative Erzeugung von Sinn. Die kommerzielle Erzeugung und administrative Planung von Symbolen erschöpft die normative Kraft kontrafaktischer Geltungsansprüche. Die Legitimationsbeschaffung ist selbstdestruktiv, sobald der Modus der «Beschaffung» durchschaut wird” (Habermas 1977: 99).

As such, as Habermas illustrates, the administrative system is unable to create meaning, as meaning is produced through social action. Citizens attribute new and diverse meanings to the presented places, thereby challenging the traditional linkage between state and sacrality and thus the status quo. In this context, public spheres akin to civil society are likely to evolve.

That said, the three-dimensional model of public space presented is of further assistance for analyses of civil society in Vietnam. The recognition of an overlap of the spheres of officialdom and public, or more generally speaking, of the interrelationship between state and society and the relevance of sacrality as a legitimising entity, are central to an emic perspective on civil society. In his assessment of “Civil Society Action and Governance in Vietnam”,

Wischermann (2010: 5 f.) explains that up to now most studies dealing with civil society have predominantly originated from a “domains-based approach”. Giddens (2001: 684) for example, defines civil society as a “realm of activity which lies between the state and the market, including the family, schools, community associations and non-economic institutions”. In a similar vein, Diamond (1999: 221) and Anheier (2004: 22) declare that civil society stands between the private sphere and the state, or the family, state, and market, respectively. For Wischermann (2010: 6 f.), such a domains-based approach immediately reveals its limitations vis a vis the development of civil society in an authoritarian regime like Vietnam because it presumes “clear-cut boundaries between the state and civil society” as well as between “civil society and the economy”. Overall, it is the premise that civil society is “autonomous from the state” that poses a major challenge. Therefore, Wischermann (2010: 6 f.) citing Beckmann (2005), suggests that the state-civil society relationship should be perceived as an interrelated one rather than two separate entities.²⁶²

Kerkvliet (2001: 239) depicts a similar account with respect to the relationship between state and society in Vietnam, declaring that they are different but not completely separate. Additionally, the close relationship between state and (civil) society is historically rooted.

Woodside (2001), in his study about the formation of collective identities in Confucian countries during the pre-enlightenment period, explains that, except in the Hegelian sense, public spheres failed to exist in Vietnam. He contends that “a public sphere that integrated would-be elites into the polity from above, by means of education, not a public sphere in which it was common for autonomous would-be citizens to interact privately” existed (Woodside 2001: 209). Woodside focuses on the official examinations, which, according to him, were a main factor in the creation of an elite collective identity. Although the examination sites offered an arena for scholars from all over the country to mingle, public spheres, distinct from the official sphere, were unable to develop.²⁶³ Woodside (2001: 215) argues that this can be attributed to the “politically mediated civil religions”.

“The relative religious peace of China, Korea, and Vietnam exacted a price, and the difficulty of navigating this particular passage was part of it. The very success of their politically mediated civil religions made the emergence of a public sphere controlled by legitimate interest groups less likely than in Europe” (Woodside 2001: 215).

The Confucian “vision of a stable cosmos” was characterised by mutual assistance between the king and his people. The ruler was both the civil and religious leader. The king’s task was to protect his people and the people, in turn, were expected to obey the ruler (Koh 2007: 220 f.; Woodside 2001: 195). Furthermore, commoners recognised the ruler due to his virtuousness. The emphasis on harmony and consensus in state-society relations is striking. Woodside (2001: 216) reports that even when the term “republic” was introduced in the 18th century, it was formulated as *nha nuoc cong hoa* which translates into “harmonious togetherness country”, rather than *res publica*. The relevance of religion is once more alluded to in the Vietnamese term for society. According to Woodside (2001: 216) the phrase *xa hoi* was borrowed from a classical term initially referring to a communal religious gathering.

²⁶² Correspondingly, Heng (2004: 159) argues that a lack of autonomy from the state does not imply that civil society completely fails to exist in Vietnam. According to him contestation does not necessarily have to come from a civil society autonomous from the state. Instead of incorporating mass organisations and other benevolent associations into the account of civil society, for example as Norlund does, Heng proposes to look at challenges to the state’s power monopoly coming from within the state itself. Heng (2004: 158) refers to Ding (1994) who analyses oppositional activities in China in the pre-1989 period. Ding found that the activities were linked to high party officials and state institutions; those within the system know how the system works and can use it for their own purposes as well as a cover to their political activism.

²⁶³ Woodside (1976: 69) declares that the Vietnamese dynasties had carefully prevented the development of scholarly associations outside the imperial bureaucracy for political reasons.

Additionally, Gillespie (2007: 139) designates morality as another important component of the Confucian ideal of the relationship between state and society. The elevation of morality above the law²⁶⁴ became most relevant in the 15th century when Vietnamese rulers began to embrace neo-Confucian orthodoxies. At that time, Confucian scholars believed that laws were deemed unnecessary as long as people were persuaded by education, social pressure and morality.

“Exogenous normative sources such as laws were not considered absolute, universal, or immutable but rather alternative sources of guidance. The chief aim of legality in this system was to maintain moral order notwithstanding gaps and contradictions in the written law” (Gillespie 2007: 140).

After Independence, these neo-Confucian moral principles were fused with Marxist-Leninist political ideas. Gillespie (2007: 142) reports that the party had to follow “revolutionary morality” (*dao duc cach mang*). Part of this morality was the interpretation of laws from five moral perspectives, including diligence (*can*), thrift (*kiem*), honesty (*liem*), loyalty (*chinh*), and public-spiritedness (*chi cong vo tu*). In 1960, the party formally took over the Soviet socialist legality doctrine, implying that legality facilitated state power, but did not delimit it (Gillespie 2007: 143). Although the Soviet system was adopted comprehensively, elite officials realised that the socialist rules were not able to completely replace traditional values and hierarchical principles. Consequently, officials also “used reason and sentiment in carrying out the law” (*ly va tinh trong viec chap hanh phap luat*) (Gillespie 2007: 144 f.).

The stress on ethics and morality is still prevalent in state-society relations today. The existence of mediation spaces indicates that local officials are expected to be “compassionate” when executing the law. In this context, Koh (2001: 292) refers to the initiation of “intra-state struggles”. Policies are passed at the national level, but are implemented on the local level. Therefore, the local administrative system determines state-society relations. Koh (2001: 282) concludes that “the party-state’s inability to implement policies and enforce rules is mirrored by the ability of society to negotiate and rework, again and again, the boundaries that the rules of the party-state try to impose”. Correspondingly, Kerkvliet (2001: 240) suggests that the state-society relationship should be thought about in terms of “arenas in which boundaries, rights, jurisdictions, and power distribution between state and societal agencies are debated, contested, and resolved (at least temporarily)”. In other words, contemporary state-society relations are characterised by processes of negotiation.

Recently, the relationship gained a new quality with an amplified reference to the law by both citizens and the state. In 1992, a new Constitution was promulgated, introducing a “law-based state” (*nha nuoc phap quyen*) (Gillespie 2007: 148).²⁶⁵ The transformation towards a law-based state can be considered the party-state’s attempt to establish a new basis for legitimacy. Thayer (2009: 48) argues that since *Doi Moi* the charismatic and traditional source of legitimacy have been supplemented by a rational-legal basis, or “performance legitimacy”. The reference to Ho Chi Minh’s charisma and the revolution are no longer sufficient to serve as the solemn basis of legitimacy. Therefore, the state seeks legitimacy through economic integration as well as an ordering of state-society relations through a “strong legal footing” (Koh 2007: 235). Thus, performance legitimacy denotes the state’s attempt to reduce poverty and to foster economic growth. With annual economic growth rates of about 7-8% and labour-

²⁶⁴ The Hoang Duc Codex of 1483 potentially constituted the most important legal framework of that time. Among others, the Codex regulated land ownership, determined burial and wedding ceremonies, and stipulated the punishment for the ten capital offences (Nguyen Khac Vien 1993: 79).

²⁶⁵ The establishment of a comprehensive legal framework had become a necessary undertaking in order to allow for the development of a private sector economy. Moreover, the state saw the necessity to turn to incentives and punishments based on the law, as citizens increasingly looked to market and non-state factors for personal economic decisions because the state had cut obligations like rations to individuals (Koh 2007: 226).

intensive industrialisation, a great part of the populace has profited from the outcomes of the transformation process and the state is expected to continuously deliver the goods. An increasing understanding of legality and citizenship rights among the populace parallels these growing expectations. For example, an increasing number of citizens take advantage of their right to petition, claiming compensations for inappropriate confiscations carried out by the state. In this context, the mass media have gained importance. Although they are dominated by the state, they begin to play a critical role in the formation of public opinion. On one hand, they inform citizens about public affairs, for example the modification of legislation or cases of corruption. On the other, citizens employ the media to publicise their personal grievances in hopes that state authorities will address them (Koh 2007: 229, 233). In fact, the public discourse about the pavement economy, as well as the controversial discussion of the socialisation of Thong Nhat Park, argue for the emergence of vibrant public spheres in Vietnam. The image of the city is considered part of the common good that not only the state determines, but also the public sphere. In particular, for the latter issue of the privatisation of public space, a public sphere beyond face-to-face interaction has formed, fostering a discussion on criteria of in- and exclusion and the common good. The emergence of public spheres around urban citizenship rights is amended by the formation of public spheres on the national level. Recently, the diplomatic relationship with China, the limitation of religious freedom, and calls for democratisation have been placed on the public agenda. This undermines the official discourse predefined by the party-state. Citizens openly voice their opinion about public interests in the print media and, more commonly, in cyberspace. Additionally, professional associations and civic organisations involve themselves in debates about public matters, thus supporting citizens' negotiations. These social dynamics accompany an intensification of discussions about the constitutionality of legislative acts in the supreme legislative body, the National Assembly (Koh 2007: 229). Thus, it seems that there is a growing self-perception among deputies in the National Assembly vis a vis their role as the people's representatives.

In sum, a process of both economic and political modernisation is under way in Vietnam. This might lead to the development of civil society in the full "equivocalness" of the term and thus, a bourgeois society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), and a society of citizens (*Bürgergesellschaft*) are gradually being formed, where the first negotiates the distinction between what is considered private and public and the latter demands political participation from the state.

In Europe, this claim for legal protection from the state contributed to the development of the public sphere in the sense of civil society.

"Indeed, the notion of private interests as distinct from public interests, especially the idea that private interests could serve as a solid base for the pursuit of public interests, seems to be European. It is tied to a legal tradition that endows the individual with subjective rights, an economic tradition that relies on the rational pursuit of self-interests, and an institutional tradition that emphasizes the separation between state and civil society" (Eisenstadt and Schluchter 2001: 11).

However, Schiel (2007: 84) declares that "economy and polity are not yet sufficiently disembedded in Southeast Asia to allow a clear-cut distinction between private and public". He regards "the double process of disembedding the private economy (sphere of the *bourgeois*) as well as the public sphere of political institutions" as the major conditions that give "the *civis* or *citoyen/ne* his/her realm of freedom" (Schiel 2007: 88).

"To sum up my view on Southeast Asian developments: here the process of disembedding has started, but is far from completed. Embeddedness still leaves its marks on both economy and polity: administration and economy are still entangled, and the economy is neither already really private, nor is the administration really public" (Schiel 2007: 93).

Although this is certainly true for Vietnam, nonetheless it needs to be remarked that at least the pursuit of private interests is on the rise. For example, Koh (2007: 226) notes that with *Doi Moi*, the defence of individual rights has become more frequent, at the expense of collective interests. The private appropriation of public spheres is only one example of this development.

In conclusion, the dynamics triggered by the transformation process are quite ambivalent. On one hand, economic liberalisation leads to a reduced stress on the collective and a turn towards a more privatised society. On the other, it raises the awareness for ownership, in the form of land-use rights, as well as citizenship. This results in an increased demand for legality and accountability from the state. It remains to be seen whether a society of citizens will be formed, calling for increased political participation from the state, or whether the growth of the bourgeois society will proceed, culminating in the tyranny of intimacy before the process of a stabilisation and institutionalisation of public spheres, as suggested by Eisenstadt and Schluchter, has even begun.

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