

Public Space and Hanoian Youth: Access to public parks and the use and preferences of young park users

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INTRODUCTION

Since the adoption of the market reform policy known as Doi Moi in 1986, existing public spaces in Hanoi have undergone significant transformations. Alongside these transformations, the simultaneous creation of new public spaces in the rapidly urbanizing periphery of the city has led to significant changes in the conception and management of public space. These transformations occur during a period marked by rapid urban population growth in the greater region of Hanoi. This growth has led to a significant rise in the number of youths in many wards and, in particular, in peripheral areas where new residential housing projects are under construction (see Table 1).

Table 1. Changes in population and provision of space per capita between 2000 and 2010.

	2000	2010
Total population living in urban wards	1 091 412	2 181 485
Youth living in urban wards (18-25 years old)	225 760	354 583
Water surface per capital (m² per capita)	11.10	4.84
Public gardens (m² per capita)	0.08	0.10
Parks (m² per capita)	2.09	1.48

Source: Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam and data gathered by Thi Thanh Hien Pham (2013-2014).

These trends have led researchers to explore the impact of urban growth on the provision of public space and the use of these spaces by residents of Hanoi. In an article that explores the spatial-temporal changes of green spaces in Hanoi, Uy and Nakagoshi (2007) reported that the total green space area in the city had decreased at an average rate of 3% between 1996 and 2003. Additionally, a recent governmental report (HAIDEP 2007) underlines the increasing encroachment on existing green space by various development projects and illegal constructions. This same report associates the deterioration of hygienic conditions around many of the city's 900 lakes and ponds to these sorts of developments and constructions. Though the concerns shared in both of these articles focus primarily on the green spaces of Hanoi, other researchers have expressed similar concerns that extend to a wider range of the city's public spaces (Kürten, 2005; Lam, 2005).

It is with a similar interest towards public space and its transformations during a period of rapid urbanization, that we sought to explore the access, use and preferences of public space by the youth of Hanoi. As part of a larger collaborative research project entitled “Youth-friendly public spaces in Hanoi”, our study focused on youth between the ages of 18 and 25 years old, “a transitional segment of the Vietnamese urban population whose socio-political practices have received scarce research and policy attention (Boudreau et al, forthcoming, 11). From the outset, we expected that youths’ relation to public space in Hanoi would differ from that reported in previous research carried out in cities of the western world. Given the drastically different urban fabric, local culture and daily lives of young adults in Hanoi, research previously undertaken in western cities can hardly be applied uncritically in Southeast Asian cities. A context-sensitive approach was therefore adopted in this project with two ultimate objectives:

1. To provide a better understanding of youths’ relations to formally-designed public spaces in Hanoi in terms of accessibility, usage, and preferences ; and
2. To identify ways in which policymakers and local decision-makers may intervene in the future in order to foster the development of youth-friendly public spaces throughout the city.

Although Western researchers have undertaken research regarding the importance of public parks in the lives of youths in many different cities (Malone, 2002; L’Aoustet & Griffet, 2004; Smoyer-Tomic, Hewko, & Hodgson, 2004), few researchers have turned their eyes towards Asian cities, let alone Southeast Asian cities, where the consumption of public space by youth may differ greatly.

This report is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews recent literature on public space. It discusses some of the benefits that these spaces bring to cities, critically reviews definitions of this concept, and introduces the question of public space in Hanoi by locating it within the wider context of East Asian cities. This section also briefly touches upon prior researching concerning accessibility and the way in which youth experience and interact with public space in the city. Section 3 describes the methodology used in this study and briefly describes the four sites on which we focused.

Section 4 presents the results of this study. Finally, in Section 5, we formulate recommendations to improve the quality of public space throughout Hanoi.

DEFINITIONS, CONTEXT AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The provision of public space is of a vital importance to development of a healthy urban environment. Public spaces help increase the liveability of urban spaces and offset some of the more detrimental aspects of dense urban living. According to a UN-HABITAT (2013) document, public spaces contribute to the improvement of the health and well-being of residents by reducing the impact of climate change, by encouraging people to walk and cycle and by increasing safety while simultaneously reducing fear of crime. By planning for green public spaces, cities can further mitigate environmental issues associated with large urban settlements. Public green spaces can generate cooler areas, effectively reducing and countering the heat island effect, while also providing space for air filtration that can effectively increase overall air quality (ibid).

In addition to these physical advantages, public spaces bring numerous social benefits. These spaces play a vital role in the creation of communities, providing residents with places to meet outside of their homes (considered the archetypical private space) and act as potential space for interaction, and in some cases, confrontation (Banarjee, 2001). To bring these multiple benefits, public spaces must first be appropriated, interpreted and lived by the urban population. It is only then that they can realize their full potential as quintessential urban spaces (Lefebvre, 1966). This appropriation of the space by urban residents also leads to concerns surrounding the equitable distribution of public space throughout an urban area, wherein an optimal situation would be reached when access to different types of public space is more or less equal to all residents of the city (Nicholls, 2001).

Defining public space

A clear-cut consensus on a definition of public space is evidently nowhere to be found. Orum and Neal (2010: 1) define public space as including “all areas that are open and accessible to all members of the public in a society, in principle though not necessarily in

practice”. This notion of accessibility to all members of society, shared by Orum and Neal, is common to many definitions of public space. Kostof’s (1992) definition, for example, incorporates this notion of accessibility and further defines the fundamental characteristic of universal access by stating that the use of public space is open to those from all income levels and social characteristics, effectively adding a stronger socioeconomic element to his definition.

However, some authors argue that a single definition of public space, such as those presented by Orum & Neal and Kostof, is impossible and reflects an idyllic vision of the past. Peter Goheen (1998: 480) clarifies the divergent viewpoints that characterize the definition of public space when he identifies “two highly contrasting assessments of the significance of public space to the conduct of public life in the modern city”. The first assessment, reflected in the definitions discussed earlier, is “the continuing significance of public space as the preferred arena where groups of every description can achieve public visibility, seek recognition and make demands”. Goheen’s second assessment takes a more critical approach and emphasizes the degradation of the public sphere and its relation to the “conflict of capitalism with the citizenry’s collective rights” and the resulting impact on members of society’s use and interest in public space.

Geographer Don Mitchell similarly criticizes the initial definitions mentioned above as antiquated because they do not take into account the constant evolution and reinterpretation of public space in society “produced through constant struggles in the past and in the present” (Mitchell 2003: 142). In Mitchell’s view, notions of public space evolve in tandem with political, economic, social and cultural changes within a given society. This is the approach that will be adopted in what follows as we move into a discussion of the significant historical transitions that altered the notion of urban public space in Hanoi from the pre-colonial period to the present day.

The evolving notions of public space in Vietnamese society

Temples, communal houses, pagodas, and markets as well as more official spaces such as the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long and the Temple of Literature are considered by some authors as early examples of public space in pre-colonial Hanoi (Drummond,

2000; Kurfürst, 2011; Söderström & Geertman, 2012). Similarly, access to these public spaces was highly restricted and reinforced the highly-segregated class structure in Vietnamese society at the time. Drummond (2000) claims that much of these restrictions were based on gender, with women excluded from communal houses but permitted to visit and use temples.

During the period of French colonial rule in Vietnam from 1887 to the end of the Indochina War in 1954, the French colonial rulers imported western methods of urban planning under the overarching banner of a 'mission civilisatrice'. Drummond (2000) points to the French rulers' desire for regulated and distinct spaces as a motive for the transformation of traditional multi-use streets into monofunctional streets and the destruction or reconfiguration of pre-colonial semi-public spaces and places of meaning, as two major transformations that occurred during this period (p. 2381). This allowed the colonial rulers to alter the urban landscape and prescribe new uses of space that strengthened their presence and authority on Hanoi's urban landscape. The destruction of sacred spaces such as Hanoi's Bao An Pagoda and Bao Thien Pagoda for the construction of a new Post Office and the St. Joseph Cathedral are a few examples cited by Kurfürst to demonstrate the feverish need of the colonial regime to inscribe its political vision and religious belief in the city's urban fabric (Kurfürst, 2012, p. 38).

Vietnam's independence from colonial rule (1945) and later the creation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1976) led to major transformations in the urban centres. Vietnam's cities found themselves shaped by Soviet practices of urban planning and architecture (Kurfürst, 2011, p.39). The construction of new Soviet-style buildings grafted itself on the Old French Quarter, physically marking the arrival of socialist ideals in the country. New official spaces such as large official squares and monuments of Soviet and Vietnamese socialist heroes defined the new forms of public space ushered in by the new socialist regime (Kurfürst, 2011, p.39). Streets were also renamed, much like the French did upon their arrival, and the new names chosen reflected the swift ideopolitical change underway by commemorating revolutionary heroes from Vietnam's history and abroad (Kurfürst, 2011, p. 39).

Reflecting China's Open Door Policy, Vietnam's Doi Moi policies (1986-) led to rapid urbanisation and growing foreign and domestic investments, mainly in the country's two major cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Kürten, 2008, p. 69). During the same period, the state lost its role as the main distributor of housing. In her analysis of the transformation of public space in Hanoi, Kürten explains that "allocation of land is now being increasingly determined by market forces as well as by the individual –and in most cases illegal–appropriation of urban land" (ibid: 70). Public space is now increasingly being shaped by three different groups of actors with significantly different interests: the party-state, the citizens and the private economic sector (ibid., p.70). While the party-state in many ways still perceive public space as an area suitable for displaying its domination and power, Kürten points to the diminishing rapport of Hanoi's residents to these spaces as spaces of political activity. Instead, she remarks that these spaces are now increasingly used for recreational purposes. Citizens of Hanoi have further transformed public space through their informal use of these spaces for private activities such as the selling of food and tea from roadside stalls, a sign of the increasing role played by the private sector in the economic liberalization which resulted from the *Doi Moi* reform (Kürten, 2008, p. 71). Finally, the private economic sector has also imposed itself on the transformation of urban public space in Hanoi. Rapid urban migration, coupled with increasing demand for consumer goods and better housing, have permitted actors in the private economic sector to deepen their role in the creation of new public and private spaces in Hanoi (Kürten, 2008, p. 71). As examples, Kürten points to the state-controlled Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUD) and the construction company VINACONEX as well as various foreign investors (Sega, Ciputra) as major new players who are transforming the city of with the construction of "new urban areas". Labbé and Boudreau define these areas (2011) "as large-scale redevelopments featuring commodity housing and public services, along with commercial and office space".

With the above-mentioned examples in mind, Mitchell's understanding of public space as a constant struggle between past and present becomes apparent and critical to an understanding of public space in Hanoi. The continuously changing face of public space in that city means that new conceptions and experiences of public space by the citizens, and various actors involved in the development of Hanoi will once again alter and reshape the various uses of these spaces.

Current issues regarding public space in Vietnam and the impact on youth

The use of public space remains heavily ordered and controlled by local authorities in Vietnam. Sporadic crackdowns on illegal tea stands, motorbike parkings and other forms of sidewalk encroachment provide evidence of such control. However, since the adoption of *Doi moi*, local authorities throughout Vietnam have adopted a more lax approach towards the policing of many public spaces. They retain significant control only over some of the more politically symbolic public spaces (Drummond, 2000), such as the area around Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum in central Hanoi.

The demographic growth of Hanoi has led to an increase in the use and demand for public spaces. Locals have now appropriated some public spaces once vehemently controlled due to their political symbolism (Kürten, 2008). In Hanoi, Lenin Square is a telling example of this transformation. Once a highly political and controlled public space, the square is now the site of a large variety of recreational activities. If Lenin's statue remains perched high above, it now watches hiphop dancers, skateboarders, and children in miniature cars rinding the square's large open surface. Though a relaxing of strict forms of policing and control in public space has occurred throughout Vietnam, discussions with youth throughout our research indicate that some still carry a level of distrust towards authority and those practicing more transgressive urban activities such as skateboarding, inline skating and parkour are still frequent targets of local police and security guards.

Researchers have also pointed to the increase in "pseudo-public"¹ space as a major obstacle affecting the way youth interact with and use public spaces (Drummond and Lien, 2009). With the appearance of more semi-public spaces and the growing presence of recreational activities that require entry fees, many youth find themselves unable to take advantage of these new forms of recreational space (ibid). Youth have also stated that public spaces do not necessarily appeal to their needs and "that they feel unwelcome or uncomfortable in many [public spaces]" (ibid). The sentiments shared by Vietnamese youth regarding public space and the increase in private and semi-

¹ The appearance of "pseudo-public spaces" is associated to the relocation of "spaces of sociability" onto private property, often a direct result of the privatization of public space (Low & Smith, 2013, p. 153).

private spaces could have strong repercussions on the quality of urban life for Hanoi's youth.

Other issues pertaining regarding Vietnam's public space are related to their overall design, upkeep, and increasing privatisation. In Hanoi, many of the city's public parks are overcrowded during peak hours in the mornings and evenings, which often limits the amount of space available for certain activities, especially those that require larger areas for proper play such as soccer, badminton, and aerobics classes. Additionally, the often-lackluster maintenance and upkeep of public spaces also result in excessive garbage in many public spaces. Litter floats on the surface and clutters the shore of many of Hanoi's small lakes.

Problem statement

Given the importance of public space in enabling a higher quality of urban life and the current context regarding the provision of public space in Vietnam, we consider it vital to further understand the roles that public space play for young Hanoians, a population that has largely transformed the demographic makeup of significant portions of the city in recent years. How has Hanoi's urbanisation affected the level of access youth have to public spaces and how do these spaces respond to the continuously evolving interests of a population increasingly exposed to new forms of media and entertainment that shift the way youth wish to use and express themselves in public space?

We chose to focus our attention on youth because, besides their role in the demographic transformation of the city, youth also represent a segment of the urban population that is often left aside in city planning. Authors like Malone (1992) consider youth to be a marginalized group "similar to gay and lesbians, indigenous people and refugees, who hold different cultural values, understandings and needs". As such a group, Malone also stresses the importance of supporting and valuing these groups in order to recognize their important contribution to the social capital of cities (ibid.). In Hanoi, the way youth interact and use public space remains largely unstudied and their contribution to urban life does not appear to influence city planning. By paying particular attention to their use of public space, this project seeks to acknowledge their presence in

the city, their role in shaping its future, and the ways in which they can contribute to the improvement of urban life.

If seeking to improve public spaces for youth, we focused on three themes: access, usage, and preferences. Good access to public space is critical because it enables usage by residents of a city. Talen (2002) mentions this symbiotic relationship between access and use when she defines access as “the quality of having interaction with, or passage to, a particular good service or facility” (p.259). To understand the way in which youth use public space in Hanoi, we need to study how they currently use spaces and the challenges and obstacles that may impede free access. However, given the very different makeup of many cities in the Global South, properly measuring access in these urban contexts, including Hanoi, calls for the adaptation of existing methods.

Access is often determined in Western cities through the use of proximity thresholds such as a 1000m walking distance to the nearest service or facility. These thresholds cannot easily be superimposed onto Southeast Asian cities, where, for example, the street network and travel modes differ significantly from their Western counterparts. In a city like Hanoi, where 84% of households own a motorbike, distances residents consider as being nearby or accessible may differ significantly than those in western cities. How then does this local context specifically impact the level of access to public spaces for youth? Furthermore, can the local context impede access for youth and prevent them from having valuable interactions with public space? What measures could mitigate possible obstructions to access?

As previously mentioned, definitions of public space often include references to accessibility. Though criticized for their idyllic vision, some authors identify open access to citizens from all income levels and social characteristics as a defining feature of public space (Kostof, 1992). Others are more critical and place significant importance on the exclusionary characteristics of many public spaces. Mitchell (1995), for instance, highlights the implicit or explicit exclusion of users based on gender, race or class as critical to defining public space. Spatial distribution of public space throughout an urbanized area and the varying degree of access experienced by the user therefore play an undeniable role in determining the ‘publicness’ of any given public service or amenity.

The often-exclusionary nature of public space has led some researchers to expand their definitions of accessibility to include more politicized variables which include social and economic barriers that can potentially impact the dispersal of goods and services. This has helped mitigate the use of what Nicholls (2001: 202) calls “value-free models” that characterize traditional studies of accessibility often based on a “purely geometric perspective”. The impacts of socio-economic and racial status on accessibility have, in recent years, increasingly become the focal point of accessibility research. This results in accessibility being frequently linked to spatial equity, a concept that refers to the “consideration of need, justice and fairness in the distribution of spatial inequalities” (Talen and Anselin, 1998). Based on Talen’s (1998) seminal *Visualizing Fairness*, Lindsey, Maraj & Kuan (2001: 334) identify four main conceptions of equity: “(1) equality, in which everyone receives the same public benefit; (2) equity based on need, in which the disadvantaged receive disproportionately more benefits; (3) equity related to political or economic demand for services, and (4) equity based on efficiency and market criteria”. For Knox (1978), the question of spatial equity becomes a crucial element of study when researching accessibility, and questions such as how much inequality is produced and which groups are most disadvantaged can ultimately lead to much more impactful research.

As mentioned by Talen (2002), access leads to interaction. When Hanoian youth access public space, they use these spaces to participate in activities and therefore help define these spaces. Through the use of these spaces and their experiences with them, youth also form preferences regarding the public space they frequent. Such preferences are significant because they identify qualities and shortcomings of public space from the viewpoint of young users who interact with public space in ways that may differ from those of the general population. If we are to understand the preferences of youth in regards to public space, we ought first to understand the use of these spaces in order to determine how one may affect the other.

Activity in a public space is intrinsically linked to the perceived quality of the space itself (Gehl, 2011). Broadly defined, perception is “the process of becoming aware of physical objects, phenomena, etc., through the senses” (Oxford English Dictionary, online). When

Hanoian youth use public space, their experiences through interaction help form an emotional response that is shaped by their senses. This perception of public space is the result of their access to and use of public space and allows youth to form preferences in regard to the spaces they frequent. The understanding of their preferences (likes and dislikes) is essential for the improvement of their experience in both future and exiting public spaces.

Objectives and research questions

Our work was guided by three main research questions that reflect the thematic orientation of the research:

- i) In terms of accessibility, what travel mode do youth use when traveling to a public park and what is the length of their typical commute?
- ii) In terms of use, what are the main activities undertaken by youth who visit public parks and what reasons influence their decision to visit a park?
 - iii) In terms of preference, what do youth like and dislike about the park space they use?

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

Data collection relied on a survey questionnaire designed to document users' experience with regard to travel behaviour, reasons of visit, and preferences. The specific questions asked of users concerned, for instance, the transportation mode they used to get to the park, typical travel time, the typical duration of visits to the park, obstacles encountered during the trip (traffic, heat, crowded sidewalks, etc.), activities in the park and likes and dislikes of the park. (For further details, see survey questionnaire in English and Vietnamese in the Appendix).

Resource and time constraints along with limited information about the population studied made it impossible to constitute a probabilistic sample. We therefore opted for a non-probabilistic quota sampling method. Set numbers of respondents were predetermined to assure that the experience of youths was adequately represented while also capturing gendered and temporal differences. Our goal was to survey enough respondents to be able to explore the experience of even smaller groups in the population (e.g. female youth users).

The establishment of the desired quotas followed three rules. First, we aimed to administer 100 questionnaires to youth in each of the four selected parks. Second, at each research site, we sought an equal split of male and female respondents (i.e., 50 of each group at each site). Third, we administered the questionnaires during the three busiest periods of park usage in Hanoi: weekday early mornings (5:30 to 8:30), weekday early evenings (17:30 to 20:30) and weekend evenings (16:00 to 19:00).

Data collection occurred between May and August 2015. All questionnaires were self-administered at the four research sites. In sum, 411 people responded to our survey, of which 8 were excluded because of uncompleted questionnaires and one respondent was excluded because the person arrived to the park by car, a form of transportation not representative of typical travel by Hanoian youth. In total, 402 respondents were retained (see Table 2).

The study's methodology and its implementation have a number of limitations. The research was carried out during the summer months and, as such, does not depict the use of public space by youth throughout an entire calendar year. Also, since we questioned only park users, our research method cannot explain why some youth do not visit public parks. Furthermore, during the survey administration process, we encountered groups of youth that were not always willing to be surveyed individually. In such cases, we chose to pass around questionnaires to a group and allow respondents to fill out the questionnaire on his or her own. Self-administration increased the likelihood of missed questions and errors, though we openly asked respondents to make us aware of any questions that they may have.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents amongst the 4 study sites.

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

Public parks of the study

The selection of parks for this study were based on the following criteria: (1) similarity in the overall role of the park in locals' life (in order to avoid choosing symbolic public spaces that may attract users from a long distance), (2) difference in the level of urbanization of the neighbourhood surrounding each park, and (3) characteristics of the

area neighbouring the park. The level of urbanization was determined by the official year the area received official urban status. In doing so, our goal was to include parks in the older and more central neighbourhoods of Hanoi, as well as parks in recently urbanized and peripheral areas (Figure 1). In regard to the characteristics of the area neighbouring the parks and because we are interested in the relationship between youth and the public parks they visit, we selected parks situated in predominantly residential areas, near schools, universities and significant employment hubs. This, we assumed, would help increase the potential for a higher presence of youth in the parks.

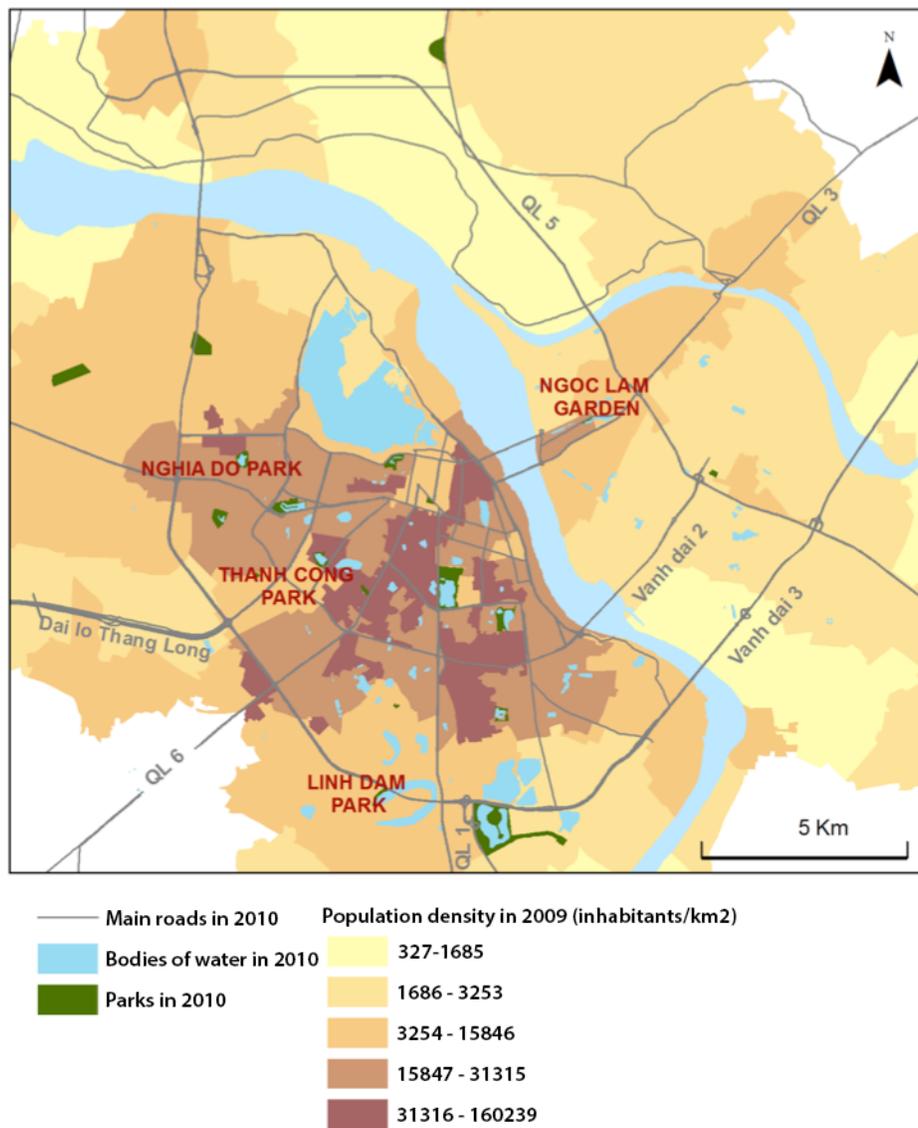


Figure 1: Location of the 4 surveyed spaces. Source: Thi Thanh Hien Pham (2015)

By using a sample of four parks, we hoped to explore the diversity of Hanoi’s parks and the surrounding area. A table quickly describing the four parks (Table 3), as well as a map and description for each park are found below.

Table 3. Descriptive overview of the four surveyed parks.

	Thành Công	Nghĩa Đô	Lĩnh Đàm	Ngọc Lâm
Area (ha)	10 ha	10 ha	5 ha	2.5 ha
District	Đống Đa	Cầu Giấy	Hoàng Mai	Long Biên
Ward	Thành Công	Nghĩa Tân and Dịch Vọng	Đại Kim and Hoàng Liệt	Ngọc Lâm and Gia Thụy
Urban status recognition	Before 1986	1996	2003	2003
Population density of the ward(s) (inhabitants/km ²)	35 315	37 264 and 16 773	9 422 and 4 933	26 095 and 8 142

Source: Thi Thanh Hien Pham (2015)

Thành Công Park

Thành Công Park is located in Đống Đa District. This inner-city district received official urban status prior to 1986. It has a very high density, with over 35 000 inhabitants/km². The park is situated near dense residential areas zones that include KTT (*khu tập thể* in Vietnamese, or collective residential zones) Thành Công and Đường Sắt. Important nearby employment hubs include Vietnam Television (VTV), Hanoi Radio Television, the University of Law, the University of International Relations, the Institute of Youth and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Two major entertainment facilities are also located nearby: the National Center of Cinema and the Theatre of Music and Dance of Vietnam.

Large walls surround Thành Công Park. Park access is through four entrances located on adjacent side streets; a parking area for motorbikes is located inside, near the main entrance on Láng Hạ Street. The centre of the park features a lake surrounded by a wide path; smaller areas in the park are designated for various activities.



Figure 2. Figure 3: Map of Thành Công Park and surrounding area.

Nghĩa Đô Park

Nghĩa Đô Park is located in the Cầu Giấy district, an administrative area that gained urban status in 1997. Population density around the park is high, varying between 16 000 and 37 000 inhabitants/km². Similarly to Thành Công park, Nghĩa Đô park is located near two large residential zones: KTT Nghĩa Tân and Thăng Long international village. Five important institutions and universities are located near the park: The Vietnam Academy of Sciences and Technology, the Institute of Sciences and Technology of Defense, the College of Teachers of Hanoi, the Academy of Journalism and Communication, and the National Political Academy. The park is also located directly opposite from Hanoi's Museum of Ethnology.

Access to the park is limited to two entrances, one located on Nguyễn Văn Huyền Street and the other on Tô Hiệu Street. Parking for motorbikes is located outside the park next to the main entrance on Nguyễn Văn Huyền Street. A wide path circles a lake in the middle of the park, while smaller paths lead to open areas closer to the park entrance. In recent years, the city built a large modern play area for children on the south-western side, which has become a popular spot for young children and their families. Small shops that sell toys, food and drinks are located near the new play area. Nghĩa Đô also has a large hilly area at its southern edge, used for gatherings and by those who wish quieter space.

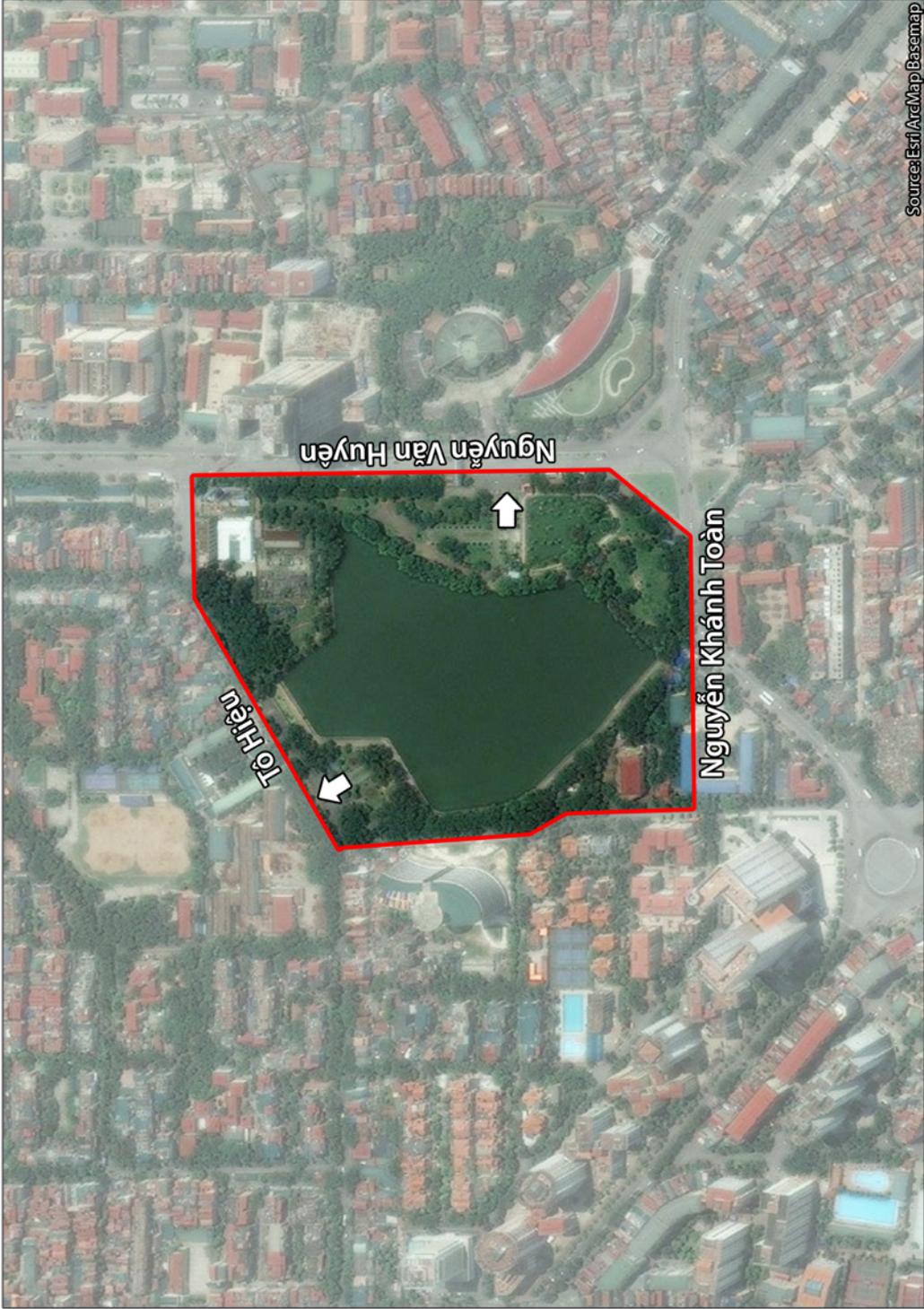


Figure 3: Map of Nghĩa Đô Park and surrounding area.

Linh Đàm Park

Linh Đàm Park is located in Hoàng Mai district, an administrative area that gained urban status in 2003. Located further out of the city centre than Nghĩa Đô and Thành Công parks, Linh Đàm Park sits amid new residential construction built in the past decade, though many homes are incomplete and their immediate futures are in limbo due to the 2008 financial crisis. The population density of the area surrounding the park is 9 000 inhabitants/km². Located near the park is KDTM Linh Đàm (KDTM refers to khu đô thị mới in Vietnamese meaning new urban zone) and Thăng Long University.

Linh Đàm, surrounded by walls and fencing, can be accessed by only two entrances. The park is located near the edge of Linh Đàm Lake. Trees densely cover much of the park and smaller paths cross the park in a zigzagged pattern. A small café is located near the southern entrance, and motorbike parking is available only during the hours of operation of the cafe. This limitation leads to many users riding their motorbike through the park. A large open area, two badminton courts and a swimming pool are located near the parks northern entrance.



Figure 4: Map of Linh Đàm Park and surrounding area.

Ngoc Lâm Park

Ngoc Lâm Park² is located in Long Biên district, on the western side of the Red River, opposite central Hanoi. Long Bien district is connected to central Hanoi via two bridges that cross the Red River. The population density of Long Bien is around 26,000 habitants/km². The park is located near KTT Gia Lâm, the College of Urban Works Construction, the Railway Vocational College, and the College of Technology of Hanoi.

Ngoc Lâm Park is densely covered by trees and sits along the edge of Cầu Tình Lake. A fountain at the centre of the park is surrounded by open space used for various sport activities. Paths intersect the park lengthwise and are used by many for running and other forms of exercise. A café and a children's play area with rides and games are located at the western edge of the park, where a guard collects an entry fee for use of the play area. A large parking area for motorbikes is located near the eastern edge of the park.

² Although Ngoc Lâm is officially a “flower garden” (vườn hoa in Vietnamese), we use the term park due to its large size (in comparison to other flower gardens) and its similar vocation to the other surveyed parks.

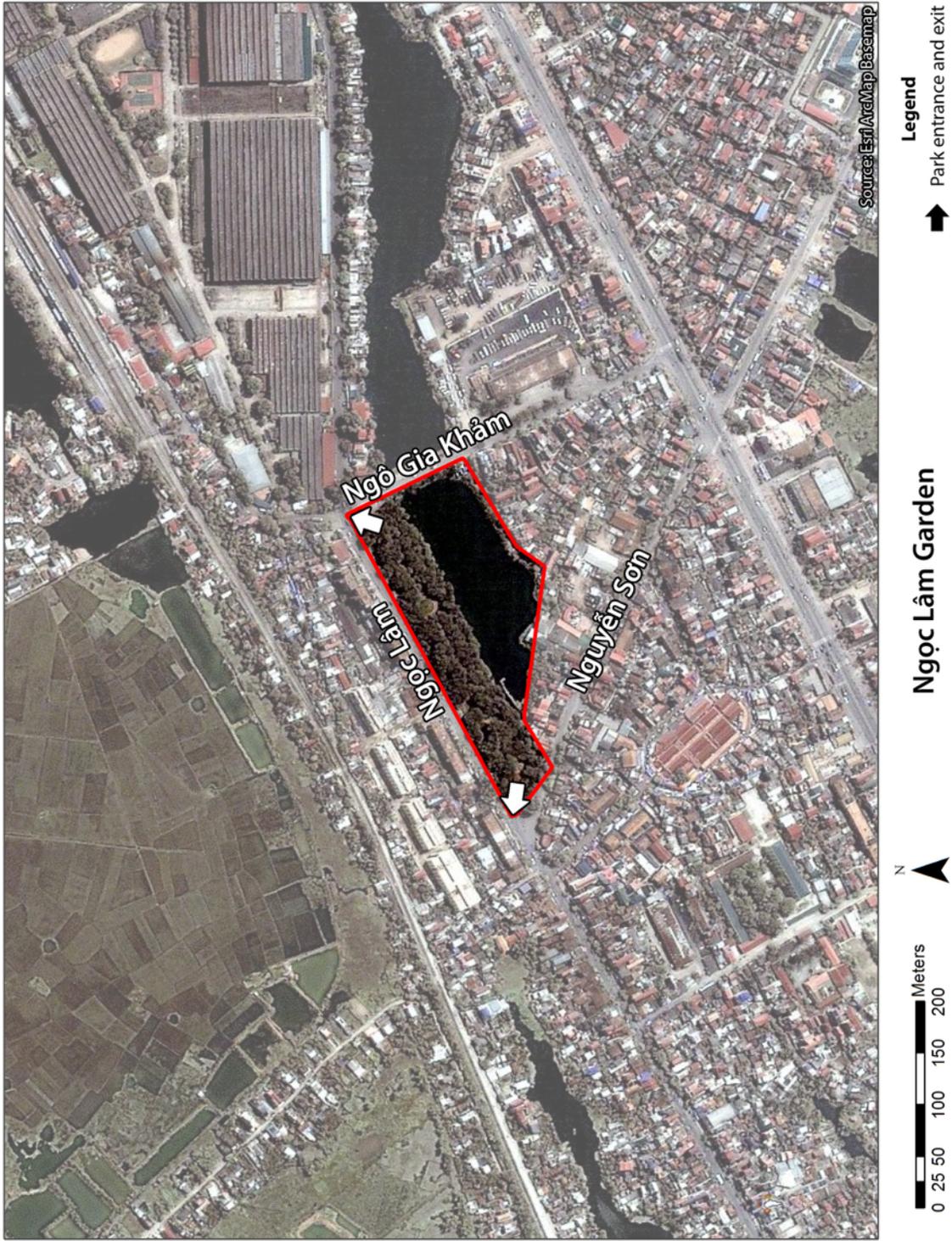


Figure 4: Map of Ngọc Lâm Park and surrounding area.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The importance of active forms of transportation for youth

Pedestrian travel is the most popular mode of transportation used to access all four public parks in our survey. For each park, travel by foot represents the largest share of travel modes used by respondents to visit the parks. 53% (n=211) of all 402 respondents arrived to the surveyed parks by foot (Table 4).

The typical travel time of respondents walking to the surveyed parks was 11.7 minutes, lower than the global average of 14.4 minutes when considering all transportation modes. Only slight differences in the average walking time to a park can be seen between the parks of the study (most notably for Linh Dam park situated in a less dense and more peripheral area of the city where the average time spent walking to the park is closer to the 15 minute mark: see Table 5).

Table 4. Mode of transportation used to access the parks.

	Bicycle	Bus	Motorbike	Walk	Total
Thành Công Park					
Count	14	11	27	49	101
Row %	13.9%	10.9%	26.7%	48.5%	100%
Linh Đàm Park					
Count	16	0	37	46	99
Row %	16.2%	0.0%	37.4%	46.5%	100%
Nghĩa Đô Park					
Count	20	4	29	46	99
Row %	20.2%	4.0%	29.3%	46.5%	100%
Ngọc Lâm Park					
Count	3	10	20	70	103
Row %	2.9%	9.7%	19.4%	68.0%	100%
Total	53	25	113	211	402

Though Hanoi has experienced a general rise in the use of motorized two-wheelers and four-wheelers in the past two decades, many of the survey respondents favour using

active modes of transportation to access public parks. When taking into account travel by bike in order to aggregate all forms of active transportation, close to two-thirds of all respondents travelled to the surveyed parks by foot or by bicycle, while the remaining third arrived by motorbike or public transit (28% by motorbike, 6% by bus). This indicates that for a significant portion of respondents, active modes of transportation remain the preferred and most frequently used form of transportation to public parks.

These results are of particular interest when we consider that in 2008 84% of Hanoi households owned a motorbike, with 40% of these households owning more than two (Schipper et al., 2008). Though 28% of respondents traveled to the parks in our survey by motorbike, our results show that despite the growth in the ownership of motorized-vehicles, the many youth responding to our questionnaire still continue to use their feet and bicycles to access public parks. Despite a 29 percent drop in the total amount of trips by bike in Hanoi from 1995 and 2005 (ibid), cycling remains a popular form of urban transportation for younger Hanoians, who are more likely not to own a motorbike. While many of our respondents may have access to a motorbike, they may choose active forms of transportation because other family members may be using the family motorbikes or because they want to avoid paying parking fees at the park.

This strong reliance of respondents on active modes of transportation may also be linked to the large amount of respondents who visit the parks to participate in organized sports or in individual physical exercise, and as such, these active modes of transportation can appear as complimentary activity. With more than 75% (n=302) of total respondents citing exercise or other sport-related activities as the typical activity undertaken during a visit, such a high use of active modes of transportation by respondents could signal that they may have somewhat more active lifestyles than those who do not frequent public parks. If many of the respondents arrive at parks using active forms of transportation, how then do these trips compare to city averages in terms of length?

Table 5. Typical travel time to all parks by travel mode (in minutes).

	N	Mean	Std Dev	Minimum	Maximum
Thành Công Park					
Walk	49	12.57	7.43	1.00	30.00
Bicycle	14	18.00	10.81	2.00	45.00
Motorbike	27	11.48	5.69	5.00	25.00
Bus	11	18.64	5.52	10.00	30.00
Linh Đàm Park					
Walk	46	14.24	8.01	5.00	25.00
Bicycle	16	16.25	9.22	5.00	30.00
Motorbike	37	13.76	10.11	3.00	60.00
Bus	0	--	--	--	--
Nghĩa Đô Park					
Walk	46	12.22	13.26	5.00	90.00
Bicycle	20	14.75	10.45	5.00	60.00
Motorbike	29	14.52	11.09	2.00	45.00
Bus	4	37.50	15.00	30.00	60.00
Ngọc Lâm Park					
Walk	70	9.06	5.95	1.00	30.00
Bicycle	3	28.33	27.54	10.00	60.00
Motorbike	29	1.10	14.18	2.00	4.00
Bus	10	48.70	16.87	20.00	72.00
All Parks					
Walk	211	11.69	8.92	1.00	90.00
Bicycle	53	16.83	11.51	2.00	60.00
Motorbike	113	14.00	10.42	2.00	60.00
Bus	25	33.68	18.68	10.00	72.00

A 2003 survey of over 10,000 households in Hanoi carried out by the Transport Development Strategies Institute of Vietnam, estimated the average pedestrian trip distance in Hanoi was around 830 meters (TDSI, 2005). According to a report of the Asian Development Bank, average speed of walking in Asian cities is estimated to vary from 1.2m to 1.5m per second, or 72m to 90m per minute (Leather et al., 2011). Given that travel time to get to parks by foot in our survey was 12 minutes, we estimated travel distance by foot to vary from 864m to 1080m, which we then rounded to 900m for ease of interpretation. Thus, on average, the young respondents to our questionnaire cover a greater distances to access a park than the average pedestrian trip distance reported in the aforementioned TDSI report.

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

While the estimated travel distance by foot may seem to be near the 10-minute and 1000-metre benchmark used in some western accessibility studies (Smoyer-Tomic, Spence & Amrhein, 2006; Larsen & Gilliland, 2008), several facets of urban life in Hanoi may make this a more difficult distance to cover. When compared to the larger and obstacle-free sidewalks of many European and North American cities, the walkability of Hanoi's streets, and that of many other Asian cities, is considered to be significantly lower than cities in Europe and North America. Hanoi's dense urban fabric and often-crowded sidewalks could make this commute to a nearby park much more obstacle ridden and can, in some cases, significantly impact the walking speed of a pedestrian. Sidewalks in Hanoi are often used as parking spaces for motorbikes or commercial space for restaurants and other businesses and can act as significant obstacles to

pedestrian traffic. Furthermore, during periods of heavy traffic, it is common to see many commuters using two-wheelers on sidewalks to circumvent congestion at some intersections, directly increasing the potential dangers to pedestrians walking on the sidewalks. The results of our survey show that respondents frequently mention difficult road crossings and high amounts of traffic as significant obstacles encountered on their journeys to the surveyed parks. Of all 402 respondents, 52% mentioned crowded sidewalks, traffic and difficult road crossings as obstacles they encounter during their trip to a park (Figure 6). When only taking into account respondents arriving to parks by foot, the number of respondents encountering the previously mentioned obstacles rises to 59%, hinting that these obstacles may be more problematic for pedestrians who often find themselves in more vulnerable situations when sharing the road with other motorized forms of transportation.

Furthermore, during summer months, hot weather that often exceeds 40°C can make this walk significantly more unpleasant and difficult for pedestrians. Of all survey respondents, 35% (n=141) mentioned the summer heat as a significant obstacle during both their commute and their time at the park (Figure 6). Of all obstacles on the questionnaire, excessive heat was the obstacle most frequently mentioned by respondents. With little vegetation or other forms of protection from the sun available to pedestrians on most sidewalks, heat can have a significantly detrimental impact on the desire of Hanoians to travel longer distances by foot or by bicycle, especially during the middle of the day when the temperature reaches its high point. In order to minimize heat as an obstacle during their trips to nearby public parks, Hanoians frequently visit parks in the early morning and in the evening and stay out of the sun during peak hours.

Despite the small sample size of our survey, these initial findings are of significant interest to us for several reasons. Before beginning data collection in Hanoi, we assumed that youth walking to public spaces would not constitute the majority of our respondents. Considering the rising motorization of daily trips in Hanoi, it is rather surprising to see that two-thirds of park-users surveyed favour travelling to park using forms of active transportation. The respondents also appear to walk and bicycle longer distances than the city-wide averages reported in the 2003 TDSI survey. Though

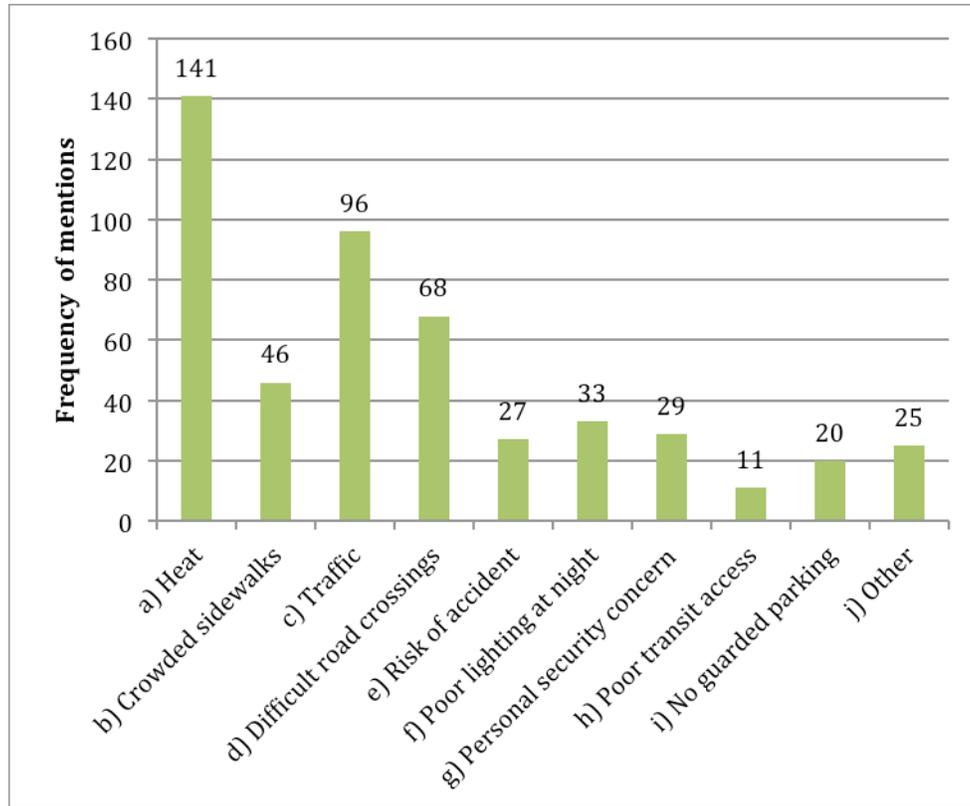


Figure 6: Obstacles encountered by respondents on the way to parks (respondent could mention more than one obstacle).

distances traveled by respondents may resemble findings in other large cities in many western cities, they do so in an environment that is much more unfavourable to travel by foot or by bicycle. The particular characteristics of Hanoi’s built environment and the heat during the warmer months of year are the main obstacles faced by respondents. These obstacles can be perceived as especially troublesome for pedestrians.

The importance of public parks in the everyday lives of respondents: frequency, duration and patterns of park visits

In order to be able to seize the importance of public parks in the daily lives of the young respondents of our questionnaire, we also asked respondents to comment on the frequency of visits during a two-week time frame. Results from our survey show that more than 52% (n=213) of respondents had visited the public parks fewer than 5 times in the previous two weeks before taking the survey. Though more than half of the respondents did not appear to visit public parks frequently, 24% had visited the park

between 6 and 10 times in the past two weeks, and 22% had visited the park between 11 and 15 times in the past two weeks. Only 4 respondents, all male, had visited one of the surveyed parks twice daily or more in the past two weeks. Furthermore, male respondents also visited parks significantly more frequently than their female counterparts, with 55% (n=156) of male respondents having visited one of the surveyed parks between 6 and 15 times in the past two weeks compared to just 36% (n=69) of female respondents (see table 6 below).

The high proportion of respondents visiting the public parks of our study while accompanied by a friend or family member is also telling. With 73% of all respondents visiting the park while accompanied, our survey appears to suggest that park visits by youth present them with an important opportunity for socialization. Female respondents were more likely to visit the park accompanied by a sibling or friend, with 78% (n=149) of female respondents accompanied at the time the survey was taken, though male respondents were also often accompanied by a friend (69%, n=145). Public parks thus appear to be an important option for youth who desire to meet with friends outside of their home environment. Also, in parallel with survey findings in Le's previously mentioned study, female respondents of our survey were more likely to visit parks while accompanied. Our observations also reflect those of Le when she states: "There are very often groups or pairs of girls taking walks in parks and it fits well with several other aspects of [Vietnamese] society and female behaviour" (Le To Luong, 2013: 86). Furthermore, the increased likelihood of female respondents to be accompanied may, in some cases, act as a form of protection against various forms of harassment by male park-users. In fact, in more than half of Côté-Douyon's interviews with female park-users, visiting the park in a group was seen as the most-used safety strategy employed by female users to avoid harassment (Côté-Douyon, 2015). The high percentage of park users in our survey that visited a park while accompanied also confirms Le's initial findings whereas 75.2% of youth between the ages of 15-29 were accompanied by friends or colleagues – a number much higher than those aged 30 or more.

Table 6. Number of visits by respondent to the park in the past two weeks.

	Frequency	Percent
FEMALE (n=190)		
Less than 5 visits in the past two weeks	121	63.68
Between 6-10 visits in the past two weeks	41	21.58
Between 11-15 visits in the past two weeks	28	14.74
MALE (n=212)		
Less than 5 visits in the past two weeks	92	43.40
Between 6-10 visits in the past two weeks	57	26.89
Between 11-15 visits in the past two weeks	59	27.83
Between 16-20 visits in the past two weeks	1	0.47
Between 21-25 visits in the past two weeks	1	0.47
Between 26-30 visits in the past two weeks	1	0.47
More than 30 visits in the past two weeks	1	0.47

Our survey also sought to measure the time youth spend at the park during a typical visit. We divided answers to the length of the visit into the 5 following categories: 10-30 minutes, 31-60 minutes, 61-90 minutes, 91-120 minutes, and 120 minutes or more. The majority of respondents to our survey (42%, n=168) spent between 31 and 60 minutes in the surveyed parks during a typical visit, with little difference between sexes (44% of female respondents versus 40% of male respondents). Interestingly, while respondents were most likely to spend 31-60 minutes in a park (42%, n=168), a large portion of respondents also spent between 91-120 minutes in the parks of the survey during a typical visit (22.5%, n=90), with only 12% (n=48) of respondents spending between 61-90 minutes in the park, the category that lies between these two previously mentioned time categories (see Table 7).

These results provide us with an interesting perspective into the way the youth responding to our survey use the public parks surveyed, and may offer other preliminary insight into possible trends in the use of public parks by youth at a city-wide scale. In a 2013 study examining the role of urban green areas on the lifestyles of Hanoians that is

similar to ours in many regards but carried out in four different parks (Thong Nhat, Bach Thao, Bo Ho, and Le Nin), Le To Luong observes that most young people answering her survey only visit parks “a few times per year, whereas most elderly people visit the park daily” (Le To Luong, 2013). Our survey results appear to differ from Le’s findings in some manner. Our results also show that close to half (47%, n=189) of respondents had visited the park more than five times in the past two weeks. This seems to point towards the importance of public parks in the everyday lives of many of the survey respondents.

Table 7. Time spent in park by respondent during a typical visit

	Frequency	Percent
10-30 minutes	70	17.50
31-60 minutes	168	42.00
61-90 minutes	48	12.00
91-120 minutes	90	22.50
120 minutes or more	24	6.00
Frequency Missing = 2		

Furthermore, while Le found no significant difference in the frequency of visits between male and female respondents of all ages in her survey, our survey establishes that male respondents were more likely to visit parks more frequently over a two week period than their female counterparts. Once again, this difference may be due to the fact that the surveyed parks in Le’s thesis are chiefly city-wide parks while ours are more local. More specifically, we can speculate that the fact that our parks are local, daily visits for female user could be limited by 1) the way young women perceive and experience public space, 2) the need for some young women to have parental approval, and 3) the requirement of household chores which can limit the free time available to a female park-user (Côté-Douyon, forthcoming). The three mentioned reasons might be less important to young women when they decide to larger and more important parks (Bách Thảo and Thống Nhất for example).

Another reason which explains the lower frequency of park visits among women is that some young women may feel uncomfortable participating in these activities in

public spaces. For instance, in an interview undertaken by a colleague studying the perception of public space amongst young Hanoi women, one respondent spoke about the influence that broader social norms can have on their decision to frequent public space: “Because, in society, girls are supposed to be gentle and charming, so they just take a walk or wander in the park. [...] Women hesitate to do strong physical activities like men do, they are afraid of being noticeable in a public space because others may judge them” (Côte-Douyon, forthcoming).

It becomes apparent through the results of our study that young people who frequent public parks often use parks as a space where they can spend time and participate in activities with friends. Respondents of the survey also spent significant amounts of time at the park and were rarely just passing through, indicating that these spaces are perceived as destinations for many respondents rather than spaces they might stumble upon and cross somewhat by chance. The differences between male and female respondents concerning the frequency of visits and the matter of being accompanied or not leads us to assume that a significantly different perception and experience of these spaces may exist between the sexes.

Park spaces: what purpose do they serve to youth and what may be missing?

The large majority of respondents to our questionnaire visited the parks with the intent to practice or participate in some form of physical activity or sport (see Table 8). Of all male respondents, 83% of them (n=176) mentioned playing sports or exercising as the activity in which they typically participate. While female respondents were also very likely to participate in some form of physical activity during their visit, only 67% of female respondents (n=127) mentioned these as typical activities. This gap between the percentage of male and female respondents typically visiting parks for physical activity emphasizes the previously mentioned unease some female youth may have about the use of public spaces for physical activities that are often perceived as men’s domain.

Though physical activity remains the activity most participated in by respondents during a typical visit to a park, many respondents also visit parks to participate in activities unrelated to sport or exercise. 19.7% of all respondents (n= 79) often visit parks to

socialize with others and 25.1% (n=101) to relax individually. There is no significant difference between the number of male and female respondents coming to the parks to participate in these more passive activities. It's also worth noting that there is an overlap between respondents participating in both physical activities and socialization or individual relaxation. Of the 303 respondents who typically come to the park to play sports, exercise or do both, 32.6% (n=99) also typically visit the park to socialize or relax individually.

Table 8. Activity participated in by respondent during the park visit.

	Frequency	Percent
FEMALE (n=190)		
Sport	28	14.74
Socializing	37	19.47
Exercise	99	52.11
Relaxing individually	49	25.79
Other	43	22.63
MALE (n=212)		
Sport	78	36.79
Socializing	42	19.81
Exercise	98	46.45
Relaxing individually	52	24.53
Other	27	12.74

Regarding socialization, visits to public parks presented respondents with an opportunity to meet with one or more friends, with many of the respondents arriving to the park with a friend or meeting friends who were already there. The opportunity to meet friends at a park was also the second most mentioned reason for visiting a park according the respondents of our survey, with close to 22% (n=88) of respondents citing the fact that their friends visit the park as the reason for their visit (Figure 7).

Though our survey does not allow us to discern if these individuals participate in all these activities during a typical visit or if most respondents participate in a single specific activity during a visit, these results indicate that the public parks present the youth of our survey with a variety of possible opportunities for both active and passive forms of activity. It is also very likely that respondents using the park for sport or exercise see a typical visit to the park not only as an opportunity for physical activity but also as an opportunity to see their friends or to take a moment afterwards to relax individually.

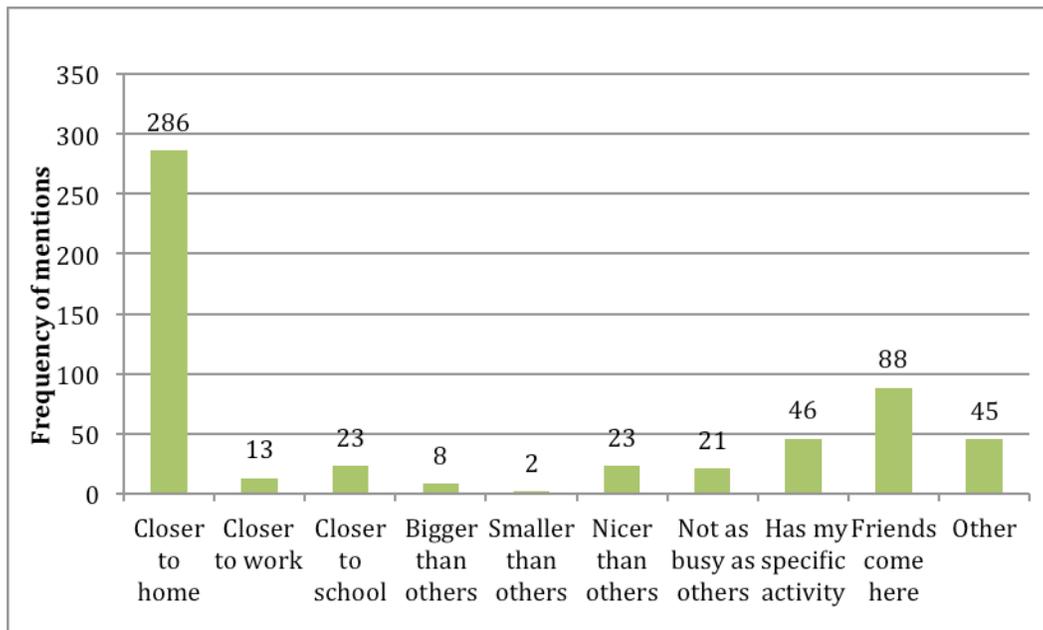


Figure 7. Respondent’s reason for visiting the park.

The surveyed parks also serve as important spaces for more specialized activities for many of the youth responding to the survey. In many of the parks, we observed several groups of youth belonging to various clubs using the park space as a meeting area. For example, in Thành Công Park, we encountered a guitar club, an English club, a photography club, a popping (a form of street dance originating from California) club, and a meditation group. At Nghĩa Đô Park, we encountered an English club, a few tutoring groups helping students with their homework, and a group of young girls practicing hip-hop dance routines after a day at school. In the mornings and evenings, many of the surveyed parks also serve as meeting points for a variety of specialized physical activities. At Linh Đàm Park and Nghĩa Đô Park, youth participated

in games of badminton, sepak takraw (*cầu mây*) and shuttlecock (*đá cầu*). The large open surfaces in the surveyed parks often serve as highly adaptable spaces for these activities, easily flowing from one activity to the next with little to no reconfiguration of the space required.

This availability of different types of space within the area of the surveyed parks allowed for an important mix of both physical and non-physical activity to occur simultaneously in the park at any given time. Each park, to a varying degree, offers potential users different types of spaces that are malleable to their individual needs and desires. In all cases, the public parks surveyed offered opportunities for both passive and active engagement, creating a space that is inviting to a wide range of potential users. Benches and ledges along paths were used in all parks as spaces for discussion or relaxation while larger and more open surfaces were frequently used for active engagement. We observed that Nghĩa Đô Park, for example, offers spaces for physical activity and more secluded and quieter spaces with benches and other street furniture for meetings or pensive relaxation, which allowed a very diverse use of the park by the young respondents. While physical activity remains the most popular activity, it would be unfair to ignore the many users who frequent parks for reasons other than physical activity. For many respondents, the parks offer a possible meeting point that may not as costly as cafes, restaurants and shopping centres and where they can appreciate some level of privacy and calm.

Although the surveyed parks can accommodate a broad range of activities, issues concerning overcrowding can, in some instances, affect the physical activities that users may experience. In a particularly telling example, the crowdedness of Thành Công Park forced some youth participating in a casual game of badminton to relocate their game to an area directly outside the main entrance of the park, carefully avoiding park-users arriving by motorbike and wanting to park their motorbikes in the parking located past the entrance gates. During peak hours at the park, some respondents also mentioned that badminton courts may be full, which prevents them from playing, that the exercise equipment area may be too crowded, or that it is difficult to run due to the crowded paths or the number of motorbikes obstructing the paths (Respondents IG4, NL29 and NL56).

In addition to overcrowding, and most problematic at Ngọc Lâm Park, is the prohibition of certain activities by authorities. In this park, some respondents were quick to underline their frustration with the park prohibiting the playing of football and the lack of space allocated for activities enjoyed by youth (NL53, NL56, NL58, NL93, NL94). The activities permitted in Ngọc Lâm Park differ than those in the other three parks of our study because the green space is officially considered to be a flower garden (vườn hoa in Vietnamese), an area traditionally used for more passive forms of engagement. However, the demand for public space by residents of the city may shift the use of these types of public parks towards more active forms of engagement.

The complicated and varied appreciation and preference of park space for youth

In addition to the study of access and use, this supervised research project also sought to explore youths' appreciation of public parks. To this end, two questions were asked to the respondents: "What do you like about this park?" and "What do you dislike about this park?" These open-ended questions allowed respondents to discuss aspects of the park at greater lengths than closed-ended questions, and generated a broad portrait of the attributes of the public parks that pleased or displeased survey respondents.

Five broad themes emerged in youths' answers to the first question: environment (fresh air, presence of water, and greenery), social exchange (friends and level of animation), activities and equipment, pleasantness (fun, big space, beautiful space, etc.) and convenient access (closeness to home) (see Figure 8). For the dislikes, four categories were delineated: environmental quality (odour, cleanliness, physical upkeep, bugs, etc.), saturation of the space (crowdedness, narrow space, dogs off leash, etc.), physical and budgetary constraints (lots of people, entrance fees, high price of food and drink), security and transgressive behaviours (poor lighting, fishing, bad or unfriendly people). It is worth noting that respondents were much more likely to speak about what they liked about a public space rather than what they disliked.

When speaking about what aspects of the park they enjoy, the vast majority of survey respondents spoke about the environmental characteristics of the park and the

associated sentiment of pleasure it gives them. The presence of trees and bodies of water was noted by over a quarter of respondents as a positive characteristic in all four parks with many respondents associating the presence of trees and a lake as essential to the appeal of the public park (29%, n= 115). Similarly, many respondents indicated that they appreciate public parks because there are places where they can find fresh air and beat the heat of the city (56%, n=227).

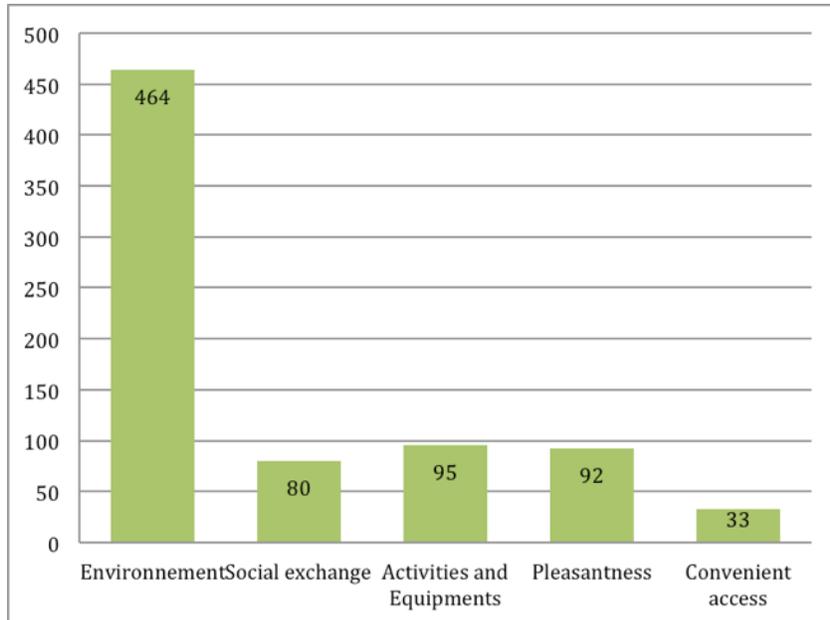


Figure 8. Frequency of mentions per positive attribute category.

Public parks, in this sense, act as a retreat from the chaotic environment of the city. The walled-in nature of the parks may effectively increase this secluded and oasis-like characterization of public parks by the survey respondents. The pleasantness of a visit to the park signalled by many respondents also reinforces this oasis-like characterization with many commenting positively on the size of the park, the landscaping and the serenity it offers (15%, n=62). The park’s ability to help foster an environment favourable to social interaction is also regarded as a positive characteristic by many. Some users perceive the bustle of the park during peak hours and the crowdedness as positive aspects that made their visit to the park exciting and enjoyable (9%, n =38). The parks of our survey also offered space for respondents to meet existing

friends and possibly meet new people, with some respondents also mentioning this to be an advantage that they appreciate (4%, n=15).

Respondents also appreciate the numerous activities that the park presented through the provision of space and equipment. The space provided in many parks for physical exercise and sport makes parks more desirable and enjoyable in the eyes of respondents (13%, n= 43). At Nghĩa Đô and Thành Công Park, 10 of the 106 male respondents in the two parks specifically mention the availability of exercise equipment in the park and regard this specific amenity as a positive aspect of the park

Although the majority of survey respondents frequent parks that are located closest to their home, only a few users (9%, n=36) mentioned convenient access as a positive characteristic. This could mean that though many frequent the park nearest to their home, few seem to consider having convenient access to a nearby park, potentially pointing towards the limited access that many may have to park space in Hanoi. While some may live nearby enough to consider this to be a positive attribute of the park, the very small number of respondents that mentioned convenient access make apparent that it is not a commonly shared advantage.

The complaints that users did have concerning the public space they were visiting are mostly related to the environmental quality of the park itself. Many park-goers mentioned the lacklustre quality of the park space as a significant downside in their overall experience of the park. Respondents often took issue with overflowing garbage, trash strewn about pathways and the overall poor quality of the water in the surveyed parks that resulted in unpleasant odours coming from the lakes (23%, n=94) . In Ngọc Lâm Garden, Nghĩa Đô and Linh Đàm Park, some respondents also took issue with the quality of the built environment, mentioning the poor condition of pathways in the park and the lack of seating (4%, n= 16). Furthermore, when at the park during peak hours, some users mentioned the large crowds and lack of space as negative characteristics of the park (7%, n=29). In some instances, a few respondents also took issue with entry fees and the above average cost of food and drink at Nghĩa Đô Park (ND27, ND29, ND30, ND38, ND39, ND40, ND41, ND43, ND44, ND45, ND66, ND93). As youth, their

more limited budgets could explain why some of the respondents may take issue with these constraints.

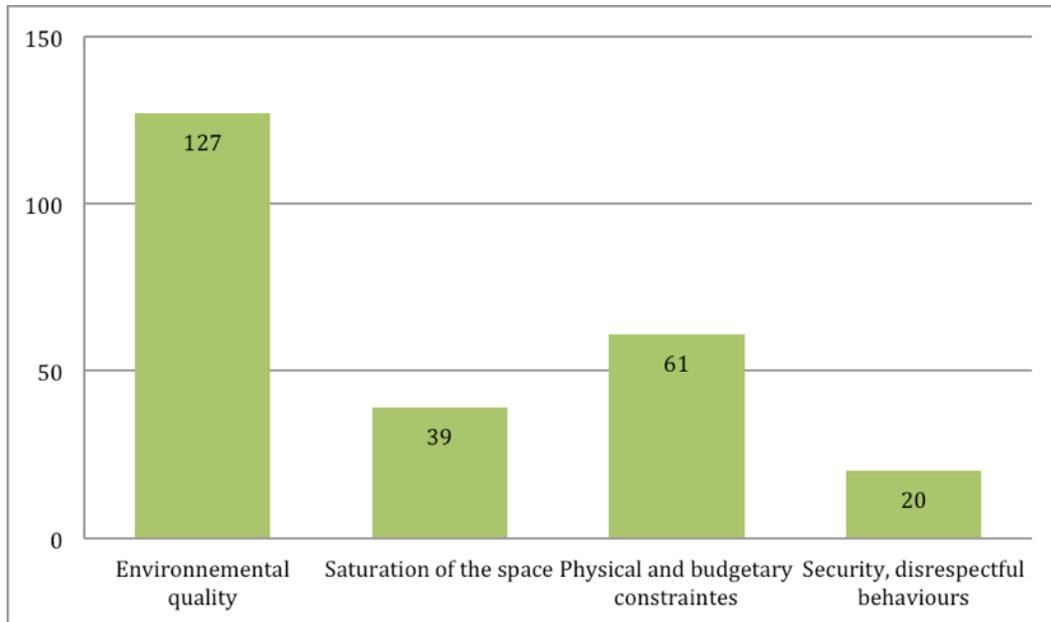


Figure 9. Frequency of mentions per negative attribute category.

Female respondents to our questionnaire also mentioned unique dislikes that were left unmentioned by their male counterparts. The presence of “bad guys” and harassment led them to encounter unpleasant situations that diminished their positive perception of the park. At Ngọc Lâm Garden, certain female respondents mentioned the presence of drug addicts and “bad guys” to be detrimental to their overall enjoyment of the park space and sense of safety (NL1, NL33, NL88, NL90). At Thành Công and Linh Đàm park, five female respondents spoke of the lack of lighting at night which did not make them feel safe using these spaces after the sun had set (IG45, LD10, LD11, LD61, LD62). Though these complaints do not resonate with a large portion of the respondents they do indicate issues with public space that are directly tied to their experience of the space as women and may also indicate problems with public space that may prevent some female youth to even consider visiting certain public parks.

We noted this somewhat paradoxical relationship between the likes and dislikes of the park users. On the one hand, respondents were both very positive towards the

quality of the environment, appreciating the availability of fresh air and the pleasant scenery. On the other, respondents frequently mentioned that the parks were often dirty and that the lake water was smelly and polluted. These often-divergent viewpoints are not as paradoxical as it may seem at first glance. For instance, a park may offer fresh air and beautiful scenery while still having overflowing trash bins and a dirty lake.

Overall, the overwhelming response of respondents citing parks as beautiful, cool and pleasant areas for exercise and social interaction undoubtedly reinforces the importance of these types of public space for many youth living in Hanoi. However, the concerns voiced by respondents suggest that some work towards the maintenance of the parks is necessary and would significantly contribute to a much more enjoyable experience for those already attending public parks and potential users. The mirrored-nature of the likes and dislikes, wherein positive aspects to some respondents are sometimes seen as negative aspects to other respondents, further points towards the importance of diversity in the types of park spaces to meet the needs of a wide-range of youths who do not always seek the same experience out of their visit to a public park.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our research findings now lead us to suggest several recommendations concerning existing public parks and the creation of future parks in more peripheral zones. These recommendations aim to contribute to discussions between local decision-makers and residents, with the objective of enhancing the experience of young park-goers throughout the city of Hanoi.

Protecting existing parks, creating new parks and renewing public gardens

First and foremost, it is of paramount importance that the city of Hanoi ensures that the existing total area of public parks does not diminish alongside the growth of the city and the transformations that ensue. With Hanoi's allocation of green space per resident at a paltry 0.9 m²/inhabitant, the city is already far below the recommended 12 m²/inhabitant recommended for cities by the World Health Organization. Without the preservation of existing public parks and the planning of new ones where space permits them, this number is likely to decrease drastically as urban migration increases density throughout the city and the demand for recreational spaces increases concurrently. The loss of any existing park space, especially in the denser central wards of the city, to residential or commercial development would directly increase the time some youth would spend to access these spaces and may lead to further issues of overcrowding in the remaining parks.

Additionally, and based on our survey results and own observations, the provision of space within existing and future public parks should be focused on providing as much space as possible within the park itself, for its visitors. Areas reserved for motorbike parking should be moved outside of parks to areas nearby, effectively freeing up a significant area of the park to the users who already often cannot find space to participate in their desired activity due to crowding.

The creation of parks in the newly urbanized zones of Hanoi must also be an important priority in order to increase the availability of these public spaces to both youth as well as the greater population. With little space available for the creation of new parks in the city centre, the periphery remains the only plausible location for the planning of

new large public spaces. However, if a significant piece of land is available within the city centre, the transformation of this space into a public park or another type of public space should be a top priority for governing officials given the actual situation of under-provision of public spaces and problems regarding overcrowding.

The planning of new parks must also seek to maximize the space available to residents by the reduction of so-called “dead space” within the parks’ boundaries³. Furthermore, the conception of new parks should focus on providing a degree of flexibility and adaptability in its design that attracts and serves a wide range of youths. Aiming for flexibility entails planning large, shaded, and open-surfaced areas that can accommodate many activities and that can adapt easily to the different uses that the youth may have. With this flexibility in mind, it is also important to keep prohibited activities to a minimum with the aim of creating spaces where youth feel welcomed to express themselves through their preferred activity. Spaces with too-strict prescribed uses may effectively turn away certain young users who could benefit from the availability of a public park near their home.

Hanoi’s existing flower gardens (vườn hoa) could also be mobilized to alleviate the pressure that high demand and use by city residents places on public parks. Although flower gardens are traditionally designed for more passive forms of engagement, these areas have been increasingly used for sporting activities and exercise due to parks’ limited availability and overcrowding. The changing nature in the use of many of the spaces points towards the adaptation of the city environment by residents to suit their needs and should be encouraged. With little space for activities, officials should remove the more restrictive rules and permit activities such as football, badminton and shuttlecock. Gardens, although much smaller than the public parks in the city (generally less than five hectares), could offer an interesting opportunity to many youth seeking recreational spaces that are located closer to the place of residence. The tolerance of new forms of activity in these spaces could easily turn them into dynamic neighbourhood spaces.

³ We consider “dead space” as space in parks whose current use prevents park users from using the space (motorbike parking, fenced-off grassy areas where activity is prohibited, etc.).

Improving public space accessibility

Almost two-thirds of the youth responding to our survey primarily use active forms of transportation to access the four studied parks. This pattern is in strong opposition to the general trend that has seen a large growth in motorized forms of transportation as the primary method for moving around the city. These results present the city of Hanoi with an interesting opportunity to promote and favour alternatives to motorized transportation for smaller trips to the park, to an age group who do not yet appear to have developed a strong dependency on motorized transportation. Policies that improve the experience of walking and cycling in the city could increase the potential number of visits youths make to urban parks, reduce transit times, and also promote a healthy lifestyle. Such liveable city-type policies and orientations entail reducing the most significant obstacles (especially difficult road crossing and crowded sidewalks) in order to improve the city's walkability and cyclability.

In the short term, it is not necessary or viable to imagine improving access to public parks by undertaking a reconfiguration of Hanoi's road network in order to tackle the rampant congestion issues throughout the city. The city could, however, undertake smaller interventions aimed at increasing park access via walking and cycling. These smaller interventions are financially less constraining and do not require lengthy periods of planning and construction in order to be completed. They could alter the generally negative experience of walking and cycling to parks in an increasingly motorized environment and ease access.

Considering that the more than three quarters of our survey respondents visited parks directly from their homes, a pilot project could plan more clearly-defined pedestrian routes that remain free of obstacles and connect residential areas to a nearby park and other local amenities. The goal of increased walkability of the built environment in densely populated-areas must be a priority, especially in areas directly adjacent to existing public parks, where pedestrian crossings are non-existent or poorly-respected by motorists. If the city creates pedestrian road crossings near the entrances of a park, it would facilitate access and reduce the risk of accidents for youths walking there. Ideally, enhancements towards the increased pedestrian access to parks and the surrounding

environment should not occur through the construction of overhead walkways that bypass existing roads. A rethinking of the existing road network that grants the pedestrian a higher place in the hierarchy of road users should be a priority, rather than maintaining motorists' position at the top of the order. Such interventions would show a local officials' support of active modes of transportation. When they ensure safe road crossings at intersections near the park, they will create safe and enjoyable park environments for all users, but especially youth.

The city could implement such a pilot project more easily on the periphery of Hanoi where development and further urbanization remains only a matter of time. At the urban edge, these types of interventions would not be burdened by the presence of an already very dense urban fabric. Furthermore, and with a more long-term perspective in mind, what is stopping the city from envisioning a return of the bicycle as a viable form of transportation especially within the city core? Once renowned for its streets filled with cyclists, the current environment is hostile to even the most experienced rider.

The creation of a network of clearly delineated bike paths would encourage youth (as well as all Hanoians) to use an environmentally friendly form of transportation that was, up until not long ago, a symbolic aspect of city life in Hanoi. Though this revival may appear unfeasible, in 2011 the city instated traffic separation controls that gave some streets separate lanes for car, motorcycle and bicycle traffic (Vietnam News Agency, 2011). A continuation of this new and welcomed approach to reducing traffic problems in Hanoi is necessary.

Through both short-term and long-term planning orientations, the city of Hanoi can, through the implementation of progressive actions in the built environment, nurture and develop the existing use of active modes of transportation by youth and help to ensure that they continue to use such modes as they move towards adulthood, a period where they may become more likely to adopt motorized forms of transportation and therefore relinquish cycling and walking.

Certain public parks could also profit from an increased permeability and connection to the neighbouring environment. Their walled-in nature impedes access and

creates unnecessary obstacles. With limited access points, users often have to travel greater distances to arrive to a park's entrance point. In the case of larger parks this additional distance represents a significant additional travel time (see the Nghĩa Đô Park example below).

While limited access points are currently used as a way to control access or to give the impression of a "walled garden," open and unobstructed spaces have the effect of being more inviting. In cities throughout the world, these attributes are considered important criteria in the determination of the level of "publicness" of a given public space (Nemeth, 2011). If the removal of walls around certain parks is unfeasible in the short term, the creation of new entrances could benefit parks, especially larger ones with just one or two access points. In some instances, these new entrances could diminish the travel distance and therefore reduce users' exposure to obstacles that negatively impact access such as traffic, sidewalk congestion and heat.

Limited entrance points control the collection of fees for use of public spaces; however, we also believe that these entry fees should be removed or at least greatly reduced city-wide. Access to parks should not, at any time of day, entail the spending of money. The cessation of entry fees would send a clear message that public spaces are to be enjoyed by all.

Improving the maintenance of park spaces

Our survey results also indicate a negative perception of youth towards the maintenance and general state of care of the parks in our survey. If public parks are to be considered enjoyable spaces for youth, it is essential that they remain clean and inviting. Trash in parks and lakes needs to be collected and removed regularly in order for the sites to retain their oft-mentioned attribute as a beautiful, peaceful respite in the city.

Furthermore, the city should make the maintenance of the built environment a priority and address the dilapidation in certain parks immediately in order to build an increasingly positive image of these spaces among both youth and the general public. In some instances, the provision of better lighting would alleviate concerns of safety at night and would allow youth to participate in later evening recreational activities,

ensuring that parks remain dynamic spaces even when there is no daylight (much like Lenin Square, where sufficient lighting makes the square come to life long after the sun has set).

Public parks that remain clean and in good condition would significantly improve the image of public space amongst the youth of our survey and may encourage visit frequency. The provision of ample public parks and spaces in a city is an essential factor in the improvement of the quality of urban life. For youth, these parks represent important spaces for them to meet friends, participate in exercise and sports and escape the Hanoi's dense, often-chaotic life. The existing situation demands that city officials, policy makers, local actors and residents act swiftly to safeguard existing green spaces and create new green spaces not only in the periphery but also in the city centre. With the existing issues regarding youth access to public spaces, the current situation will only worsen over time if solutions such as those outlined here are not undertaken.

The interests and passions of youth are further diversified through their consumption of new forms of media supported by technology, which exposes them to new activities and forms of expression occurring worldwide. By creating environments that foster their creativity and desire to be amongst themselves, the city of Hanoi can redefine what public parks mean to youth and increase their value of such spaces. When Hanoi invests in existing and future spaces through improvement of access, and removal of obstacles (such as restrictive use rules, entry fees, lack of care and maintenance) that prevent youth from feeling a sense of belonging, it will provide spaces that enable the physical and mental growth of its youth alongside that of the city.

APPENDIX

English questionnaire

Accessibility to public space questionnaire

Date: _____ Time: _____ Park: _____
 Date of birth: _____ Gender: _____ Accompanied: Yes No
 Major street intersection near home: _____
 Ward: _____ Weekday or Weekend: Weekday Weekend

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

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

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

2. How did you travel to this park today?

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

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

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

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

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

<input type="checkbox"/> Walk	<input type="checkbox"/> Bicycle	<input type="checkbox"/> Motorbike	<input type="checkbox"/> Car	<input type="checkbox"/> Bus
From: H-W-S-O	From: H-W-S-O	From: H-W-S-O	From: H-W-S-O	From: H-W-S-O
Time: _____	Time: _____	Time: _____	Time: _____	Time: _____

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

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

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

6. What do you typically do at this park?

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

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

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

Vietnamese questionnaire

Bảng hỏi về khả năng tiếp cận của không gian công cộng

Ngày: _____ Giờ: _____ Tên công viên: _____
 Ngày sinh: _____ Giới tính: _____ Có đi cùng ai không: Có Không
 Nhà bạn ở đâu (Ngã tư phố chính gần nơi bạn ở): _____
 Phương: _____ Ngày thường hay ngày cuối tuần: Ngày thường Cuối tuần

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<input type="checkbox"/> Đi bộ	<input type="checkbox"/> Xe đạp	<input type="checkbox"/> Xe máy	<input type="checkbox"/> Ô tô	<input type="checkbox"/> Xe buýt
Đi từ: N-C-T-K	Đi từ: N-C-T-K	Đi từ: N-C-T-K	Đi từ: N-C-T-K	Đi từ: N-C-T-K
Thời gian: _____	Thời gian: _____	Thời gian: _____	Thời gian: _____	Thời gian: _____

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

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

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

6. Bạn thường làm gì ở công viên này?

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

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

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

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