

Research Project: Redefining public space in Hanoi, Vietnam (ongoing)

The research project focuses on the analysis of the transformation of public space in Hanoi, Vietnam. Changes of power relations between state and society and their reflection in the physical environment of the city are of major concern. Embedded in the discipline of urban sociology, it is the project's aim to contribute to the discussion of the correlation between public sphere as a sociological/political category and the morphology as well as the practices of public space. A main question is whether public spaces are an expression of a public sphere or a prerequisite for its development. According to Sennett, public sphere is a crucial element of urbanism. Furthermore, as Eisenstadt points out, a strong relationship between public sphere and civil society, along with political and economic liberalisation, does exist. Since the introduction of the Vietnamese economic reform program *Doi Moi* in 1986, a physical transformation of public space as well as a shift in its symbolic meaning can be observed. Based on the assumption that diverse social groups attach different meanings to urban objects, power relations in the city's landscape become visible. While the private sector dominates the development of new public and semi-public spaces like New Urban Areas and Shopping Malls, the public of Hanoi continuously redefines existing public spaces by utilising them for private economic and social activities. Can this process of redefinition be considered an expression of a public sphere beyond state control?

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