Urban Planning in Vietnam: A Vector for a Negotiated Authoritarianism?

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Abstract

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is one of the last communist states ruled by a single political party. Despite what the one party rule in Vietnam may suggest, issues related to urban planning reveal a great complexity of interaction between stakeholders in the country, and an aggregation of new coalitions concerned with growth, who question the regime's political choices and development orientations. The authoritarianism of the Vietnamese political regime is undeniably key to understanding the socio-spatial organisation of cities in the country. However, this paper aims to show how the contemporary urban planning of these cities is participating in the recent evolution of the political regime, towards what can be called a "negotiated authoritarianism". With the implementation of new urban projects; debates over notions of justice and injustice, common good and private interests, community and individuality are emerging. These values are conveyed by the authorities, as well as the citizens, in order to negotiate their participation in decision-making and their access to new wealth. Our goal is then to question the links between political authoritarianism and the production of the city in contemporary Vietnam.

Key words: Vietnam, urban planning, land conflicts, negotiations, everyday politics

The Socialic Republic of Vietnam is one of the last communist states ruled by a single political party, which is the architect of the current economic liberalisation but remains the only holder of the political power. Since the 1986 *Đổi Mới* (« Renovation ») reforms, international organisations – such as the World Bank – have raised the country as a model of a successful economic transition, from collectivism to market economy (World Bank

1996). Despite this positive image, the country was still ranked 174 out of 180 for press freedom by Reporters Without Borders in 2014, and 166 out of 177 according to Transparency International Corruption Index in 2013[1]. At the same time, Vietnam is regularly criticized for dissidents' or critical bloggers' arrests. The Vietnamese party-state still subscribes to the political organisation model of « Democratic Centralism »: it mobilizes and controls the entire population through mass organizations, which supervise close to ¾ of the population (Norlund 2007). The regime maintains its power through a system of socialist political structures, that covers the entire territory up to a very fine scale and offers the central power various relays at every level of the nation.

Based on recent and long-term field work observations in Vietnam[2], this paper tries to offer an analysis of the daily functioning of an authoritarian regime, in which the integration in the globalization networks carries multiple new arrangements, that are sometimes perceived as being unfair by the population. The Vietnamese party-state justifies his authoritarianism by his developmentalist approach, the voluntarism of its ambitions and plans, and by its belief – shared by numerous elites – in his vanguard and guiding mission for the modernisation and « civilisation » of the country (Woodside 1998). However, the observation of these society-state iterative dynamics forces to nuance this paternalistic positioning and to underline the hybridisation of elements of government in the exercise of power.

The recent terminology adopted by the observers of the Vietnamese political life does reveal the hybrid character of the regime, qualified as an « accommodating state » (Koh 2006), « 'mass regarding' or 'quasi democratic' » (Womack quoted by Koh 2006), « infrastructural power-state » (McCormick 1998), « post-socialist authoritarian regime » (Hewinson quoted by Wells-Dang 2010), or as an « authoritarian pluralism, consultative

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1The ONG Human Rights Watch identifies from 150 to 200 political prisoners still jailed in 2014 and underlines the constant increase of arrests and convictions since 2012, on the grounds of « abuse of democratic rights against state interests », as allowed by article 258 of the Penal Code (HWR Report 2014).
2This paper is the prolongation and the establishment of a dialogue between two pieces of doctoral research, led between 2008 and 2014 : « From Rural to Urban in Hà Nội's Fringes : Craft Villages, Power and Territory » (Segard 2014) and "The Alleyways of Hô Chí Minh City (Việt Nam), The Street Patterns and the Evolution of Ordinary Public Spaces" (Gibert 2014). Based on the study of six wards of Hô Chí Minh City and three periurban craft villages of the Red River Delta, approximatively 250 interviews have been conducted, with both citizens and publics authorities.

authoritarianism or illiberal democracy» (Wells-Dang 2010). These recent researches offer a renewed comprehension of the Vietnamese state underlying exogenous influences – from international donors or foreign states –, as well as internal tensions in the communist party and its different trends, the impact of the provinces will for greater autonomy, pressures from the society, both urban and rural, that tend to make the regime more flexible.

By focusing on citizens capabilities – and on lower or intermediary levels of government – to interact with the leaders of this strong regime to make it evolves, we introduce the idea of a « negotiated authoritarianism », that can complete the multidisciplinary frame recently developed and mobilized to apprehend the means of citizens representation in an authoritarian context (Bayart 1991, Bayat 2000, Chatterjee 2004, Hilgers et Mazzoechetti 2010, Hibou 2011). The Vietnamese party-state is not a monolithic bloc. It is characterized by its flexibility, its co-optation and its ability to integrate incrementally different elements of tensions that could hinder its stability. The regime manages crises or disruptions by plural answers, particularly pragmatic, that balance between taking these divergences of opinion into account and limiting their expression (Kerkvliet 2001). Developed at the local level, this way of functioning « makes the party-state more accommodating to people at that level without challenging the structural or institutional dominance by the party-state » (Koh 2006, p.5). Thus, choosing to focus the scope of analyse at the local level enables to nuance the overhanging vision of the Vietnamese party-state and to study the governing apparatus and its negotiation modalities. This pragmatism in governing and domination is not new (Papin, 1997, Gironde 2001, Pandolfi 2001, Cerise 2004), but has been reinforced by the Đổi Mới impact and more generally speaking by the economic opening and Vietnam's internationalization (Gainsborough 2010). Then, this paper aims at completing existing socio-political analyses of the Vietnamese authoritarian regime functioning by a spatial one, taking the evolving Vietnamese city as a case study.

Even if the authoritarian dimension of the regime is key element to understand the socio-spatial organisation of the Vietnamese cities, we would also like to point out that current urban planning modalities – and moments of negotiations or confrontations at the local

level – participate in the evolution of the Vietnamese authoritarian regime, towards a « negotiated authoritarianism ». Therefore, we question the iterative processes between political authoritarianism and the production of the city, in the Vietnamese context.

While inherited colonial cities are reshaped and « metropolized », at the same time, periurban areas are progressively being « colonized » by both urban patterns and actors, and both administratively and physically. The field of planning thus reveals complex stakeholders games and aggregation of new growth coalitions that questioned public political choices, their development orientations and their means of implementation. The urban and periurban accelerated mutations also put a growing pressure on natural resources. The state capability to recover lands and to control it is therefore an indicator of its action latitude (Musil 2013).

In this context, matters regarding lands are sensitive, both symbolically and politically and they create new stumbling blocks between the inhabitants – city-dweller as villagers – and their local public administration. Inhabitants can unite when land recovery procedures are launched for projects seen as unjust, capitalistic and going against public good. These federations can actually sometimes challenged public authorities power and legitimacy. As a result, land regime has emerged as a fertile ground for resistances building – coherent and sometimes violent – and reveals the growing people's participation in political affairs and their new daring to confront more and more openly the existing administrative and political structure, for justice and common good (Culas et Nguyen Van Suu 2010, Mellac et al. 2010, Labbé 2011, Tôn Nu Quynh Trân et al. 2012).

Our analysis is based on field work results and experiences that have been conducted during our PhD researches in Hô Chí Minh City and Hà Nội, two metropolises polarising the country's most dynamic provinces, that are often opposed, a bit arbitrarily, in literature as well as in people's imaginary. The southern metropolis, Hô Chí Minh City, is usually depicted as the head city for political and economic experimentations, the country liberal and international vanguard, which would act autonomously, benefiting from its distance to the capital. The northern metropolis, Hà Nội, is on the contrary associated with ideas of

conservatism, bureaucracy, party enhanced control and backward elites. Nevertheless, this binary vision is contradicted by our observations on the political functioning of both cities. By confronting our field works, we also hope to go beyond the rural-urban dichotomy. Motivations for contestation and opposition, conflicts' nature, their origin, the negotiations triggered are much more similar than expected: in cities as well as in the « countryside » or in periurban areas, territories are reshaped, populations transit, migrate, emancipate and relationships between the public authorities and the inhabitants evolve, stretch thin or enter in conflict (Labbé 2014). Debates over categories such as fair and unfair, common good or private interest, collectivity or individuality rise again upon new projects implementation. These values are mobilized by representatives of the state and by the citizens, that try to negotiate both their participation in decision-making processes and their access to the newly created wealth (Gibert 2014a).

This paper intends to contribute at the same time to a renewed understanding of contemporary Vietnam and its local dynamics and to enrich the debate on the unjust character of authoritarian spaces, based on the analysis of local and daily resistance strategies.

To do so, we first question modalities and stakes linked to territorial planning in a context qualified as « authoritarian », by analysing both discourses to legitimate these politics and arguments justifying oppositions (I). Then we will focus on practical case studies and we will analyse techniques, strategies, « everyday politics » as well as violent acts that highlight how public authorities and inhabitants often face each other and confront when a new regulation is imposed, an opposition to a project arise or a precarious « consensus » needs to be find to ease a situation of conflict (II). Finally, we will show that the complication and evolution of sociabilities and social belongings challenge traditional means of public influence, social control, mobilisation and contribute to creating new forum of expression, claims and emancipation, that, if not calling for a system revision, at least call for its evolution (III).

Part 1. Urban planning in an authoritarian context: deciphering the authorities narrative of legitimatization

Hô Chí Minh City and Hà Nội are going through deep mutations due to their steady-pace insertion into globalization processes. Their economic emergence takes place in an exponential urban growth context, at a moment where urban development is revalued and encouraged by the authorities. This context explains the multiplication of urban renewal projects, often justified by the invocation of different references.

1.1. The legacy of the "democratic centralism" system in the land management: a source of (in)justice ?

Despite the diversification and the progressive privatisation of urban stakeholders following the economic reforms, control of urban development is still considered a strategic sector by the Vietnamese central state. This explains the predominance of its engagement both in the decision-making and in the implementation of urban projects. This method is embedded in the political tradition of a "democratic centralism", where decisions are taken at the national level and then transmitted to the local levels, in the name of national unity. Thus, it is more appropriate to talk about "administrative devolution" than "decentralization" to qualify the recent institutional changes that delegate some jurisdictions to the districts (*quận* or *huyện*). The districts benefit from autonomy of management, but not from autonomy of decision (Albrecht, Hocquart and Papin 2010).

The control of the land resource and its potential economic valorisation – together with the speculation it is associated with – is central keys to understanding contemporary urban dynamics in Vietnam (Evers and Korff 2000, Pandolfi 2001). In a context of high land pressure, the numerous "land recuperation" operations, together with population displacements or imposed land use changes, are the most obvious illustration of the dominance of the state actor and its authoritarian character. In Vietnam, land property is still controlled by the state and only land right uses can be exchanged or compensated in

the case of land eviction. In the Vietnamese language, these operations are literally called "land recovery" or "land liberation" (*thu hồi đất / giải phóng mặt bằng*).

The urban land management's legal tools are still incomplete and do not provide the capacity for public authorities to constitute necessary land reserve to reach their metropolitan ambitions. The authorities neither benefit from any visibility on land availability, nor on land latest actuality. Acquiring land rights uses constitute a more reliable and long-term financial investment than the money itself. Moreover, the added-value of such an investment is not subject to tax, to the contrary a banking deal (Truitt 2013). The sale of land rights uses to private companies is an important income for local authorities, especialy considering the corrupt practices to which they are deeply linked (Papin and Passicousset 2010, p. 132). Transfers of land right uses are also subject to speculation, which increase their value (Sheng Han Sun and Trang Vu Kim 2008, Truong Thien Thu and Perera Ranjith 2010). With the anticipation of their future urban status, agricultural lands localised in the urban outskirts are subject to important speculative practices. Between 2001 and 2009, the square meter price in Hô Chí Minh City's periphery area is estimated to have multiplied by ten, in constant money value (Papin and Passicousset 2010). Moreover, the simple announcement – or even just the rumours – of a new project provokes an uncontrolled increase of land value. Announcements of new roads and metro lines generate the most radical price increases. Thus, they allow substantial added-value, by "no reason enrichment" (Musil 2013).

"Land recovery" among local communities is then a prerequisite, both for new urban development and renovation projects. These forced evictions illustrate well the state authoritarianism. These moments are often destabilizing and sometimes dramatic for the local inhabitants, who lose their homes or their resources for work, but the state representatives try to legitimate them by invoking the imperative of "modernity" and "civilisation".

1.2. Legitimating land recovery in the name of urban civilisation

The several urban projects conducted by Vietnamese authorities serve a global project of "urban modernization" (*hiện đại hóa*) and "urban civilisation" (*văn minh đô thị*) – both on urban and ideological perspectives. These expressions are widely relayed through

propaganda campaigns: they are an important evidence of the country's entrance into the market economy since the economic reforms (Schwenkel 2012). Then, the ideological rhetoric of the "New Man" gave the way to the idea of a "civilized urban dweller"[3]. This leitmotiv refers to the vision of a "urban project of civilization", in line with the Singaporean model and more and more the Chinese model, these two being thought as tutelary figures in the contemporary Vietnamese master plans. In these models, the modern city is firstly characterized by land development control, a functionalist zoning and the global support of urban dwellers for a shared social order (People's Committee of Hà Nội and Posco-Perkinks Eastman-Jina 2010, People's Committee of Hô Chí Minh City and Nikken Sekkei 2007).

"Urban modernity" is embodied by different elements, such as high-rise buildings, new scale roads and shopping malls. Thus, it implies both a renewal of the physical city frame and social order mutations, together with new urban practices. Street trading, for instance, despite its omnipresence in Vietnam, is challenged, just like the multiple uses of public space. This new social order is not only imposed by strict urban regulations and police actions, but also through the reorganization of the urban space itself.

Urban "modernization" implies various urban programmes, both through regulatory (*Ill. 1*) and operational planning. These programmes exclude various urban dwellers, such as informal small producers in the industrial fringes of the metropolises, rural migrants, street traders or elderly people wearing their traditional pyjamas on the streets. These discourse are then exploited to standardize urban practices and to exclude part of the urban population, judged as "deviant" or, at least "non-civilized". The ideas of "urban beauty" and "civilized way of life" are used as a persuasive ideology and linked to an official discourse about order, reminding the idea of "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*), introduced in China by Hu Jintao.

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[3] The promotion of a "civilized way of life" by the Vietnamese state has been introduced during the socialist period, with the launching in 1978 in Hà Nội of a campaign entitled "towards a civilized way of life and new cultural families" (*nếp sống văn minh - gia đình văn hoá mới*) (Koh 2004).

Illustration 1. Rules associated with the "civilized neighbourhoods" programme in Hồ Chi Minh City

a) dans le secteur central de la nouvelle zone urbanisée de Phú Mỹ Hưng (district 7)

b) dans un quartier de ruelles héritées (district de Phú Nhuận)

Source : M. Gibert, 2011.

Translation of the boards :
a)   A civilized city / A human community
b)   The residents of this neighborhood are building a civilized lifestyle, during weddings, mourning and festivities.

In Phú Mỹ Hưng, the poster campaign is managed by the private company, the Phú Mỹ Hưng Corporation, whose logo is appears at the top of this board. However, in alleyway neighbourhoods, the poster campaign is under the jurisdiction of the public authorities. The blue color of the board indicates this. However, the message displayed in both cases is the same.

1.3.   Building "urban civilization": between popular support and feeling of unjustice

Urban projects associated with "modernity" and "civilization" are rarely contested or challenged as such by the urban dwellers, who generally accept their principles, especially the architectural ones. No alternative model, for example, proposes to counter the norms

of what is a "modern metropolis" for the authorities. This consent illustrates the efficiency of the Vietnamese regime "soft governance". This strategy relies on various propaganda campaigns and the use of nationalist references, in order to impose a certain vision of development. According to Nguyễn Thị Thanh Bình, this "governance *via* culture despite being a "soft" mode of governance, has become a modern principle of contemporary Vietnam socialism. It participates in directing ways of life and spatial practices of the inhabitants, together with, coercive policies and regulations" (2010, p.123).

These discourses are not only well known by the inhabitants, but they also participate directly in shaping their daily life, because they are integrated into their systems of values and representations. Thus, the urban dwellers become direct agents of change and relay national policies at the local scale. For Bill Hayton, urban middle classes have progressively been convinced by public the authorities' visions of the clearance of public space and new modern ways of consuming

« Shopkeepers and professionals look down on the street traders and the itinerant workers, deride them for their rural ways, call them *nhà quê* (country bumpkin) and support the state's campaigns to keep them off the street » (2010, p.55).

Thus, there is a progressive convergence of interests between the public authorities – who want to control and order the city – and the emerging middle class, newly owner of its properties – in particular of real estate properties –, who also want to encourage a clearer delimitation of this newly acquired private property. In Vietnam, the consumer society participates in a society of political consensus.

Nevertheless, if the population generally support these discourses, it does not prevent from the emergence – and more and more the expression – of feelings of injustice from urban dwellers excluded from the supposed benefits of this modernization movement. The land clearance procedures, and the very low compensations going with them, are more and more considered as unfair; so is the lack of consultation during the project implementation and its very uncertain calendar. The inhabitants are attentive to the nature of any projects implying land clearance; they also care for the potential beneficiaries of these projects (Segard, 2014). The multiplication of golf courses in the urban peripheries,

forced displacements for "ghost projects" *(dự án ma)*, or the increase of privatisation of collective spaces, such as public parks, are viewed as deeply unfair and against the common good, whose the socialist government should be responsible for (ibid).

This infringement of common good is particularly hard for villager's communities living on the margin of metropolises. The predation of land resources by the urban expansion is perceived as an unacceptable colonial process and leads to tensions, delays and even blockages in the projects implementation (Labbé and Segard, 2014). Facing the limits of "soft governance", the central state – or its local representatives – can use authoritarian practices, sometimes implying the use of violence, in the name of the superior interest of the national and the development mission of the state-party.

Part 2. The production of the city, between control and negotiation

2.1 Vietnamese regime's spatial measures of control

« Recovering of land » undertakings are the principal source of social tensions in contemporary Vietnam (Vietnam Development Report 2010, Gibert 2014a), given the major disjunction between official compensation rates and market values for both residential and agricultural lands (Truong Thien Thu and Perera Ranjith 2010). During these phases of tension, these two opposed stakeholders are using manifold strategies, from negotiation to blockage or coercion, that sometimes result in resolving the conflict and finding a consensus, or sometimes lead to forcing through or freezing a project.

From the public authorities perspective, the first way to gain the support – or at least the passivity of the inhabitants – is verbal threat. Fines are foreseen, mentions of judicial proceedings or military and police interventions are thrown, the idea of public disgrace is also underline. Indeed, if some people remain opposed to a project aiming at the nation « modernization », they might be consider as bad patriots. At the same moment, pressure is also put on infra-local actors, such as heads of hamlets or neighbourhood, members of the party or mass organizations, that must « show by example », considering their position. Doing so, the authorities are trying to break coalitions built around a common interest or federations of inhabitants against one specific project, by bribing some of their

members or threatening them. This is how opposition fronts are progressively crumbling : some lots are finally conceded, some frontage are being destroyed, and as compensation rates are diminishing, some neighbours finally accept the offer, even if it is still considered unfair or unjustified.

Nonetheless, if the inhabitants managed to stay united, state violence remains an possible option, even thought it is consider as the last resort.This solution in actually implemented when the state authority needs to be reasserted on specific projects and priorities: supporting investors, favour private interests or avoid « loosing face », especially when the country is hosting international events or distinguished guests. The construction of Mỹ Đình stadium in Hà Nội, for the Southeast Asian Games in 2003 is a good example of these kind of scenario (Sheng Han Sun and Trang Vu Kim 2008, p. 1110). While the project was frozen for months, the direct intervention of Phan Văn Khải, Prime minister at that time, and the pressure he put on Hà Nội's People's Committee enabled the conflict resolution : 70% of the land titles' owners finally conceded them « pacifically » to the authorities, while the remaining 30% were expelled by the police.

The regime's capacity to adapt to local circumstances explains that resorting to violence remains exceptional. Vietnam actually manages to avoid the image of a dictatorship by relying on its dense networks of political and territorial control, on its ability to use propaganda, on its capacity to put pressure and on its legal means.

2.2. The inhabitants, between circumventions and negotiations

From the inhabitants point of view, the range of opposition, negotiations or avoidances strategies is as wide, which nuance the regime authoritarianism and its capacity to unilaterally impose its views. Collective forms of protest and frontal open oppositions are usually confined to few dissidents groups, usually built from abroad by diaspora members. These organisations are systematically repressed by the public authorities, via imprisonments, websites denied access or forced dissolution. Resistances and tensions are nevertheless frequents and consists of :

« everyday forms of resistance [...] the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups : foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so on » (Scott 1985, p.xvi).

These « everyday politics » (Kerkvliet 2006) don't require formal organisation or challenging of the state, and are as many « quiet encroachment » (Bayat 2000) to the norms. These resistances, originally based on an individual scale, can become – if systematized – source of flexibility and public policies' adaptation. « Everyday forms of resistance » range from illegally enlarging one's house by encroaching upon the road, to storing private goods on public space, installing a food stand on a portion of the sidewalk or making a fool out of the public authorities by propagating rumours and wearing down their credibility.

The conflict that happened in the commune of Sơn Đồng, belonging to the city of Hà Nội since 2008, is a good example of the variety of means of action and their possible mobilization. A 40 hectares industrial-residential project had been announced in 2006 then formally authorized by the Hà Tây Provincial authorities in 2008 . Its official objective was to increase the available lands for the craft production and allow mechanisation of few steps of the production chain, the village being specialized in rites-related statuary and lacquer. Despite this « common-good » turned, in favour of Sơn Đồng village development, as a all, villagers rapidly opposed this zone, with the arguments of insufficient compensation prices rates and foreseen high selling prices that would prevent them from accessing these new « industrial lands ». They argued that this project was, *de facto,* a private one, for profit.

Following the land recovery announce, the first villagers' reaction was to demand a consultation meeting. This request remained untreated, feeding local angst. Then the opposition took another turn, with informal discussion, propagation of rumours and continuation of farming the soon to be seized lands.

Confronted to the public authorities mutism, the inhabitants decided to contact upper levels, bypassing the administrative system hierarchy, writing to districts and provinces, sending petitions to the central level – communist party as well as government – arguing

that « democratic procedures » supposedly implemented to accept projects were not followed. More and more aware of their rights – through medias for instance – villagers « gather information, compare situations and ask for written documentation to authorities » (Culas 2010, p.65), using the new legislative corpus on grassroots democracy and land « liberation » procedures to their advantage.

The legislative corpus and the procedural frame have actually being evolving in reaction to a movement of citizens protests. Following Thái Bình, Thanh Hóa and Đồng Nai rural uprisings in 1997, linked to corruption issues and collusions affairs, the Grassroots Democracy Decree 29/1998/ND-CP was adopted, introducing new information, control and participation procedures to take local decisions. Ulterior amendments, other laws and decrees had also been adopted since, expanding the legislative corpus of « good practices » and citizen's involvement. These measures, partly adopted to answer to popular pressure and to offer a democratic "colour" internationally, are nevertheless scarily applied and remain largely ineffective (Segard 2014).

In Sơn Đồng, the contestation progressively took a violent turn. Some inhabitants started to make their opposition to the project public, distributing pamphlets against the People's Committee at the market or trying to convince their co-citizens to act. This finally lead to the organization of a manifestation at the commune People's Committee office. This meeting originally was set up to ask again for an information session but ended up with the sequestration of both the People's Committee President and the commune Party General Secretary. The police intervention nevertheless put a term to this manifestation and its « leaders » got arrested and jailed[4]. Following these events, the industrial zone project had been suspended[5]. However, the element of violence in this confrontation doesn't explain this suspension alone: Sơn Đồng's integration in Hà Nội's administrative sphere is largely responsible of this stop.

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[4]These events took place in January 2008. At the time of our field work, in January 2010, these people were still imprisoned or were still under probation.
[5]Following Hà Nội's enlargement in 2008, all investment licences that had been delivered by Hà Tây have been suspended and a thorough overhaul has been decided.

Despite the growing visibility of these affairs in the medias, these tensions shouldn't be aggregated as a common « front » and interpreted as a deep challenging of the regime. All these resistances, ostentatious or dissimulated, are mostly contingents with local affairs, and rarely go beyond this dimension. Central authorities are indeed not directly incriminated, whether by fear of exposing oneself to more repression, by political strategy or because the central government keeps inspiring a certain esteem. Martin Gainsborough also underlines this nuance, stating that « beyond individual instances of unrest, it would, however, be misleading to speak of a rural opposition in Vietnam understood in terms of an organization with a common institutional base and a coherent critique of party rules » (2010, p.14).
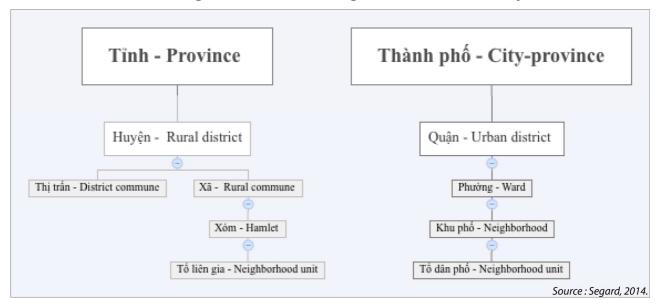
2.3. The mediating figure of the « local chief » : a recomposing position

Channels of expression and information feedbacks enable penetration of every components of the society, in each territory, and explain the regime capacity to capture and hear popular opinion in order to adapt its policies. These « transmitters », that make the State-Society iterative movements possible, are strategic at the local scale of ward or village, and at the infra-local level, of the street, the alley or the hamlet[6] (*Ill. 2*). These levels represent important arenas and focal points for the management, even for self-management, of the population and a contact point between public authorities and the inhabitants, through key actors, such as head of alleys or hamlets, that locally ensure the institutional flexibility of the regime.

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6 People's Committee at the three territorial levels (province, district and commune/ward) are the administrative bodies in charge of executive power, the local twins of the central government.

Illustration 2. The Vietnamese Democratic Centralism. From province to micro-local : ensuring an extensive management of the territory

Source : Segard, 2014.

Semi-official actors of the administrative and political vietnamese structure, these local chiefs are « the only states agents in Vietnam that reach right into homes. They can mobilize people personally, and, in this sense, the state in not 'faceless' » (Koh 2006, p.49). These active members of the local community also embodied the state. For David Koh, they are used as a tool by the public authorities in order to « promote community spirit and ideology as well as to perform administrative duties ». Nevertheless, their loyalty and obedience are not only devoted to the People's Committee, and these agents also see themselves as porte-paroles of their community. They are torn between to accountabilities, being sent by the People's Committee to ensure tasks and at the same time being invested in an important mission of representing their constituency, which is a growing responsibility. For Nguyễn Thị Thanh Bình, « as a result, they confront a major challenge on how to be accountable to both local people and the state » (2010, p.99), and this duality is often illustrated by the enlightening expression « power of straw, stone responsibilities » *(quyền rơm vạ đá)*, as their semi-official status gives them very few leeways in both legal or budget matters.

This pivotal position nonetheless offer them a capacity to soften public decisions, to limit their local implementation or to convince their co-citizens – thanks to their moral authority – to yield to new regulations. These chiefs are therefore important intermediaries to find local consensus, to accompany or slow down the impact of reforms and to maintain a certain stability in wards and village. Their role currently tend to evolve either as representative and partisan of the inhabitants, or on the contrary, as a non-influent representative of the State, which authority is overlooked and bypassed by the inhabitants, who address their concerns directly to the higher levels. Their effectiveness and power are indeed threaten as communities are opening themselves and facing recomposition. It is worth noticing that the new urban zones are getting rid of these local agents, who are replaced by private management entities or by self-proclaimed local representatives (Labbé 2014, Segard 2014). In Đồng Kỵ for instance, the second industrial-craft zone, built and run by the private company ITD, is managed by a management committee for the zone, that takes care of tasks usually devolved either to the People's Committee – rubbish collection, infrastructures maintenance – either to the local heads – mediation of neighbours conflict.

Part 3. Urban transition and new negotiation platforms

The urban transition, the country integration in a more and more globalized context, and the increase of youth mobilities and independence – particularly trough the use of the Internet – participate in changes of the Vietnamese citizenship. New aspirations and demands emerge from these renewed urban stakeholders.

3.1. Vietnamese authoritarianism facing an exponential increase of mobilities

Metropolization processes of Hô Chí Minh City and Hà Nội go along with an explosion of urban mobilities. These are both due to the arrival of new urban dwellers coming from the surroundings countryside or from more remote provinces, and to residential inner-city and daily mobilities (Gubry 2008, Gubry et Lê Hô Phong Linh 2010). Several processes contribute to the growth of these residential and daily mobilities, beginning by urban

planning programmes – which imply frequent undesired displacements of dwellers –, but also the development of new housing estate in the city's periphery and the new process of de-cohabitation of young people. Moreover, land investment's strategies are also responsible for residential mobilities (Gibert 2014b). These various types of mobilities contribute to social changes at the neighbourhood scale, where a progressive individuation of way of life can be observed, together with a growing extraversion of communities. These evolutions challenge the ancient local socio-economic balance and often have paradoxical effects during daily negotiations between the inhabitants and their authorities.

For instance, in the outskirts of Hà Nội, the village of Trang Hạ has been affected by generational differences since the arrival of 3 000 external young students, who came to join the new University of Sport. Even if some members of the People Committee consider these youths with benevolence, some others regret that their presence affect the village "atmosphere". According to them, these youths living far way from their family spend too much time "hanging out" in the village until late at night and disturb the usual quietness. Moreover, the arrival of urban populations in the newly urbanized areas questions their capacity of integration among the village communities (*Ill. 3*). Interviews conducted in the municipality of Xuân Đỉnh in the Greater Hà Nội in 2011 – where some lands have been expropriated to build the Ciputra gated community – show that links are limited between this newly urbanized zone and the surrounding villages (Segard 2014). The new inhabitants visit the village very rarely: they rarely get their supplies from the local markets, usually do not frequent the coffee shops and do not participate in the village social life. The rare contacts are due to the villagers working in the newly urbanized zones, for gardening or housework, which are not inclusive activities and do not contribute to the edification of a territorialized community.

Moreover, it is frequent to see new residents of the zone addressing their request directly to the district authorities because they benefit from a sufficient social capital. The local and daily figure of street or hamelt chief is then easily bypassed, and sometimes even questioned.

Illustration 3. Urban modernity, functional zoning and exclusivity: marketing strategy in new urbanized areas

Source : Sudico, the main investor of the project

This marketing document presenting An Khánh-South khu đô thị mới (new urban area) is a good example of two recurring features in this kind of advertising campaign. First, these plans are usually greatly idealized. Then, they voluntarily avoid representing the real environment of the area. Here, craft villages that are actually surrounding the site have been replaced by a luxurious vegetation.

In this context of growing mobilities, Vietnamese urban dwellers are becoming more and more « plural men » (Lahire, 1998), who are able to navigate between different social spheres and urban spaces, looking for more anonymity, especially when they want to be critical towards the political regime. Therefore, paradoxically, the places where political debates emerge today are often associated with – juridically speaking – private spaces, where anonymity is more guaranteed, apart from local surveillance networks (Hogan *et al.* 2012). These places are often cafés, but also some shopping malls, where the urban dwellers can beneficiate from a certain freedom of action and speech, compared to their neighbourhood and hamlets streets. This is due to the nearly extra-territorial status of the shopping mall, ruled with its own regulations. These new urban practices can occasionally challenge the efficiency of local surveillance networks, based on mass organizations and local chiefs.

3.2. Towards the privatisation of urban production: a challenge for inherited management structures

The private status of malls is also a question at the bigger city scale, with the current multiplication of new urbanized zones (*hhu đô thị mới),* as mega-projects. These projects illustrate both the privatisation and internationalisation of the Vietnamese urban fabric. In Hô Chí Minh City, the new area of Phú Mỹ Hưng – also known as Saigon South – is a good example of this tendencies. Saigon South has been produced by a Taiwanese-Vietnamese joint venture, which began the planning of a 3 300 ha area in 1993 in district 7, with the slogan « civilization city – human-oriented community ». Saigon South is thought as an independent piece of town, with its residential areas – made of high-rise buildings and classy villas – its commercial zones, but also office buildings, leisure and education places. The urbanization of the zone is structured by main roads and a functional zoning of the different activities. This mega-project is characterised by a general privatisation process: both urban places and planning and managing stakeholders of the zone belong to the private sector. This new developed zone is only dedicated to upper classes: the real estate offer is very selective and there is no public housing at all.

Even though they are not all enclosed or disconnected from their local environment, this type of newly urbanized zone is multiplying, meaning that large part of the urban territory is not directly ruled by public or classic infra-public stakeholders anymore. It is for example the case in new hand-craft and industrial zones in the urban peripheries. The infra-local administrative subsystem and its representatives are missing there, at least in the beginning, and mass organization also face difficulties to settle down there. As far as the daily management, urban services or neighbourhood relationships are concerned, they are mainly managed by "management committees" constituted by the investors and developers of the zone. New local organization forms are being invented and settled down, only marginally controlled by the public authorities. This privatisation of the urban production challenges the former socialist forms of territorial control. These new urbanized zones' structures of control serve a neo-liberal order and do not contribute to the citizens' emancipation from the state supervision or to collective claims.

Mass organisations also compete with the increase of autonomous associations, such as alumni networks or professional and leisure organisations, which federate members on an

extra-territorial basis, on a common interest. Even in villages' communities, a multitude of associations emerge and constitute alternative spaces for discussion, informal meetings, mutual assistance or construction of a social capital, apart from the ancient frame of the socialist system (Ill. 4). According Russel Dalton and Nhu Ngoc Ong « since opposition political parties are prohibited, these non-political groups might serve as outlets for casual political discussion with fewer chances of being accused of law-breaking » (2003, p.9).

Illustration 4. A typology of new volunteers associations in Đông Quang municipality (Bắc Ninh province)

Association's names	Club's names
Water buffalos association	Veterans club
Fighting cocks association	*Quan họ* club (folk songs)
Birds association	Art club
Traditional chess association	Poetry club
Chèo association (folk songs)	Cycling club
Same age persons association	Table tennis club
Classmates association	Fitness training club
Friends association	Badminton club
Same infantry unit veterans association	Ornamental plants club
Same regiment veterans association	Living plants art club
Retired people association	Association to support education

Source : Đặng Thị Việt Phương (2009)

Besides the seven mass organizations at the communal and infra-communal levels, Đặng Thị Việt Phương considers that a hundred associations or clubs have been recently created in Đông Quang, which can be considered as structures competing with the inherited marxist-leninist system.

The development of the Internet and social networks platforms online also contribute to enhance the citizens' connexions and participate in a form of emancipation from the local control, even though the state-party practices still censorship and daily surveillance. Apart from this social control inherited from the socialist period, not only new self-managed associations emerge, but also pre-socialist customs and rituals re-emerge, more and more massively invested by the local communities (Endres 2001, DiGregorio 2007). Religious

activities forbidden during the social period of edification of the New Man – such as the Buddhist celebration of tutelary genies – achieve a strong success today and propose an alternative system of values.

Conclusion

The country development and the economic opening, together with its growing insertion in more and more globalized networks, led the Vietnamese regime to engage a reforms movement of the national institutional frame and a progressive redistribution of powers. These evolutions are very linked with the emergence of tensions about urban production and main cities planning. The choices made by the authorities are sometimes perceived as opposed to the common good by the urban dwellers.

The land control, the edification of a "modern" city, together with the constitution of a new urban order, constitute the main elements through which the state-party affirm its power and authoritarianism. Paradoxically, the concrete modalities of urban planning are also a matter of opposition for the citizens, who sometimes federate themselves against the implement of urban projects seen as unfair. The citizens negotiate their participation in the urban production and claim their right to benefit from the wealth newly produced. Theses analyses allow qualifying the Vietnamese political regime as a "negotiated authoritarianism". Through these processes, the figure at the interface between state and society – such as local chief – become central pivot both for the daily functioning and the upholding of the regime.

Urbanization process allows also the emergence of new expression and negotiations platforms, while the progressive individuation of ways of life contribute to renew the citizens requirements and aspirations. Today, ideological tensions about the development vision, but also about its various forms and beneficiaries are still bypassed and contained, one by one, through reactive and repressive policies. The regime relies on flexible and iterative governance principles: either it experiments locally-based new answers, either it limits and contains sharply these experimentations, especially when the public opinion becomes too agitated. The maintain of the party hegemony on every part of the

Vietnamese society or economy depends greatly on the regime's capacity to negotiate the society growing differentiation.

Thus, these evolutions question the capacity of the state-party to integrate and facilitate the inclusions of new social and professional categories, new associations or dissident's groups and interests coalitions. Their acknowledgment, the capacity to canalise their requirements and to control them is at stakes. Then, the study of governmentality at the local scale allows the revalue space as a negotiations media and local resistances as a fertile ground for the understanding of a progressive relaxing political authoritarianism. Research on the everyday temporality, on mundane events and local scale, help to qualify a monolithic vision of politic regimes, which are *a priori* seen as authoritarian and omnipotent.

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