

# THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC SPACES TO SOCIAL INTEGRATION FOR YOUNG MIGRANT WORKERS IN HANOI

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## **Abstract**

In Hanoi, there are currently tens of thousands of migrants working in peri-urban industrial zones and small-scale private manufacturing workshops in the inner city and construction sites. Many of them live in precarious houses, where the quality of life is rather poor, and they travel with little integration. For this reason, this project has been carried out and investigated how public spaces are used by the migrant workers, hereby finding out the difficulties they may have encountered while trying to integrate into the local community and suggesting some solutions to their integration by means of public space design. The main research methods include the qualitative survey with half-structured interviews conducted in three wards: Truong Dinh, Thuy Phuong and Sai Dong. The research outcomes reveal the most frequently-visited places among young migrant workers. It is noticeable that they do not go there very often. The main reason for this fact is that they do not have enough time or money. In addition, there is a lack of good-quality public space near their homes and their understanding of the importance of public space remains incomplete. This study also suggests that how those public buildings could be created for those workers to attend public activities. Then social connections will be cemented.

*Keywords:* migrant workers; social integration; public spaces.

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## **1. Introduction**

Hanoi is a major city as well as a large economic centre, attracting many migrant labourers, including workers in industrial parks. According to a report by the Ministry of Planning and Investment, there are eight industrial parks in operation with a total number approximately 150,000 workers, and about 70% of them come from other cities and provinces. In addition, many small-scale workshops and construction sites privately run in the inner city have also employed a large number of migrant workers.

Young workers, mostly coming from the countryside, must adapt themselves to new life as they work in industrial parks. It is wistful to find out that most of them are manual labourers, not attending any training courses and thus earning less than what they really need to ensure a minimum living standard [1]. The only way of earning more for them is working extra hours. Overwork in many industrial parks is frequently reported, making up about 60% of all cases (207 factories surveyed

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by Better Work Vietnam) [2]. As a consequence, those workers face health-related problems and have almost no time for themselves, which leads to their extremely boring spiritual cultural lives. The project -“Urban Poverty Observation” - undertaken by ActionAid, UKAid and Oxfarm used a questionnaire regarding six major factors that would lack the most in the view of migrant workers in an industrial park in Hanoi from 2008 to 2012. “Lack of social integration” was considered the second most serious problem, only behind “very high living cost”, even ahead of “inadequate housing condition” [3].

There have been several research projects focusing on migrant workers’ social integration in terms of sociology, psychology and management, such as “Social integration in Vietnamese cities” [4] or “Studies on social integration – Some recommendations for Vietnam [5]. However, in terms of planning, no research projects have ever assessed to the roles that urban spaces and especially public spaces should play in ensuring a successful integration for migrant workers in Hanoi particularly and in Vietnam generally.

Worldwide, some experts have already emphasised the positive impacts of urban spaces on city inhabitants, young people and even immigrants. Individually, activities in public spaces may help alleviate daily life pressure and encourage a healthy lifestyle [6]. To the community, public spaces are believed to make a significant contribution to the consolidation of social relations within a neighbourhood, as well as the improvement of public awareness and spirit of solidarity. Even walking is said to have a positive impact on residents’ perception of their living quarters [7]. Carr in his book “Public Spaces”, stated that “*public spaces are places for people coming from different cultural backgrounds to get together in a supportive context and enjoy the benefit it may bring. As this experience repeats, public spaces will become effective tools for the community*” [8]. Public spaces, such as parks, squares or any other forms, should be an environment that enables public meetings among residents living in the same neighbourhood and this may help develop the local community. A public space designed with a good quality has a strong influence on the public health, safety and security, and the sense of responsibility among citizens [9]. A barrier-free integration should therefore be encouraged in well- managed open public spaces and pave the way for mutual understanding while bringing a great urban experience to people. Furthermore, this shows a respect to the community and an interest in people’s socio-political life [10]. Public spaces in general, and green areas in particular, play an extremely important part in the improvement of social interactions and migrant workers can feel more self-confident while trying to integrate into the local community [11]. Outdoor activities are regarded as essential instruments for young generations with different cultural backgrounds to get on well together, even when they tend to depend largely on the virtual reality of the cybernet [12].

It is apparent that public spaces play an important role in our lives and in migrant workers’ integration globally. How do the migrant workers in Hanoi use public spaces? Will these public spaces be able to help migrant workers while they make every effort to integrate into the host city? How could barriers, if any, influence their access to public spaces? These research questions provided the team with an initial orientation towards such a topical issue as the use of public spaces among young migrant workers. With this in mind, the team will find out some solutions to the development and management of public spaces, as well as some supporting policies and encouragement so that migrant workers use these spaces more often.

## 2. Definition, scope, object and methods of research

### 2.1. Establishment and development of research

This research forms part of a larger-scale project on migrant workers administered by TRYS-PACES – an international research organisation focusing on transformative youth spaces. Subjects of research are young migrant workers between the ages of 16 to 29. The sites of project are 5 wards, in which three wards are the areas of migrant workers namely Truong Dinh, Thuy Phuong and Sai Dong (Fig. 1). The survey was conducted from September till the end of December 2018.

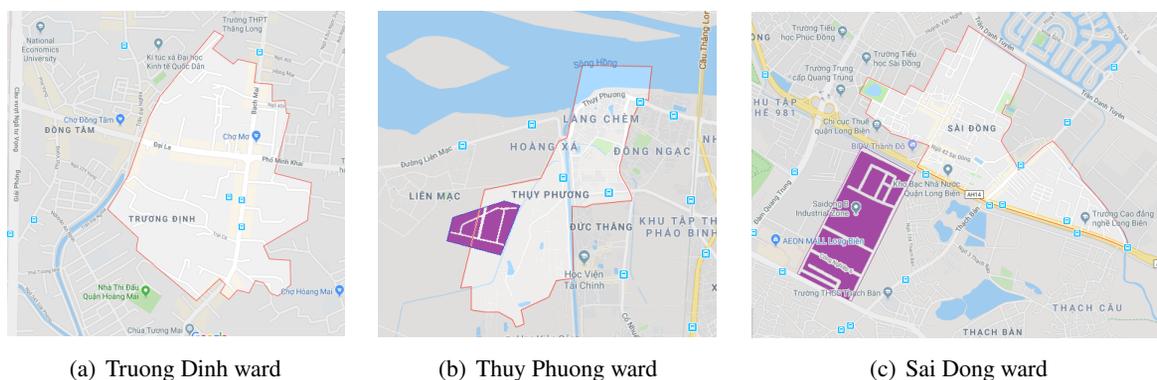


Figure 1. Maps of research areas (Red boundary areas: wards; purple areas:IZs)

### 2.2. Definition of public space and social integration to be used in this research project

Public space has been defined in different ways. In urban planning, public space is historically described “open space”, denoting that this could be a street, a park, an entertainment centre, a city square, etc., where everybody can be offered free access. Nevertheless, in recent years, a new type - semi-public space - managed by public - private partners or even by private partners only has become more and more popular and diverse, and made a major contribution to urban residents’ activities to a certain extent [13]. Starting with integration-supportive space for migrant workers, the team tends to pursue the research in an open-minded thinking when it comes to public space and its definition. This concept encompasses various objects, including parks and mini-parks, pavements, service and trade areas, religious buildings and sports centres, etc. which workers can spend some hours after work relaxing or refreshing, playing, meeting and communicating with people.

On the theoretic level, social integration indicates some principles by which individuals are bound to each other in the social space. Integration of a social system means the reciprocal interaction of segments of a certain social structure, [14]. Social integration needs to create equality, allow the participation of all people in many dimensions: 1) Economic dimension (employment, income, living costs); 2) Dimensions related to infrastructure (settlement, housing, living facilities); 3) Dimension of social capital (social network, social participation); 4) Dimension of human capital (health, education, living environment); 5) Political dimension (political understanding, participation political events) [15]. It can be said that social integration is a very widely recognized concept. However, this study only considers the role of public space in the social inclusion. Therefore, social integration is primarily seen in the dimension of social relations, including the expansion of human social capital through participation in public space activities.

### 2.3. Objects and scope of research

The main research methods that have been used are data collection and analysis, based on the qualitative survey with half-structured interviews. The research aims at young migrant workers aged from 16 to 29, currently living in the following three wards: Truong Dinh, Thuy Phuong and Sai Dong. The sampling was the convenience sampling, carried out with 30 participants, evenly distributed in the three residential areas.

Table 1. Summary of quantity and characteristics of research samples

Characteristics	Quantity by residential area			Total	
	Truong Dinh	Thuy Phuong	Sai Dong	Quantity	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>					
16 to 20 years old	3	4	1	8	27
21 to 25 years old	3	3	4	10	33
26 to 29 years old	4	3	5	13	40
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	7	3	4	14	47
Female	3	7	6	16	53
<b>Marital status</b>					
Single	7	3	6	16	53
Married	3	7	4	14	47
<b>Children</b>					
None	8	4	7	19	63
One child	2	4	1	7	23
Two children	0	2	2	4	16
<b>Education level</b>					
Class 5 to Class 8	3	0	0	3	10
Class 9 to Class 11	4	4	0	8	27
Class 12	2	6	9	17	57
College	1	0	0	1	3
University	0	0	1	1	3
<b>Time to live in Hanoi</b>					
Less than 1 year	3	4	2	9	30
One to three years	4	5	4	13	43
Four to seven years	2	0	0	2	7
Seven to nine years	0	0	4	4	13
Ten years or longer	1	1	0	2	7
<b>Income (million VND)</b>					
From 4.5 to 5.9	5	3	2	10	33
From 6 to 7.9	3	7	6	16	53
From 8 to 10	2	0	2	4	13
Sample quantity	10	10	10	30	100

Note: Point of time (age and the time to live in Hanoi) – as of December 2018

Truong Dinh ward is located in Hai Ba Trung district as an old central district in Hanoi. Workers living here work in various small workshops or private garment, cake-making factories as construction

workers or bricklayer assistants. In general, these workers are mostly not qualified, and some just finished primary school. Reversely, Thuy Phuong ward situated in North Tu Liem district and Sai Dong ward as part of Long Bien district are two peri-urban areas with industrial zones (IZs) (South Thang Long and Sai Dong, respectively). Workers in Thuy Phuong and Sai Dong work in industrial zones and they were employed based on strict requirements. Most of them have high-school certificates.

Workers interviewed in the group’s survey live in rented houses within a short distance from work. Living conditions are inadequate, rooms do not exceed 10 m<sup>2</sup> in most cases, and some are provided with separate kitchen and toilette. Workers live with local families or share houses with other co-workers, normally two to three persons per room, having to pay 600,000 to 1,200,000 VND per month as rental fee. Construction workers and bricklayer assistants stay in temporary housing at construction sites.

2.4. Information collecting and data analysis

Information was collected on the basis of observation and intensive interviews with the half-structured questionnaire. The story might be extended and depends on the respondents. Most of the interviews were conducted at workers’ homes. The group members interviewed the workers and watched their behaviour or attitude (their expressions, living conditions and housing comfort) in order to understand better the stories that the workers told and/or shared.

The group decided to choose migrant workers between 16 and 29, of which about 30% was invited to react in a snow-ball match while the rest were conveniently selected in rental rooms near factories.

Data analysis was quantitatively carried out by means of data coding, searching for repetitive data and identifying both frequency and development trend, and finally finding the principles as well as the descriptions for research outcomes.

3. Findings and discussions

3.1. General assessment of the current situation of public space usage among workers

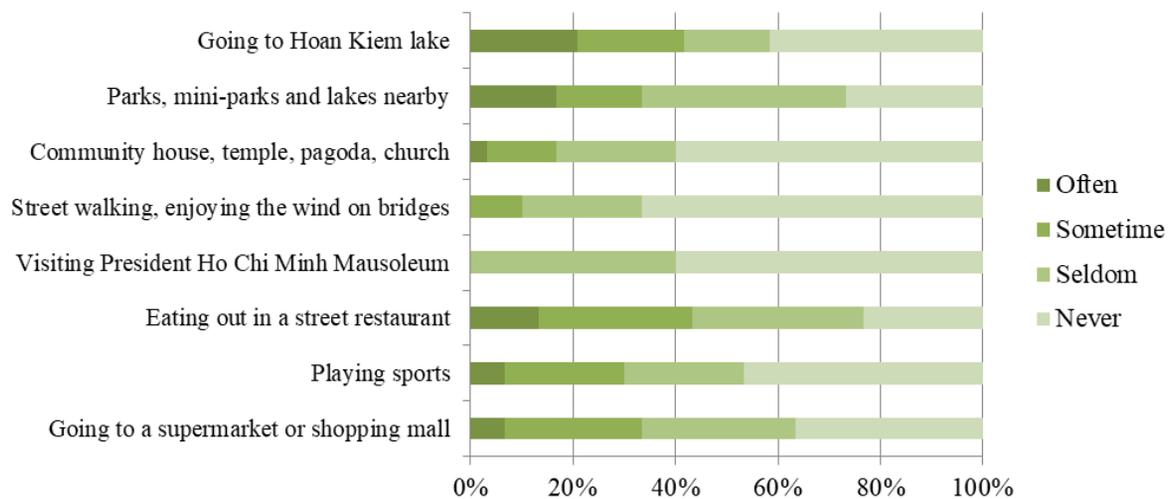


Figure 2. Frequency of use of public spaces among migrant workers

According to the survey results (Fig. 2), the workers do not use public spaces very often. Some of them have never been to the most popular options including trade centres and shops, mini-parks, city parks, temples, pagodas as well as well-known sites for sight-seeing in Hanoi, for instance: President Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum or Hoan Kiem Lake. A relatively low frequency can be noted. “Often” means to many of them “once a week or every two weeks”, “sometimes” can be once or twice within three months, while “seldom” is “once only”.

Some symbolic public buildings or places, such as President Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, Thong Nhat Park or Times City, may be visited once only by those workers. However, Hoan Kiem Lake and pedestrian streets at the weekend can be a good option for many of them, even among those who live and work far from the city centre, for example in Thuy Phuong or Sai Dong industrial park. Like others, T., a 26-year-old male worker in Sai Dong said that his most favourite public space was Hoan Kiem lake. He and his roommates often go there on Saturday or Sunday evening every week.

Frequently visited places among the workers are usually located near their accommodation. In the case of Sai Dong, the workers prefer to go to Thach Ban lake and Aeon Mall Centre. Many workers in Thuy Phuong would like to relax after working hours in Chem Community House. Convenience is the reason for choosing street food or drink stalls as common places to reduce stress and hang out/communicate with friends.

Sports fields, primarily football courts, are often chosen (weekly or occasionally - monthly) by male workers in Sai Dong and Thuy Phuong. In these outlying quarters, many vacant land plots with the modest investment can be organised into football courts for rent at 300,000 to 400,000 VND per hour. For female workers, some never play any kind of sports like however to watch a football match as the supporters for their husbands, colleagues and co-villagers.

### *3.2. Reasons why the workers rarely go to public places*

#### *a. Time*

Having no time (or very little time) is the main reason given by many workers why they rarely go to public places. As demonstrated in the survey, most of the workers have to work six days a week and have only free time on Sunday. Some of them even have to work on Sunday and have only two days off a month. Their working time differs greatly: i) working permanently ten hours a day (from 7 am to 5 pm); ii) working permanently 12 hours a day (from 7 am to 7 pm) and iii) shift-based working condition (morning from 6 am to 2 pm and afternoon from 2 pm until 10 pm, and at night from 10 pm to 2 am). Additionally, they have to work extra hours when their enterprises receive more orders from customers, usually two to four hours right after their typical working day. As a consequence of working intensively, they feel very tired. All that they want to do after work is sleeping or staying at home and getting up later than usual.

Nevertheless, sometimes “the feeling of lacking time” is not a reason why the workers rarely go to public places. When they have free time, most of them surf the internet. It is possible to notice that digital technology and virtual cybernet have an immense impact on young people, changing their habits and awareness in the way they use public spaces.

#### *b. Cost*

Cost is also one of the reasons why the workers refuse to go to public places. Most workers said that they only stayed in Hanoi for a while to earn money, not to settle permanently. Beside their daily living expenses, they save money to send home or accumulate for future plans. Therefore, their spending is quite tight. They hesitate to spend in shopping malls, supermarkets, but feel free to spend

on parties or playing football with their friends. They know what they will have (good health and joy) when they use public places and they will be able to pay if it is worth.

#### c. Discrimination

There are some studies showing that migrant workers face discrimination in many places [16]. Therefore, the researchers were very interested in finding out whether this is a barrier that prevents those migrants from going to public spaces. However, most of the workers asked in the interview programme stated that there would be no discrimination at all against migrant workers or any other difference between Hanoians and the countrymen in public places. Discrimination happens at work sometimes, especially when migrant workers start to work, and thus they do not know how to behave or react properly towards such attitude.

It is possible to notice that in crowded public places like Hoan Kiem lake, migrant workers feel free to join the others. All migrant workers said that they did not realise that they were different from those around them. In other public places, such as those near their living quarters, the local people know where a person comes from. In Thuy Phuong and Sai Dong, for example, they are not so much different in terms of lifestyle or cultural background because these areas have just been recently urbanised, so the local people are quite friendly to migrant workers. As for those migrant workers, they do not encounter any difficulties when they communicate with the local community or participate in activities in public places.

According to the survey results, although there is in general no discrimination between Hanoians and the migrant workers, minor ethnic people, such as Muong, Tay, Mong, etc. from the provinces of Son La, Thai Nguyen and Lai Chau are said to be sometimes discriminated because of their ethnic groups and cultures. They could be called “people from mountainous provinces” in a negative meaning. Such behaviour might be seen at work or in residential areas at the beginning, when they first arrived. Some workers from Thanh Hoa or Nghe An province think that they should change their accents so that no difference may be found.

#### d. Lack of public places in residential areas

The survey shows that only 40% of the migrant workers have motorbikes, some have bicycles and the others do not have any vehicles to go to work. Therefore, they will only be able to go somewhere far from their living quarters on special occasions, such as during public holidays. The story of T., a female worker, aged 27, currently living in Truong Dinh ward highlighted the workers’ dream of having public spaces near their homes. During the interview, she showed herself busy and tired so she rarely went to public spaces. However, when we asked about her favourite hobbies, she was excited to talk about playing volleyball when she was in Quang Ninh. She even insisted that: “If there was a volleyball court near here, I would spend some time playing that kind of sport every day, even when I was tired, because it inspires me”.

In addition to the lack of public places, other problems, such as no investment in facilities or unsafety, will prevent migrant workers from going to public places. For example, T., a 28-year-old male, currently living in Sai Dong commented that Thach Ban lake used to be a favourite public place for local people, where children used to play while senior people do morning exercise. This also used to be a place where migrant workers met, chatted and played shuttlecock. However, this area is currently not well maintained, without security guards, bad lighting systems, leading to a lack of attractiveness for local people as well as migrant workers.

### 3.3. Needs for public places among workers

Fig. 3 indicates workers' needs for public places. Asked for which public spaces they wish to be offered near where they live, 12 out of 30 migrant workers (equivalent to 40%) shared that they need parks, mini-parks and outdoor playgrounds. This is desired by all the groups: single workers and married workers (with or without children). Sports rooms, gym centres and outdoor sports facilities are the most wanted open places of 7 interviewees (23%), sought after by both men and women, as well as by both single and married workers. In the meantime, shopping malls and restaurants come third (5 respondents, equivalent to 17%) and are primarily chosen by women.

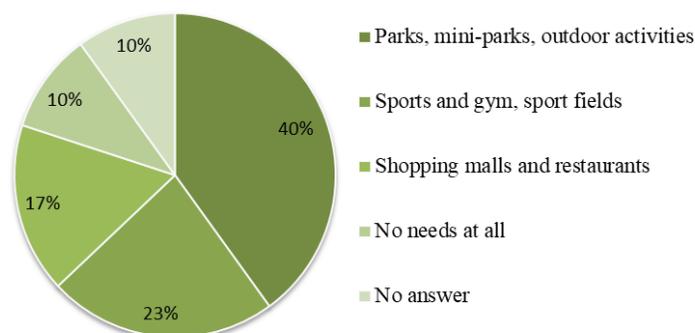


Figure 3. Statistics of workers' needs for public places near their living quarters

It is a concern that 3 migrant workers (10% interviewees) say that they have no ideas or wishes for public places. They just want to have a permanent job and good income to help their families in villages, particularly among construction workers, whose daily life activities take place within the construction sites. They rarely go out, even for a drink. They do not wish to be offered any public space nearby.

### 3.4. Workers' awareness of public places and their importance in daily life

Apart from a minority of workers who almost never go out and thus do not realise how important public places can be, the others claim that public places should be used by people for various purposes, for example relaxing, enjoying breezes, dining, chatting with friends, hanging out and getting rid of stress after long working hours in factories. Some workers participate in physical activities to keep fit. However, the majority of workers stay unaware of the role that public spaces play in "helping people to integrate in the local community". They take part in these activities primarily with their family members, co-workers, roommates and other people with whom they become acquainted. Their circle of social contacts can hardly be broadened when they use such public places.

Nevertheless, there is one interesting fact to note that in sports centres, workers tend to be more open-hearted. Sportsmanship brings people together and helps them make friends with new people. Many workers excitedly talked about their activities at football fields or shuttlecock. M., a 25-year-old male worker in Sai Dong ward said that he would like to join people playing sports and talk with them, although he does not know them so well. At the football field, he gets to know new friends during the break. They exchanged their phone numbers and invited each other to join in the next match. Another worker (A., a 23-year-old male in Sai Dong) said that he did not know how to play football. However, he was still ready to cheer on his friends' matches and join the party after the match, where he met some new friends.

#### 4. Conclusions and recommendations

In the first step of our research, it is possible to make a preliminary assessment of the use of public places among young migrant workers in three wards in Hanoi. Their favourite and most frequently visited public spaces are varied, including Hoan Kiem lake and other activities in pedestrian zones at the weekend, and then green areas, such as parks, mini-parks and lakes adjacent to their wards with pavements, tea shops or street food stalls. Anyway, only a few of them go there regularly (daily or weekly). There are many reasons for their limited participation: lack of time, low income, shortage of quality for facilities, and especially their incomplete awareness of the importance of participating in the common activities that take place in public places, which may eventually lead to the integration to the city life.

In order to encourage migrant workers to participate in public activities and to cement their connection with the local community, it is necessary to facilitate small public spaces near their wards which they can use every day. Open green areas, particularly sports fields and fitness centres will not only help migrant workers stay healthy, but also strengthen social relationships within the local community. A mini-garden, a small badminton court or an open area for doing morning exercise can be very interesting inside a living quarter and supportive space for migrant workers to achieve social integration.

For peri-urban neighbourhoods, with a larger land area available, it is essential to plan and reuse vacant land plots and develop them into sport facilities for workers and the community. They should enhance their awareness of sports and cultural activities that help consolidate social relationships among the local community. In living quarters for migrant workers, they could establish different clubs and various community activities to facilitate social connections.

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