



# ANOTHER FUTURE FOR THONG NHAT PARK

*Public spaces in transition in the new urban reality of Hanoi*



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**ANOTHER FUTURE FOR THONG NHAT PARK**

Public spaces in transition in the new urban reality of Hanoi

**EN ANNAN FRAMTID FÖR THONG NHAT PARK**

Hanois offentliga rum i förändring

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## SAMMANFATTNING

Under våren 2007 offentliggjordes planer för omvandlingen av centrala Hanois största park, Thong Nhat Park, till en privatägd nöjespark. Nyheten väckte starka känslor, och en intensiv debatt som engagerade både parkens användare, politiker och yrkesverksamma inom planering och arkitektur, följde under året. Debatten lyfte fram aktuella problemställningar och blottade många av de konflikter om stadsrummet som globaliserings- och urbaniseringsprocesserna medför. Som en direkt följd av den snabbt accelererande urbaniseringen krymper Hanois offentliga rum till ytan, då mark exploateras och privatiseras. Samtidigt ökar invånarnas handlingsutrymme i de offentliga rummen både politiskt och ekonomiskt, och med nya konsumtionsmönster och livsstilar uppstår nya behov i staden. Politiskt är situationen komplex då myndigheterna balanserar mellan kontroll och eftergifter i sin syn på vad som är tillåtet i stadens rum. Park. Sammantaget sätter dessa processer ett ökat tryck på Hanois offentliga rum och leder till en ständigt pågående förhandling om användandet av dessa.

I vårt examensarbete följer vi debatten kring Thong Nhat Park och relaterar den mot en vidare diskussion om offentliga rum i Hanoi. Med denna diskussion som utgångspunkt presenterar vi ett förslag för ett framtida Thong Nhat Park, där parken som offentligt rum har varit vårt fokus.

## ABSTRACT

In the spring of 2007 plans were released to turn the largest park in central Hanoi, Thong Nhat Park, into a privately owned theme park. The news stirred the emotions of Hanoians and a heated debate followed, involving park-users, professionals and politicians. The debate brought urgent issues to surface, revealing the multi-layered conflicts over urban space that come with the processes of globalisation and urbanisation. Due to land exploitation and privatisation the public spaces of Hanoi are shrinking in surface. Population densities in the inner city are now among the highest in the region, and a continuing rise is expected. Simultaneously the people of Hanoi are experiencing an increased scope of action in their usage of the public space, both politically and economically. New demands on the public spaces appear with new consumption patterns and life-styles, while politically there is still a fine balance between freedom and control when it comes to how the citizens are allowed to use the urban arena. The public spaces in Hanoi are thus experiencing increased pressure as well as new possibilities, and Thong Nhat Park is at the centre of this process.

In our master thesis we are following the debate about the Thong Nhat Park project and relating it to a broader discussion on the role of public space. We use this discussion as a basis for a proposal for the future Thong Nhat Park, where the park as public space has been our focus.

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Stockholm 9th of September 2008

Lisa Hellberg  
Åsa Johansson

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## PREFACE

A theme running through our work with Thong Nhat Park, formerly Lenin Park, in Hanoi is the constant shifts in perspective between local and global. Following a debate about the park from the other side of the world we found it strangely relevant to issues discussed at home. Questions of privatisation of green space and conflicts over space, as brought up in the Thong Nhat Park debate, are on the agenda across the world today. And then we went to Hanoi finding a park deeply rooted in the local context.

Another shift in perspective is that between dreams and reality. Strong symbolic images are conjured up through the debate about the Thong Nhat Park project. It seems to be all about manufacturing dreams, from the idealism of communist propaganda posters depicting model workers, to images of the glistening towers of Disneyland. The dreams of young Hanoians are reflecting the transition from a society based on communist ideals, to a society driven by the logic of capital. Old meanings are over layered by new visions when Hanoi is moving from its rural past into modernity. And still the everyday routines continue in Thong Nhat Park - the middle aged pyjama ladies gossiping on power walks, the guys showing off their muscles on the worn out gym, the couples after dark, the hundreds of dancers in the morning, the old ladies struggling around the lake, the skateboarders on Saturday afternoon, the children taking rides in rusting carousels, the men gambling in the shade, the school classes practicing badminton. This everyday life is going on seemingly regardless of the overwhelming changes in the surrounding city, and yet gradually incorporating and reflecting the changing society. What stands to be lost as the agenda is shifting from communal ideals to private interests? Can the public value of the park be maintained through changes to come?

# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

In Vietnam a new reality is emerging, in the intersection between a locally established system and a new global reality. A process of rapid urbanisation has recently been taking off and the number of city-dwellers is constantly rising. Simultaneously the processes of globalisation are transferring decisions on urban development to multinational corporations and the global economy. This puts pressure on the urban areas, leading to new types of conflicts over space. In Hanoi the available public space is shrinking in size as well as per capita, while people are experiencing an increased scope of action in their usage of public space, both politically and economically.

Our master thesis is based on a debate about the redevelopment of Thong Nhat Park in central Hanoi. This is a story which clearly demonstrates the conflicts that occur in the transition from a communal society to a system based on individuality. Conflicts between economic interests and public benefits, between generations and between history and modernity all come to surface in the debate following the news that Thong Nhat Park was set to be turned into a privately managed theme park.

These issues are not only relevant in a Vietnamese context, but are also very much on the agenda in Sweden and other western countries at the moment, with current debates on the privatisation and commercialisation of public space. Thus we believe that our work can be a basis for a discussion on issues that are also valid here, and of importance for our future work as landscape architects. The Thong Nhat Park debate raises questions about our role in projects where there are conflicts over space. As landscape architects we are faced with a complex reality in which global processes beyond our reach are affecting the urban development.

The target groups for our thesis are practitioners and students of

landscape architecture, as well as other professionals within the urban field, in Sweden and Vietnam.

## AIMS

Using the debate about Thong Nhat Park as a point of departure, we aim to study the role of public space<sup>1</sup>, and specifically public green space, in Vietnam, in the political and cultural context as well as in relation to urbanisation and globalisation.

By proposing an alternative future of Thong Nhat Park, we aim to explore ways of processing problems through design. We intend for the proposal to be a reflection of and a response to the changing reality described above.

Through this work we further aim to investigate our role as landscape architects in a situation with multiple actors and conflicting interests.

## METHOD

Working with landscape architecture and planning today means handling shifts and transitions between scales, contexts and perspectives; from the local to the global, from the small to the large scale and from the specific to the general. New methods and approaches are needed as globalisation is making urban processes more complex and hard to grasp.

Our method is to look at Thong Nhat Park in the local context, and reflect this against global processes. Through extensive mapping of the activities in the park, we aim to get a comprehensive picture of the use of the park and how it is distributed spatially and temporally. The mappings are not only quantitative, but also reflect the conditions of everyday life in the park, and the park as public space.

The on site studies are combined with theoretical research. Literature relating to the processes of globalisation, urbanisation and politics in Vietnam and Hanoi, as well as literature on public space, in a western and Asian perspective is studied. To broaden our view on the subject we are also conducting interviews with professionals both in Sweden and Vietnam.

The collected information is processed through an iterative method, with interplay between design practice and theoretical discussions. We aim to work in an investigative and open process where our proposal for Thong Nhat Park is not a final solution, but rather an argument in an ongoing debate.

<sup>1</sup> The concept of public space has multiple dimensions, including both physical and non-physical spaces. Though we touch on non-physical spaces such as the media, our main focus will be on physical public spaces, leaving out discussions about virtual spaces such as the Internet.

PART 1



## FROM LENIN PARK TO DISNEYLAND

*"We must do our utmost to turn this place into the green lung of Hanoi"*

Ho Chi Minh  
(Pham 2007)

In the late 1950's the Hanoi People's Committee decided to turn a former dumping site in the Hai Ba Trung district south of the French Quarters into a park. The area had been assigned as a park in earlier plans drawn up by the French colonialists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but was never realized under their rule. (Logan 2000) The People's Committee now mobilized voluntary workers for the construction, and the park was built using "tens of thousands of socialist working days" (Logan 2000, p 156). President Ho Chi Minh also pitched in by planting a memorial banyan tree in the park during its construction (Pham 2007).

At the time of its inauguration in May 1961, North Vietnam was still separated from South Vietnam. The park was given the name Công viên Thống Nhất - Reunification Park, reflecting the will to unite the nation. This was then, as now, the largest park in central Hanoi, covering close to 50ha of which 21ha is taken up by lakes. Through its name and the way it was created Thong Nhat Park was a symbol of socialism, the communal effort to create a better city and the strength of the nation through hard times. From the opening people came to the park for their morning exercise and evening strolls even as the American bombs were falling during the war (Hayton 2006). In 1980, when the country had been reunited for 5 years, the park was renamed Lenin Park to commemorate Lenin's 110<sup>th</sup> birthday and to show Vietnam's allegiance to the Soviet Union. (Logan 2000, Nguyen 2004, Pham 2007)

Through the 1990s Vietnam went through large changes, as the politics took a turn towards a 'socialist-oriented market economy', which has led to an opening for foreign investors and visitors, but not yet to any opening for change in the political domination of the Communist Party. In the early 2000s, after decades of decline due to lack of funding and poor management there was a resolution to upgrade Thong Nhat Park with the help of private funds. In this process the prominent Lenin statue was moved to a smaller park in

the Ba Dinh district and the original name Thong Nhat was taken back as the official name, in reality leaving the park with two names. In 2005 the park was turned into an independently managed company, owned by the Hanoi People's Committee. This was a sign of a new era for the park, and for the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. (Hayton 2006)

The story of Thong Nhat Park is in many ways a reflection of the social and political changes that Vietnam has gone through in the last 50 years. Just following the changes in the park's name give a picture of the shifting politics of the nation. And now another name change might be ahead as new plans are drawn up for the park, a name reflecting the current political, social and economic climate of Vietnam: Disneyland.

In February 2007 news was released in the Vietnamese press of the plans to develop a small Disneyland in Thong Nhat Park. According to the news articles the investment company Vincom JSC was willing to spend 1,500 billion Dong (600 million SEK) at the project, turning the park into the No1 entertainment site in Hanoi with state of the art games, sports and cultural items, on land and water. In addition a 60.000m<sup>2</sup> entertainment complex would be built, including a 5-star hotel, shopping centre, discotheque and 3D cinema. To meet the demand for parking 500 parking lots was to be set up under the trees in the park. In further articles Vincom JSC promised to keep the park open to the public for morning exercise between 4-7am, while charging entrance fees from 9am. (Pham 2007, VietNamNet 2007-02-02, 2007-02-23, 2007-03-27) One of the main arguments for redeveloping the park given by the chairman of Vincom JSC, Le Khac Hiep is the lack of entertainment opportunities for tourists. "Hanoi has long seen a lack of entertainment options and services that in the end lower the attractiveness of the capital from an international tourist point of view while we have seen our public spend millions of dollars in entertainment facilities throughout neighbouring countries." Le Khac Hiep was quoted saying in VietNamNet on the 27th of March 2007.

This was the starting point of a debate which continued throughout 2007, where leading architects and planners took a stand against the Disneyland project. After losing much green and water space in Hanoi over the past 15 years to construction, it seems this was the project that tipped the scale. The concept of turning this well-used park into an entertainment facility with entrance fees stirred the emotions of Hanoians, and of course the thought of a Disneyland in this symbolic

*"We will apply the most modern and regularly updated games to Thong Nhat Park – so that nobody who plays the games there is disappointed because they have played them in Singapore or Thailand before! We hope to build a Disneyland for Vietnamese children in the heart of Hanoi. However, it doesn't mean that the games will be located tightly but there are still wide areas for grass, green trees, walking lanes..."*

Le Khac Hiep,  
Chairman of Vincom JSC  
(Trang 2007-02-05)

*"Developed countries don't build amusement parks in the centre of their cities"*

Nguyen Dinh Toan,  
Head of Architecture Study Institute,  
Ministry of Construction  
(VietNamNet 2007-08-29)

park added further to the opposition. One of the users quoted in the paper was 75 year old Pham Van Dung, living a few blocks from the park. Pham Van Dung participated in building the park together with his wife, and still uses the park regularly. "We need greenery to breathe. We don't want to see big changes in the park. Most of the trees here are 50 to 60 years old. They cannot be destroyed or removed." (Thu 2007)

A Seminar for Public Greenery in Hanoi was held in August 2007 as a part of the protests. The topic of the seminar was the loss of green space in Hanoi in general, and in particular the Thong Nhat Park. "Large areas of green trees and water surface have been lost due to the weak management, only for short-sighted benefits. Therefore, the remaining parks, lakes and rivers (...) should be protected" said architect Pham Thanh Tung, Vice editor of Construction Newspaper in his speech at the seminar. (Pham 2007)

Landscape architect Tran Than Van questioned the planning process, asking how the Hanoi People's Committee could claim that detail planning for Thong Nhat Park was under consideration in May 2007, when Vincom JSC had declared two months prior that they had the go-ahead to start construction in the third quarter of 2007. Tran Than Van and others were also critical of the placement of Disneyland in city centre, where the green areas are limited and the transportation system already under pressure. As other Disneylands around the world are located some distance away from the city centre, the new development areas on the outskirts of Hanoi would be a more appropriate location for such a large scale project. (Tran 2007, VietNamNet 2007-08-29)

*"[Thong Nhat Park] reminds people about a period of struggle and victory in the history of the capital because the park was built by the efforts of thousands of workers at a time when people lived for the common benefit rather than that of individuals"*

Nguyen Hai  
(Houng 2007)

Voices were also raised to protect the nature values of the park. Professor Ha Dinh Duc from the Viet Nam Nature and Environment Protection Association wrote an open letter to the President of Vietnam which was published in VietNamNet. In this letter he protested against the project which would be stifling one of the city's green lungs, and pleaded that the president would act to save this "treasure of the capital" from the Disneyland project. (Ha 2007, VietNamNet 2007-08-29) These protests received a lot of attention and media coverage, ultimately resulting in political action.

Through 2007 and 2008 came contrasting statements from the Hanoi People's Committee, who had agreed in principle on the plans presented by Vincom JSC in February 2007. (VietNamNet 2007-02-02) By August came a formal statement in response to the protests, declaring that the Thong Nhat Park is in poor condition and in need of improvement. As the city has limited funds, they need

to invite developers, working together according to the “socialization guidelines”. These guidelines assures the “protection, preservation and development of material and non-material values of the park, established by the labour of Hanoians in years after gaining peace, at the same time meeting the demand for relaxation for all the public citizens of the capital.” The Hanoi People’s Committee also outlined some general regulations to meet this goal, including that the park should be free of charge except for the entertainment services, which should be selected carefully for cultural and educational feature. (Hoang 2007)

*“The park used to be a large dumping ground. My wife and I helped turn it into a green carpet. The memories are still fresh in my mind”*

75 year old Pham Van Dung,  
regular user of the park  
(Thu 2007)

In November Nguyen Van Thinh, deputy head of Hanoi People’s Committee office was saying that the park would be kept in it’s present form and should not be for entertainment and profit-making. “Thong Nhat Park is for the public” he stated (Ngoc 2007). At least most of the park, as Nguyen Van Thinh did make allowance for private investors to build on 10 percent of the park area while the remaining 90 percent would be kept as it is. (Ngoc 2007, Thu 2007) A new statement from Hanoi People’s Committee in April 2008 declared that the city administration itself would be responsible for upgrading the lake, paths and gardens of the park, as well as the construction of an underground parking area. Private investors would only be invited to upgrade some of the recreational areas. (Hoang 2008)

As the debate progressed the developers of Thong Nhat Park were trying to bend with the opposition. By now Vincom JSC had joined hands on the project with Tan Hoang Minh Company Ltd, a company which was previously assigned to upgrading the Thong Nhat Park. The two developers were now outbidding each other in how little they aimed to change the park. Do Anh Dung, general director of Tan Hoang Minh Company Ltd stated that there would be no entrance fees to the park and that the daily activities would remain unchanged. He further made assurances that no trees would

*“In my childhood, my house was near Thong Nhat Park. Everyday I used to go there; I knew the park as my hand. Later on, I have been everywhere and the more glorious parks I have seen; the more I miss Thong Nhat Park and resolved to do something for it.”*

Do Anh Dung,  
general director of Tan Hoang Minh  
(Trang 2007-02-05)

be cut down if his company was given permission to develop the area, although some trees might have to be moved to make room for parking and other facilities underground. (Thu 2007, Ngoc 2007) Le Khac Hiep of Vincom JSC said that their company would cater to all demands, and besides the games would create quiet zones for meditation (Trang 2007).

In the spring of 2008, a year after the original news of the Disneyland project, we speak to a representative of Vincom JSC on the telephone who is saying that the project is now resting. Vincom JSC is drawing up new plans to improve the public area, and will then be awaiting further decisions from the authorities. According to the

statement from Hanoi People’s Committee in April 2008, it would seem that the park is safe at least from any large scale development, and guaranteed to be kept as a public area. (Hoang 2008) But Architect Huynh Dang Hy, General Secretary of the Vietnam Urban Planning and Development Association and one of the initiators of the Seminar for Public Greenery in Hanoi, is still somewhat pessimistic about the future for Thong Nhat Park, believing that “the profit will make the leader blind”. He thinks that the government will let someone develop the park into a commercial area, but his organisation will do their best to stop it. (personal communication)

This ongoing debate, where a picture of a park under pressure emerges is the background and framework of our master thesis. Landscape architects now work in a context of rapid urbanisation where the pace of development is accelerating and the players are multiplying. There are many contrasting forces at work in the creation (and destruction) of public green space, putting new pressures and demands on these spaces.



WEDNESDAY 14:34



WEDNESDAY 11:27



WEDNESDAY 13:21



WEDNESDAY 13:42



SUNDAY 16:24



SATURDAY 06:44



FRIDAY 11:57



SUNDAY 17:12



The poster reads: Enhance Law Obedience Awareness, Increase Law Efficiency  
For the Wealth of the People, the Country's Strength, for a just Democratic and Civilised Society

## A NEW URBAN REALITY

While urbanisation is not a new phenomenon, what has changed lately and what is evident in contemporary Hanoi is the radical change in the speed of urbanisation. Large parts of the world are now experiencing a time characterized by massive movements from rural to urban areas. (Forbes 1996) At this point about 50 percent of the world's population live in cities, to be compared with the outset of the twentieth century when the corresponding number was 10 percent. In 2025, the urban population of the world is forecasted to reach five billion individuals, of which two thirds will live in poor countries. And in 2015, 27 of the 33 largest cities are predicted to be located in the least developed countries, including 19 in Asia. (Rozenblat 2000, p2-7)

*"Although I have little professional knowledge about urbanisation, I protest against the idea of building this entertainment site. An open area with fresh air is more important for a noisy city than a new entertainment centre."*

Nguyen Tien Dung,  
student at Hanoi University  
of Technology  
(Huong 2007)

In Vietnam the United Nations estimate an increase of the number of city-dwellers from 23 million in 2005 to nearly 47 million by 2030. It is believed that the rapid urbanisation will not cease until it reaches levels of 70-80 percent (HAIDEP 2007a, p2-53). Hanoi is no exception in this development with a population

that has increased with almost 45 percent during the 10-year period between 1997-2006 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam 2008). The growth is forecasted to continue, to reach about 5.3 million inhabitants by 2015 (HAIDEP 2007a, p5-4). To this should be added that the population density in the inner city of Hanoi, like many other South East Asian cities, is extremely high with 19 163 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in 2003<sup>2</sup> (Do 2004, p1). However, as living conditions are expected to improve and many homes are transformed into commercial premises the population density in the urban core is forecasted to decrease by 0.8 times by 2020 (HAIDEP 2007a, p5-10).

The rapid urbanisation described above is the backdrop to which the controversies over Thong Nhat Park must be reflected. Together with a changing political climate and interrelated processes of globalisation and modernisation, it results in fundamental transitions

<sup>2</sup> The corresponding number for the inner city of Stockholm the same year was 8200 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> (Utrednings- och Statistikkontoret, Stockholms Stad 2008).

in the Vietnamese society at large as well as in Hanoi. All this gives rise to thorough transitions in the physicality of the city, where rapid changes in the urban landscape are evident. The opening up of the Vietnamese economy to new actors, both local and global, has resulted in a multiplication of the players in the urban arena, where planners and authorities are faced with new challenges. The struggle over every square meter of available land is now a reality, as public interests of recreation and accessibility are more frequently put against private ones. In the new urban reality of Hanoi, critical issues on how to handle the rapid urban expansion are brought to surface and one of them is inevitably the value of public green space. Although Thong Nhat Park is still a respite for the people of Hanoi, offering a possibility to get away from crowded homes and noisy streets, the presence of a new outside reality is continuously putting more pressure on its fences. Seen in a larger perspective the controversies over the park give quite a clear picture of many of the processes that are now at work in Hanoi - as in large parts of the world. The processes of urbanisation and industrialization that the western world has already experienced are now repeated here - but in a fraction of the time span. (Forbes 1996, Marcotullio 2002, Waibel 2006)

#### GLOBALISATION AND A CHANGING URBAN LANDSCAPE

Throughout the cityscape of Hanoi images of past and present, of tradition and modernity exist side by side, embodying a radically changing political reality. Large commercial signs from multinational corporations, previously banned by authorities, stand beside educative propaganda posters of the communist regime. Street vendors from the rural vicinities of the city set up their temporal businesses outside newly built shopping malls. One or two run down bikes stand out in the crowd when parked in the midst of a sea of shiny motorbikes. The transition from a closed and to a large extent agrarian economy into becoming a part of a larger globalized economical context, is evident throughout the urban landscape of Hanoi.

Although rapid urbanisation and globalisation is now a reality in Vietnam, the processes have taken a longer time for take-off here than in many other Asian countries. This is to a large extent dependent on the country's political climate. (Billier 2007) Since independence from French colonial rule in 1954, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has been ruled as a communist one-party state. Through the far-reaching control apparatus associated with communist regimes, well aware strategies were developed to avoid problems associated with large urban agglomerations. Risks of social unrest and the formation of political oppositions fall into this category. With strict residential

registration requirements and state-controlled access to food, employment and housing the communist regime managed to control rural-urban migration, resulting in a drop of the urban population from 20.6 percent in 1976 to 18.9 percent in 1984 (Forbes 1996, p27). Simultaneously a large number of small and intermediate towns were built to further decrease the pressure on the largest cities. (Forbes 1996)

*"If you came back to Hanoi after only one year away, you wouldn't recognise the place. It is changing so rapidly. By the time it celebrates its 1,000th birthday, it will probably have changed beyond all recognition."*

Shizuo Iwata,  
JICA programme manager and  
doctor of engineering.  
(VietNamNet 2006-12-25)

It was not until the late 1980s that the processes of urbanisation and globalisation truly set off in Vietnam. As a result of the economical crisis of the 1980s, with the Soviet Union limiting their foreign aid and the U.S. still promoting economical warfare against the country, the Communist Party was forced

to implement changes. At the party congress in 1986 the concept of Doi Moi was launched.<sup>3</sup> The literal meaning of Doi Moi is renovation and the concept marked the beginning an opening of the economy towards a more market-orientated direction. The permission for inflow of foreign direct investment, FDI, as well as the de-regulation of the labour market is considered a starting point for economic growth in Vietnam. (Hägerdal 2005)

The opening up of the economy to global capital also marks the beginning of a new era in Vietnam and in Hanoi. With the state continuously losing power to private hands, and increasingly to major global firms, Hanoi is now on the fast track of becoming a part of a larger, transnational economical context.<sup>4</sup> With new information technologies increasing the speed and mobility of transactions and services, a global network with little correlation to a physical world map is enabled. The processes of globalisation trigger urban growth as cities become increasingly important in the competition on the global market. It also pushes the processes of modernisation fast forward in the rapidly developing economies in Asia. Forbes describes how transnational elites establish cores of metropolitan culture in global cities, and to compete with this group, other cities continuously have to adapt and restructure to serve the global networks (1996). The originator of the term global city, Saskia Sassen, explains further how global cities require a certain type of urban environment, with a mix of firms, talents and expertise from a broad range of specialized fields to function as information centers (2000). (Forbes 1996, Sassen 2000, Sassen 2006)

When walking in the streets of Hanoi the restructuring of the urban environment soon become a natural part of your perception of the city. As the Asian cities are racing each other to become important parts in a global network Hanoi is still lagging behind, being one

<sup>3</sup> The concept of Doi Moi is often compared to what was called Perestroika in the Soviet Union. Attempts to introduce Coi Moi, a parallel to Glasnost, was also launched, but without success. Political freedom is hence still very limited in Vietnam. (Hägerdal 2005)

<sup>4</sup> "States are still the main global actor but have lost power to global firms and global cities. The 100 richest firms are richer than most, except the 20 richest states." (Sassen 2006, p28)

of very few capitals still at a walkable scale (Douglass 2008). Major changes in the urban landscape are evident though as urbanisation and globalisations have recently fired away. As foreign capital flow in, a new infrastructure is generated to meet the reality of global competition. In parts of the city the inflow of foreign capital is evident solely by watching the changing skyline. Business districts, with office towers and hotel facilities rising above the older structures, are constructed as answers to the new demands. Fancy restaurants and café chains pop up in every corner. Waibel refers to these previously unseen urban spaces as *globally oriented* and the many large construction sites seen in Hanoi today tell that the development is continuing (2006). (Douglass 2008, Waibel 2006)

The new urban forms and facilities not only serve foreign businessmen, but are also a response to the new demands of an emerging middle and upper class. Increasing economical disparities are becoming evident in the physical structure of the city, as private investors cater to the demands of new income groups through the construction of luxurious residential areas, commercial spaces and leisure facilities. Waibel argues that the new high-income groups have a desire to distinguish themselves from other societal groups by the choice of lifestyle, and these individualized lifestyles are creating demands for new types of spaces throughout the city. Until the late 1980s, spaces for leisure, recreation and consumption were few, and the ones that existed were owned and managed by the state. These spaces were often run down or inadequate but mostly free of charge, although in some cases restricted in use to employees of certain ministries or organisations. Since Doi Moi private developers around Hanoi have created new types of spaces for recreation, as leisure is turning into consumer goods and consumption turning into leisure. The choices are multiplying with new shopping malls, supermarkets, theme parks, golf clubs, bowling centres and tennis courts across the city. (Drummond 2000, Douglass 2008, Waibel 2006)

As seen in the debate over Thong Nhat Park, the driving force behind the production of these new kinds of spaces is also to a large extent the exploding tourism industry. A statement by Le Khac Hiep, chairman of Vincom JSC, saying “A capital that considers tourism as the most important sector must not lack the places for entertainment. The lack of entertainment places and services makes the capital less attractive in the eyes of foreign tourists, while local residents do not know where to relax and entertain.” (VietNamNet 2007-02-02), gives a clear picture of this view on the development of Hanoi. The head office of Vincom JSC was one of the first spaces to cater the

*“In the process of urbanization, many parks, flower gardens have been cleared out (... ) and many old trees were cut down because they were blocking up fronts of new high buildings. (...) Ten mother-of-pearl trees were cut down to create an open front for Vincom.”*

Associate Professor Ha Dinh Duc,  
Vietnam Nature and Environment  
Protection Association  
(Ha 2007)

*“The investors should not touch the trees and turn this park into a place for profit. If they are kind enough, they should pour money into planting more trees and building public works for the people.”*

Nguyen Manh Trieu,  
74-year old motorbike keeper in  
Thong Nhat Park  
(Thu 2007)

demands of the affluent tourists, as well as the foreign businessmen and emerging high-income groups. The 21 storey Vincom towers, only a few blocks away from Thong Nhat Park, include a luxurious shopping mall, underground car park, top of the line office space and of course the obligatory branch of the Vietnamese version of Starbucks, Highlands Coffee. A café latte here costs about 49.000 Dong (around 20 SEK), a price most Vietnamese could not dream of paying. Few local residents feel welcome in this space, excluded by high prices and an immaculate atmosphere.

While major global actors have entered the stage of Hanoi, it is important to remember that much of the urban transitions are also due to individuals and small-scale local enterprises. The economic growth following Doi Moi has resulted in over all increased economical standards. With increased incomes and new opportunities for private profit-driven initiatives, people in general are experiencing new possibilities of acting in the urban landscape. Lakes are continuously being narrowed and green spaces are shrinking as a result of small- or medium scaled private residential building activities. Cramped living conditions and severe housing shortage as well as increased land- and real estate values fuel this development. Often illegally encroaching land, people are seen adding structures to existing housing and constructing new settlements, ranging from shanty dwellings in flooding areas close to the Red River to modern high-class housing by the West Lake. The need to make a living also triggers the taking of parkland through out Hanoi, as small informal businesses claim space for their existence. (HAIDEP 2007a, personal communication Tran Thi Lan Anh)

In this dual development, with powers working from outside as well as from below, the demands on urban space in Hanoi have increased to an extent where land is now hard currency. At the same time as individuals experience an increased scope of action, private developers are increasingly allowed to construct and transform the urban landscape of Hanoi. The planning and provision of urban space has thus to a large extent shifted hands from the state to the private economy. (Forbes 1996, Douglass 2008, Waibel 2006)

## PLANNING IN A HIGH SPEED CITY

Although Hanoi have upheld support from among others the World Bank and UNDP to regain some of the land lost to private hands when the rapid urbanisation first volleyed away (Waibel 2006), authorities and public planning institutions are constantly facing new challenges when racing with the new actors in the urban arena. Ranging from

local, small-scale projects to global actors, and from illegal to legal constructions, authorities and public institutions are struggling to keep up the pace with the new demands and opportunities. With limited economical recourses, a lack of experience of handling private investors and with profound problems relating to corruption, much-needed policies regulating the exploitation of the city are largely non-existent. Due to lack of funds Vietnam also follow the general tendency of developing countries to invest mainly in 'hard infrastructure', such as roads and sanitation (Marcotullio 2002). Long-term strategies for urban development, on the other hand, are weak as a result of both lack of knowledge and experience, inefficient planning procedures and cramped economic resources (Do 2004). (Ho 2004, Marcotullio 2002, Waibel)

The Japanese foreign aid organisation JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) have contributed to the development of planning strategies when helping Hanoi to conduct the Comprehensive Urban Development Program for Hanoi Capital city 2025 (HAIDEP) in 2004-2006. With comprehensive studies as a basis they have, in cooperation with the ministries in charge of urban development, developed a framework and policies for the future urban growth of Hanoi. But Pham Thuy Loan, deputy director of the Urban and Architectural Institute, National University of Civil Engineers in Hanoi, describe how the work of JICA is complicated by the Vietnamese planning tradition. With a vertical planning system, where planning of different sectors to a large extent is done separately without the crucial coordination, there have been difficulties in legalizing the outputs of HAIDEP. It has come to function more as an orientation for the urban development and as a source of references for policy makers. Simultaneously alternative plans for parts of the city also challenge the work of JICA. In HAIDEP for example, the Red River area is designated as an ecological corridor, while the Seoul city sponsored project called Plan of the Red River City has proposed a series of intensive developments at some locations along the river bank, indicating conflicting views on the planning of the city. (personal communication)

### VANISHING GREEN SPACE

A part of the open space that is particularly exposed when new demands on land arise is the urban green space. The interest that Vincom JSC and other private developers have been taking in Thong Nhat Park recently is only one of many examples of how the pressure on urban green space in Hanoi is increasing. The dual forces working from above as well as from below eat away much of the cities green

*“Once the project has started, the park will become a tremendous construction site, stifling one of the city’s green lungs.”*

Associate Professor Ha Dinh Duc,  
Vietnam Nature and Environment  
Protection Association  
(VietNamNet 2007-08-29)

areas. Large profits are to be made and, as described, there is a lack of efficient planning tools to handle the worrying development.

*“The Department of Traffic and Public Works, the Department of Architecture and Planning, and the city’s People’s Committee will have to work together to bring back the green spaces of the city.”*

Huynh Dang Hy  
(VietNamNet 2007-10-29)

According to a survey by P D Uy and N Nakagoshi the amount of green space area in Hanoi was shrinking by an average of 3 percent per year between 1996 and 2003 (2007). The total area was not only reduced, but the green patches also became smaller and more fragmented. Uy and Nakagoshi name factors of economic growth, population increase and weakness in planning systems as some of the main reasons for this decrease in urban green space. (2007) The alarming shrinkage of urban greenery and water surface is also mentioned in the preparation studies for the Hanoi Master Plan 2020. GIS-studies performed by the HAIDEP team show that many of the 900 lakes and ponds of Hanoi are continuously being filled up or being narrowed due to urban development and illegal encroachments. (HAIDEP 2007a) In the nine urban districts of Hanoi, only 0,3 percent of the land is park area. The per capita amount of park space in Hanoi is only 0,9m<sup>2</sup> (HAIDEP 2007a, p11-9), compared to over 25m<sup>2</sup>/capita in cities such as London, New York and Berlin (HAIDEP 2007a, p11-10). In the urban core districts<sup>5</sup>, where park space is somewhat more abundant, the total park area measures 135 ha which corresponds to a per capita number of about 1.3m<sup>2</sup>. The target figure set up for this area in the Masterplan 2020 is 5.2-5.5m<sup>2</sup>/person (HAIDEP 2007a, p11-10). This target is described in the HAIDEP report as hard to reach, mainly due to inefficient planning standards (2007a). Although requirements for urban green areas are clearly stipulated in the Building Code of Vietnam<sup>6</sup> conditions are rarely checked upon by authorities and penalties for the violation of the rules are seldom imposed. Furthermore planning authorities lack strategies and resources to develop new green spaces and improve existing urban areas. (HAIDEP 2007a)

As described in the previous chapter the controversies over Thong Nhat Park have brought issues of the future of urban green space in Hanoi up to date, engaging architects, planners and researchers, both local and from other parts of the world. While describing a for Hanoi quite typical dilemma of privatisation of public space, the plans for the park seem to have evoked strong feelings accumulated throughout a longer period of time. The big protests against Vincom’s Disneyland initiative have given fuel to a debate on the value of public green space, engaging large parts of the public. Results of the recognition of these values in newspaper and TV, following the Thong Nhat Park debate, can be seen in for example the popular Thu Le Park, where a large

<sup>5</sup> Hanoi is made up of nine urban, two suburban and three rural districts. The four urban core districts are Ba Dinh, Hoan Kiem, Hai Ba Trung and Dong Da. (HAIDEP 2007a, p2-17)

<sup>6</sup> Requirements on green area per capita by type, minimum land area for parks, and minimum green coverage ratio by building type are stipulated in the Building code of Vietnam.

number of illegal structures such as karaoke bars and cafés which in a steady pace was eating up park space, are being torn down in this very moment (VietNamNet 2008-01-10). The strong voices of leading planners and architects, taking a stand for urban green space, have brought these issues into the public floodlight and pressure is now put on authorities to develop strategies to protect and promote urban green space.

### A NEW URBAN REALITY

Thong Nhat Park is located in the eye of the urban storm described above. It might even be from inside the park that the changing skyline of Hanoi is most evident. Not long ago, the large trees framing the park managed to keep out most impressions of the surrounding urban landscape. Today, office towers belonging to actors on the global market and hotels serving foreign business men rise above these trees, making the outside urban life present in the park.

With the increasing demands and the multiplication of actors, the urban arena can be seen as a battlefield and a set of opportunities at the same time. Increased inflow of private means investing in the urban landscape give rise to new possibilities when the states budget is narrow, but when the planning apparatus fail to keep up the pace with the forces at work, open spaces intended for common use often end up in the hands of private interests, ranging from individuals to multinational corporations. Considering the surrounding conditions and the weakness of the planning system it might even be surprising to see that the park is still there today, in service of the everyday life of the Hanoians. But while local authorities are having a hard time managing the new demands, an image of a system well aware of its deficiencies grow strong when talking to employees at the Ministry of Construction, in charge of the urban planning of Hanoi. In the will of presenting a modern Hanoi to the outside world, conscious efforts are being made to get a grip of the situation. Foreign aid, while not uncomplicated, contributes with both experience and economical resources to push the work towards stronger strategies controlling urban growth. Continuously faced with new situations where decisions on how to deal with private investors have to be made, authorities are also step-by-step developing guidelines of their own for how to handle these situations.

With new actors, and an increased amount of capital in flow in the urban arena, there are big risks but also a lot to gain. These issues are rarely simple or one-sided, but more often very complex and multilateral. As seen in the Thong Nhat Park debate, the voice of a public and professionals engaged in the future of their city can also

*“Despite the fact that Thong Nhat park, like many other parks in Hanoi, has been degraded with poor and monotonous facilities, it continues to be a green space for relaxing, sport and cultural activities of Hanoians.”*

Architect Pham Thanh Tung,  
Vice editor in chief of Construction  
Newspaper, Ministry of Construction  
(Pham 2007)

effect the development. It is obvious that urban green space is an issue that concerns many, especially when having such strong symbolic value as Thong Nhat Park. Even in the new urban reality of Hanoi, where high-speed change is the new state of normality.



SATURDAY 16:01



SATURDAY 15:32



SATURDAY 15:18



SUNDAY 11.09



FRIDAY 10:44



SATURDAY 07:25



TUESDAY 17:11



SATURDAY 08:14



## PUBLIC SPACES IN TRANSITION

The pressures put on the public spaces of Hanoi come not only from a growing population, high speed construction and a weak planning system. New demands on public spaces also appear as global influences inspire new consumption patterns and individualised lifestyles. With relaxing political policies and higher incomes people are experiencing an increased scope of action in their usage of the urban space. While this progress results in new opportunities for the people of Hanoi, increasing inequalities are also leading to separations in the urban landscape, ultimately resulting in tensions and protests over the right to public space, as seen in the debate over Thong Nhat Park. However, the concept of public space in a Vietnamese context is full of complexities, due to political and cultural traditions.

- *Have you had any problems with the government when you have been working with the park?*
- *Do you think there could be a problem?*
- *There might be a problem...*

Conversation with a young man in Thong Nhat Park

In the Western tradition public space is the space which is “accessible to or shared by all members of the community” (Merriam – Webster Dictionary). Ideally the public space is for the use of everybody on equal terms. In reality there are cultural factors limiting the access to public space for specific groups, such as women or minority groups, through different times and cultures. Still the concept of public space as a political space is an integral part of Western democracy. It is a space of free speech, of meetings and confrontations where oppositional social movement can organise. Public space is also the potential arena for “contestations among actors representing state, society, and capital” (Anh 2005, p2). (Anh 2005, Drummond 2000, Ho 2008)

In Vietnam, a country with no democratic tradition, the concept of public space does not carry the same meaning as in the western model. The history of public space in Hanoi is rather a story of control, from strict hierarchal order under the emperor in pre-colonial Vietnam, to physical segregation under French colonial rule, to state control under the communist regime.

Pre-colonial Vietnam was a society governed by Confucian ideals, where one's place in the hierarchy of the family and the community governed the appropriate social behaviour as well as the architecture and the arrangement of space, especially in the imperial cities like Hanoi (Tran 2000). Until the French invasion the city of Hanoi was divided in the emperor's citadel, closed to normal residents, and the market town consisting of gated streets which were built and regulated by the various occupational guilds. (Drummond 2000, Tran 2000) There was no concept of urban public space as each guild managed their own street, and the remaining land fell under the emperor. Traditional places of public use were mainly the temples and communal houses, but access to these were restricted by social rank and gender. Participatory social space was formed elsewhere, through daily routines. (Anh 2005, Drummond 2000)

From 1887 onward, as Hanoi was transformed into the capital of French Indochina, the city became the venue for the symbolic representation and enforcement of colonial power. Many temples and other buildings of cultural significance were torn down and replaced by the representational buildings and institutions of the new rulers. European ideals of city planning such as the spatial separation of public and private activities through zoning plans were introduced, along with the concept of urban public space. New features such as squares and parks around the lakes of the city appeared. (Anh 2005, Logan 2000, Wright 1991) The establishment of such public spaces was used by the colonialists to "establish the power of the colonial state in both physical and ideological space" (Anh 2005, p5). While new housing areas of luxurious villas were built for the French, there was not much consideration for supplying the growing urban population of Vietnamese with housing. This was a reflection of the colonial social order which emphasised segregation between French and Vietnamese. (Tran 2000, Wright 1991) But in a passing note Ernest Hébrard, head of Urbanism Department of Indochina in the 1920's, mentions that the French government should provide parks for the recreation of Vietnamese labourers in line with the reform models in Europe at the time (Wright 1991). Thong Nhat Park was originally part of Hébrard's plans, but was not built until after the French had withdrawn from Hanoi (Logan 2000).

As the colonial rule was replaced by the communist state from 1954, the public spaces of Hanoi were once again transformed to represent the doctrines of the new rulers. With much help from the Soviet Union, a new capital for the communist state was built, with symbols demonstrating the brotherly links between the two

*Thong Nhat Park is currently a treasure of the Capital, it is not only a green carpet, a lung of Hanoi but also a national cultural heritage, a milestone of the war period against American enemy liberating people, especially Uncle Ho banyan tree is inheriting property reminding young generation of growing tree occasion - Now this movement has become a cultural tradition every coming spring New Year.*

Associate Professor Ha Dinh Duc,  
Vietnam Nature and Environment  
Protection Association  
(Ha 2007)

<sup>7</sup> The public sphere is "the realm of public discourse and debate, a realm in which individuals can discuss issues of common concern." This realm includes the media as well as physical spaces of public debate and discussion. "The concept emphasises the importance of open argument and debate - whether conducted in the media or in a shared locale - as a means of forming public opinion and resolving controversial political issues." (Thompson 1996, p707)

<sup>8</sup> The civil society is a sphere separate from the state, a sphere of individual self-seeking as well as social and civic institutions, associations and organisations. The civil society can be said to be interposed between the family and the state. In the former communist states of Eastern Europe the concept of civil society has been used as a "weapon against the all-encompassing state" (Kumar 1996, p89), a model of opposition without direct confrontation with the state, and a possible route to a post-communist pluralistic society. (Kumar 1996, Logan 2000)

countries. One such example is the renaming of Thong Nhat Park into Lenin Park for Lenin's 110th birthday. (Logan 2000, Nguyen 2004) Pre-colonial and colonial symbolic spaces were given new purposes and inscribed with new meanings, as colonial institutions were turned into offices for the Communist Party and the traditional communal houses converted into spaces for non-ritual purposes. (Logan, Drummond, Anh) New housing areas were constructed according to communist ideals - a "collective way of living suitable for the modern socialist people" (Tran 2000). Public space was controlled not only through the patrolling of streets, squares and parks, but also through the planned economy which effectively reduced the street life and the social realm which used to exist there. A system of state officials reaching into every block guaranteed the effective surveillance of these spaces and the reporting of any transgressions (Koh 2008). The communist urban planning philosophy was to transform the consumer towns into places of production. Outlets for the distribution of goods were managed by the state, while local markets and street trading were suppressed. The general poverty and the shortage of food and other supplies turned Hanoi into an ascetic city, as described by Gabriel Thien Than, an overseas Vietnamese in the 1980s (quoted in Logan 2000, p217). Reportedly, people moved mainly between work and home, when not waiting in the long lines of the state controlled stores. (Logan 2000, Anh 2005, Thomas 2002, personal communication Pham Thuy Loan)

The communal ideals of the communist state have provided Hanoi with plenty of public spaces. However, their function has not been public in the Western sense, as they have been under strict control and regulations. Under authoritarian regimes the provision of public space can have other agendas for the state, such as to "symbolically build a national identity with the aim of legitimizing the authority of the regime in power" (Douglass 2008, p30). The public spaces of Hanoi have thus not been an arena of free speech, free exchange of ideas or the formation of political movements, characteristics which in the Western tradition make public space the physical domain of the public sphere<sup>7</sup> and a growing ground for the civil society<sup>8</sup>. (Anh 2005, Drummond 2000, Ho 2008) The public spaces of Hanoi have however occasionally been the site of political uproar and protests, such as when Ho Chi Minh declared independence in Ba Dinh Square in 1945 (Thomas 2002). And in the new urban reality of Hanoi the public spaces are becoming the battle ground of small scale protests, as people are recapturing the streets, squares and parks through everyday transgressions of the rules imposed by the state (Anh 2005, Thomas 2002).

## NEGOTIATIONS IN PUBLIC SPACE

Since the reforms introduced with Doi Moi, with less control on public movement and commercial activities and new inflow of capital, the face of Hanoi has changed rapidly. The town is now decidedly a consumer town, with small businesses popping up in every available spot. This has led to a revival of street life, but also to a reduction in available public space. (Anh 2005, Thomas 2002) Walking in the streets of Hanoi today, what strikes you is the narrowness of the available public area – all sidewalk space is taken up by commercial activities such as shops, street side cafés, hairdressers and pay parking for motorbikes. Sidewalks that are cleared are mainly in front of official institutions, always with a guard on duty outside. As such, the sidewalks can rarely be described as public space at all. Not only commercial activities, but also private and semi-private activities are moving out into the public as people use all available space for cleaning, cooking, bathing, watching TV etc. The distinction between public and private space is blurred not only by private functions moving out into public space but also through state interference into domestic areas<sup>9</sup> (Drummond 2000). The use of public spaces is also layered over time, as people are making the most of every inch of available space. On our street in Hanoi for example, one shop which was a hat shop by day turned into a popular grill in the evening, occupying both the shop and the surrounding sidewalk. This can also be observed in the parks, where early morning exercise give way to portable cafes during the day, leasing of battery driven cars for kids in the afternoons and couples making out on every available bench in the evenings. These activities are an effect of the cramped living conditions, with per person living space of less than 9m<sup>2</sup> per person in central Hanoi (HAIDEP 2007b, p2-15), but is also a sign of how people are becoming bolder in their use of the public space (Drummond 2000).

With increasing global influences the Communist Party is losing their appeal to the youth of Vietnam. As the Party's monopoly on the definition of ideals and distribution of information is eroding, people are turning to other sources of inspiration. Growing awareness of global trends along with increasing incomes create a demand which global companies are quick to supply, and local companies quick to copy. The media industry is constructing new tastes and values, creating a desire for consumption, individual life style choices and entertainment. This development stand in sharp contrast to the views of older people and the Communist Party, where the consumption of Western consumer goods and habits is still regarded as a "morally corrupt capitalist political agenda" (Thomas 2001). (Thomas 2001)

However, with a population where the large majority was born

after the war, the support for the communist ideals is weakening as the emotional attachment to the Party as liberators of the country is fading (Drummond 2000). Young people are increasingly aware of the outside world through the media and internet, while there is also a renewed interest in national identity and traditions. (Hägerdahl 2005, Tran 2000) Religious rituals and festivals are drawing bigger crowds every year. Popular gatherings such as roadside celebrations after sports events as well as mass mourning at the funerals of popular celebrities are other examples of the bolder use of public space for individual expression. Meanwhile the state looks on with worry, sometimes enforcing restrictions to limit the numbers attending. Political Party events, which used to be the only time crowds were allowed to assemble, are now largely abandoned by the people. To the Communist Party informal crowds signify disrespect for the regime, and potentially a threat to their authority. Even if these events are spontaneous and festive, crowds have the potential to become unmanageable and even turn into riots. In Vietnam, where the establishment of oppositional political parties is forbidden, these apolitical events can in fact be seen as political, as Mandy Thomas argues, through their blatant rejection of the ideals of the Communist Party. Even small scale individual transgressions in public space, such as the skateboarding youth gathering by the Lenin monument and the joggers in the square by the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, can in this context be seen as a political act. Using such politically symbolic

*"Some more rowdy kids got into some trouble with the police skating the statue once. The cops are pretty good about it though, they don't arrest us, just tell us to go, so we go. We don't want to cause any trouble, we just want to skate."*

Skateboarder Tuan Anh  
(Kirk 2003)

spaces for activities signalling Western influence is, in the words of Mandy Thomas, "not so much a challenge to state power as a shift in the ideological landscape—one over which the state can no longer maintain its dominance" (2002, p1615). (Thomas 2001, 2002)

While people are appropriating public space for private business and informal activities as described above, state officials are walking a fine line trying to bring some order into the chaos. There have been several campaigns to clean up the streets but without much long term success. One of the more recent campaigns was the banning of street vendors in Hanoi, effective from January 2008, a ban of which there was little evidence only a few months later (VietNamNet 2008-01-14). It seems the state no longer holds the same authority as before or simply do not have the resources to make sure the regulations are followed. (Anh 2005, Drummond 2000, Koh 2008) The density of local state officials responsible for the surveillance of the streets is one important aspect when considering the lack of enforcement of the regulations. According to David Koh, there is as many as one state

<sup>9</sup> These interventions into private space include birth control strategies limiting the number of children per family, campaigns attempting to organise the social roles within the family and household registration prohibiting people from moving freely from rural to urban areas. (Drummond 2000)

official to every hundred citizens of Hanoi. As these officials live and work within the community, they can be subjected to local pressures, and most state agents are trying to find a balance that the community can live with. One reason that the regulations are constantly being transgressed is the basic need to make a living through street-vending and other informal businesses, and most state officials are aware of this. There is also a worry about social unrest if the control gets too strict, as reflected in a quote by a ward chairman; “The people can row the boat but they can overturn the boat as well. The political authority must be flexible; the people can not take it if it is too tough” (Koh 2008, p161). On the other hand there is also money to be made for the officials, accepting bribes for turning a blind eye to people setting up businesses on the sidewalks. (Koh, 2008)

The efforts to clean up the public spaces have not only the purpose of creating a cleaner and safer environment for the citizens, but also to present Hanoi as an attractive, modern and civilised city to foreign visitors and investors. In this context, the ‘ruralisation of the urban landscape’ with farmers selling their goods along the pavements is seen as signs of Vietnam’s backwardness (Waibel 2006). One evidence of the state’s focus on the city as a showcase for visitors is the campaign against “uncivilised behaviour” during the Southeast Asian Games in Hanoi in 2003. This was one of several campaigns that have been seeking to actively impose norms of appropriate behaviour and a respect for the law. During the weeks preceding the games the streets of central Hanoi were cleared of illegal businesses and improperly parked motorbikes. Local officials patrolled the streets making sure there was no uncivilised public behaviour, such as wearing pyjamas (a common everyday outfit in Hanoi) or revealing clothing in public, littering, playing soccer on the sidewalk, fighting, playing loudly in city parks etc. Beggars, homeless and street hawkers were also removed from the streets during the games. The people of Hanoi are also fed with images of how to behave in public space to create ‘civilised city districts’, as the message reads on billboards across town (Anh 2005). (Anh 2005, Koh 2008, Schutte 2005)

In the race towards becoming a modern and civilised city, parts of the population are inevitably left behind. Increasing segregation between different societal groups is one side effect as Hanoi is transforming itself through processes of privatisation, as described by Michael Waibel: “Vietnam is moving away from being one of the most egalitarian towards becoming one of the most unequal societies in the world. The development of the new urban areas appears to have aggravated housing inequality, for example. The latter developments, at least, are in sharp contrast to the still existing egalitarian ideology

*”Children could once play between buildings. But these have been destroyed and replaced by shops or a cafe.”*

Do Viet Coung,  
resident of a five-storey apartment block  
in Giang Vo Road  
(VietNamNet 2006-07-19)

of the Communist Party of Vietnam. In some way, this dilemma can be interpreted as the price of the successful opening towards a globalizing economy in the course of transition.” (2006, p48)

*“The city nearly forgets that these parks are constructions of social welfare, so they find many ways of doing business to earn money from this narrow green space. We consider it too narrow, but some people assume the free land is too much, wasteful, competing to tear the park!”*

Landscape architect Tran Thanh Van  
(Hoang 2007-08-07)

The separations in public space are intensifying the effects of these inequalities, when the access to space for leisure and recreation becomes a matter of money. As most people in central Hanoi are living in extremely tight conditions, it can be argued that the access to public space here is about satisfying basic human needs, such as physical movement, fresh air

and social interaction. For the majority of Hanoians the suburban theme parks and recreational facilities are still too expensive, and as a consequence they are left with the inadequate playgrounds and overcrowded, polluted parks of the centre. (Anh 2005) One of the speakers at the Seminar for Public Greenery in August 2007 who addressed these issues was the lawyer Cu Huy Ha Vu. He suggested that the Lawyers Association should sue the developer of the Thong Nhat Park project if they made profits from the parkland, in opposition to the state goals for social equality: “All parks aim at the highest target of public welfare, existing up to now in order to ensure social equality between the rich and the poor that the party and state have always paid much attention to. That all parks turn into playgrounds for the rich opposes the target! If the park land is used for commercial centres, office buildings, and star hotels - where will low-income people, who can not afford to play games, go shopping or rent rooms, go for entertainment?” (Trang 2007)

The shifts in the use of public space and the movement towards a privatised and commercialised urban landscape are now turning into direct protests. All over the world the effects of globalisation are hitting hardest in the cities, where the logic of global capital and the rational of economic space is set against the lived space, the space of the people who inhabit the city (Forbes 1996). In countries like Vietnam, where there is a lack of transparency in the decision-making process and sometimes a reluctance to provide public space for political reasons, the effects are hitting even harder. Limited resources create a desperate need for foreign investment, giving private developers a larger scope of action. With rapid changes in the urban landscape, demonstrations over the ‘right to the city’ are intensifying, both on a local and a global scale. On the global scale the protests over the homogenisation and negative implications of globalisation take form outside the meetings of organisations such as the WTO and the World Bank. (Douglass 2008, Forbes 1996, Ooi 2008, Sassen 2006, Thomas 2001, 2002) At the local scale contestations over specific

changes in the urban landscape take place at an increasing pace, as can be observed not least in Stockholm in the last few years, with public protests over the construction of new shopping malls. These are all signs that the space of the city, as Saskia Sassen argues, is now a more concrete space for politics than that of the nation (2006).

The debate over Thong Nhat Park can thus be seen in a larger context of contestations over changes in urban space. There is also a clear parallel to a dispute in Hanoi in 1996, over the construction of the Golden Hanoi Hotel, which William Logan claims to be the first successful public protest over the urban changes occurring since Doi Moi. The protests managed to bring a halt to the construction of the 11-storey building on the banks of Hoan Kiem Lake, where there is a 5-storey limit for new construction. This was the first time that official protests were made by professional associations such as the Vietnamese Architects' Association. Here, as in the Thong Nhat Park debate there were no organised popular protests, but the manifestations made by professional associations were seen to reflect the public opinion, and was consequently successful in forcing political change on the matter. The active role of professionals, in some cases from within the Party administration, is one important point here. Mandy Thomas argues that in Vietnam such a voice is needed for the protests to be formulated, and the criticisms acted upon. The active social and political presence of professionals, together with local people has the power to challenge the legitimacy of both the planning authorities and foreign developers. (Logan 2000, Thomas 2002)

### TRANSGRESSIONS AND PROTESTS - SIGNS OF CHANGE

Whether the protests and transgressions now occurring in the urban landscape of Hanoi can lead to broad political change is up for debate. Protests such as those over Thong Nhat Park are important in that they are struggles over public space, where the provision of public space can be seen as a potential breeding ground for an active public sphere and civil society. Anh Nguyen Pham, using the ideas of Don Mitchell argues: "Public spaces are important in that they are sites for the articulation and demand of rights and citizenship. Mitchell argues that rights are never guaranteed in the abstract but always contested and proven in practice; it is through these public spaces that the right to the city is struggled over" (Anh 2005, p13)

Typical of authoritarian regimes is the strict control of the use of public space, where the state is constructing the boundaries and limitations for the civil society. The denial of a public space for active mobilisation reflects the constraints on the development for a more equal relation between state and civil society. (Douglass 2008, Ooi

*"This March, Hanoi public opinion was in a tumult because of the project on Thong Nhat Park renewal submitted by Vincom JSC."*

Architect Pham Thanh Tung,  
Vice editor in chief of Construction  
Newspaper, Ministry of Construction  
Pham 2007

*"Improvement and planning of Thong Nhat Park will be made public for broad ideas among citizens before they are deployed"*

Do Viet Chien  
Vice director of Hanoi Architecture –  
Planning Department  
(VN Media 11-08-2007)

2008,) However, as Mandy Thomas claims, the people of Hanoi have already voted with their feet in their constant transgressions of the rules set by the authorities. The right to define the appropriate use of public space is going into the hands of the people, as the authorities are gradually relaxing their control and people are experiencing an increased scope of action in their usage of the public space. Hence, a "fragile but assertive form of Vietnamese democratic practice has arisen in public space, at the margins of official society, in sites previously equated with state control" (Thomas 2001). This democratic practice is indeed fragile, as even these marginal places are under the threat of disappearing. The provision of public space is shrinking through privatisation and lack of planning, leading to increasing protests over changes in the urban landscape. Local people and organisations are now starting to challenge the power of the city authorities and private developers, to "create, define and transform the landscape of Hanoi" (Thomas 2002, p1621). These protests, in combination with the small scale daily transgressions in the public spaces have the potential to turn into more lasting political change, in the view of Thomas: "Community involvement in high-level government planning for the city, street protests against corruption and the flagrant dismissal of police attempts to order unruly activities in public spaces must be seen together with the abandonment of interest in state-organised rituals

in the monumental spaces of the city as evidence of an emerging community politics which is grounded in the local and everyday experiences of the streets (p1612)." (Thomas 2001, 2002)

One such sign of a movement towards active participation and a democratic political culture is the growing numbers of NGOs supporting protests over changes in public space. The increasing social impact of non-state groups in Vietnam, including NGOs working with environmental concerns and 'right to the city' issues, could be interpreted as a sign of an advancing civil society. William Logan sees the protests over the Golden Hanoi Hotel as one such demonstration of an active civil society engaged in issues on the right of public space, and the Thong Nhat Park debate can be seen in the same light. In a country where oppositional political parties are prohibited, these non-political formations might serve as "outlets for casual political discussion", (Dalton and Nhu-Ngoc 2003) helping to strengthen the civil society and the creation of a public sphere. (Dalton and Nhu-Ngoc 2003, Hägerdahl 2005, Ooi 2008, Logan, 2000)

As the Communist Party keeps a firm grip on the media, a public sphere of open argument and debate has to be partly developed elsewhere. While there is a larger possibility to question the decisions of authorities now than before Doi Moi, as seen in the Thong Nhat

Park debate which to a large extent took place in the media, it is still not a possibility to directly challenge the authority of the Party. Newspapers are dominated by propaganda, educational information and Party-related events and authorities are screening the media to stop reports about protests and accounts of large crowds, for reasons talked about above. However with the opening up for globalisation processes, the Party's monopoly on information is declining. Vietnam is a society of highly educated people where the use of the internet is widespread, a forum which is obviously harder to control even though attempts are being made. (Anh 2005, Hägerdahl 2005, Thomas 2001, personal communication Tran Hoai Ahn) The Party's grip on the media compared to the increasing toleration of individual activities in public spaces creates an "uneven landscape of power" (Anh 2005, p7). It is in the public spaces that the interrelations between state and society are constantly tried. (Anh 2005, Dalton and Nhu-Ngoc 2003) An emerging public sphere can be seen in the negotiations over public space now taking place across Hanoi, as Mandy Thomas illustrates: "The social context created out of the increased number of people on the streets partaking in recreation, work and religious activities allows for the development of public opinion and debate. (...) The public are sharing views and gathering together to exchange information and ideas, allowing a 'public sphere' to develop in much the same way that it did in Europe in the 18th century." (2002, p1621)

In summary, since Doi Moi there has been a resurgence of public life, and a revitalisation of public space in Hanoi. People are becoming bolder in their use of public spaces as they experience an increased scope for action, both political and economical. Informal gatherings and apolitical crowds are new phenomena challenging the norms of the Communist Party. Small scale transgressions in public space signify a shift in the ideological landscape, where global influences have an increasing impact. While having accepted a more diverse range of activities in the use of public space, the government is struggling to find a balance between freedom and control. In this process the public spaces of Hanoi are sites of contestations between agents of state and society, as well as between private interests and society.

The parks of Hanoi are especially important in this process, as the only public spaces which are not directly appropriated by private business or political powers. Parks are belonging to everybody in a way that the squares and sidewalks of Hanoi are not, and thus carry the potential to become public spaces - sites of collectivity, of the articulation of public debate and an active civil society. It is in this light one must consider the daily activities in Thong Nhat Park, as

*"People like this park so much. They want it to remain the same – they don't want anything to change."*

Ngoc, student of architecture  
(personal communication)

a vital part in the constant negotiation about who has the right to define what the public spaces are for, and who they are for.



SUNDAY 11:00



SUNDAY 12:21



FRIDAY 10:42



FRIDAY 11:21



SUNDAY 13:02



SATURDAY 07:30



FRIDAY 11:32



SATURDAY 06:50



## THONG NHAT PARK

The vital role that Thong Nhat Park plays in people's lives is easy for an outsider to miss. At noontime you will find a deserted park, with rusting carousels among the trees and crumbling concrete paths around a polluted lake. Not a person in sight except the scattered fishermen catching pale looking fishes in the brown water, the carousel tenders playing cards in their sheds and the workers picking weeds out of the lawns. At this time of day you can easily understand that an investor might get itchy fingers, seeing this as an unexploited plot in a prime location.

*"We consider this park as part of our life. The rest of the time we have to live with a lot of noise and dust."*

Regular park user Nguyen Huu Nhat  
(Thu 2007)

Another picture emerges as you get to the park at 5 o'clock in the morning. This is the beginning of the rush hour in the park, and within an hour every available inch of the park is packed with people doing aerobics or gymnastics, rehearsing salsa and tango-steps, playing foot badminton, regular badminton and football, doing taiji quan or tai chi with swords and sticks or power walking around the main circulation path – all to the sound of music from a multitude of loudspeakers. This is an early morning explosion of activities and sounds that has to be seen to be believed. After 7 o'clock the rush hour dwindles, as the entrance fee of 2000 Dong (around 1 SEK) is now starting to be collected. Now is breakfast time as people flock by the makeshift cafes and temporary soup kitchens for their pho. (Hanoi style noodle soup) By 8 o'clock all is quiet, only a few pensioners are lingering by the cafes, taking the time for a bit of gossip over a cup of tea while the rest are going to work. This is the start of the quiet hours of the park, lasting through the day until around 4pm, when people get off work and it starts all over again. In the evening the young lovers take over, occupying each bench in the park as well as the swan shaped boats in the lake.

The way that people live their lives with and in this park, spending each and every morning and afternoon in this extended living room, is the essential thing here. The everyday aspect is what risks getting

squeezed and overlooked in a planners or investors perspective, considering only the big picture or the promise of profit. In other words, the planned controlled and ordered space comes in conflict with the lived space defined by the users. When observing how Thong Nhat Park is used and how the space is appropriated, the negotiation concerning whom has the right to define the meaning of public space become obvious.

An important part of our work process and a basis for this chapter has been a mapping of the activities in the park, which we have carried out in intervals spread out over the week and over the day. We have used this method to get a comprehensive picture of how the park functions, at what times it is used for which activities, and by whom. In this process we have counted people and activities, and the figures are presented in maps and charts in this chapter, as an illustration of the use of the park. The mappings are quantitative, but the results also give a picture of the qualitative aspects of the park; of the park as a public space. Through these figures a picture of the social life in the park takes shape, with its rhythms and layers of use over the day and the week.

#### A PARK FOR THE WHOLE CITY

While Thong Nhat Park is a fair sized park at 50ha, it is not a huge one considering the area that it serves. The park is located in the Hai Ba Trung District, the district with the most park area in Hanoi at 1,68m<sup>2</sup>/capita. To the north and east are the comparatively spacious French Quarters, with wide tree lined streets. Further north is the Hoan Kiem District with the crowded Old Quarters - the heart of Hanoi. To the west is the densely built Dong Da District, the district with the lowest amount of park area per capita, at only 0,05m<sup>2</sup>. (HAIDEP 2007b, p3-4) While Thong Nhat Park is a potential asset to this area, it is largely cut off to this side as the railway passes just by the park.

*"This is the only park like this in Hanoi! I lived in Shanghai last year and there I saw so many parks, but in Hanoi there is only this one."*

Son, student of technology  
(personal communication)

The effects of the loss of green space, described in previous chapters, can be seen in the HAIDEP map over parks in Hanoi (Figure 1), where Thong Nhat Park stands out as the largest green area by far. The lack of a coherent green structure and the fragmented green patches has a large impact on living conditions in Hanoi. According to the HAIDEP report, only 31 percent of the residents in Hanoi are provided with a park within walking distance, although 90 percent of the residents consider good access to a park important or very important. In the urban core the situation is somewhat better, as 55 percent of the people have access to a park within walking distance

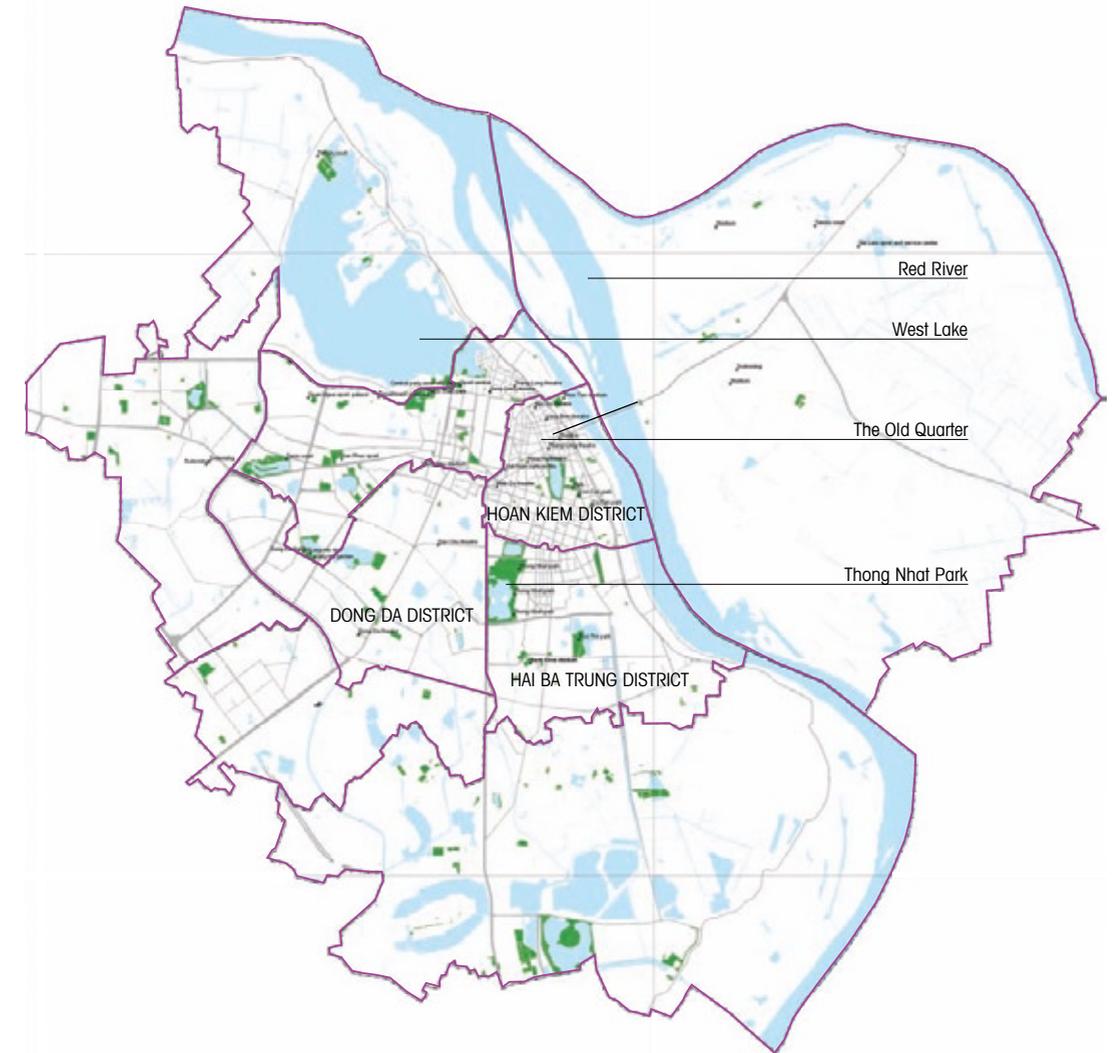
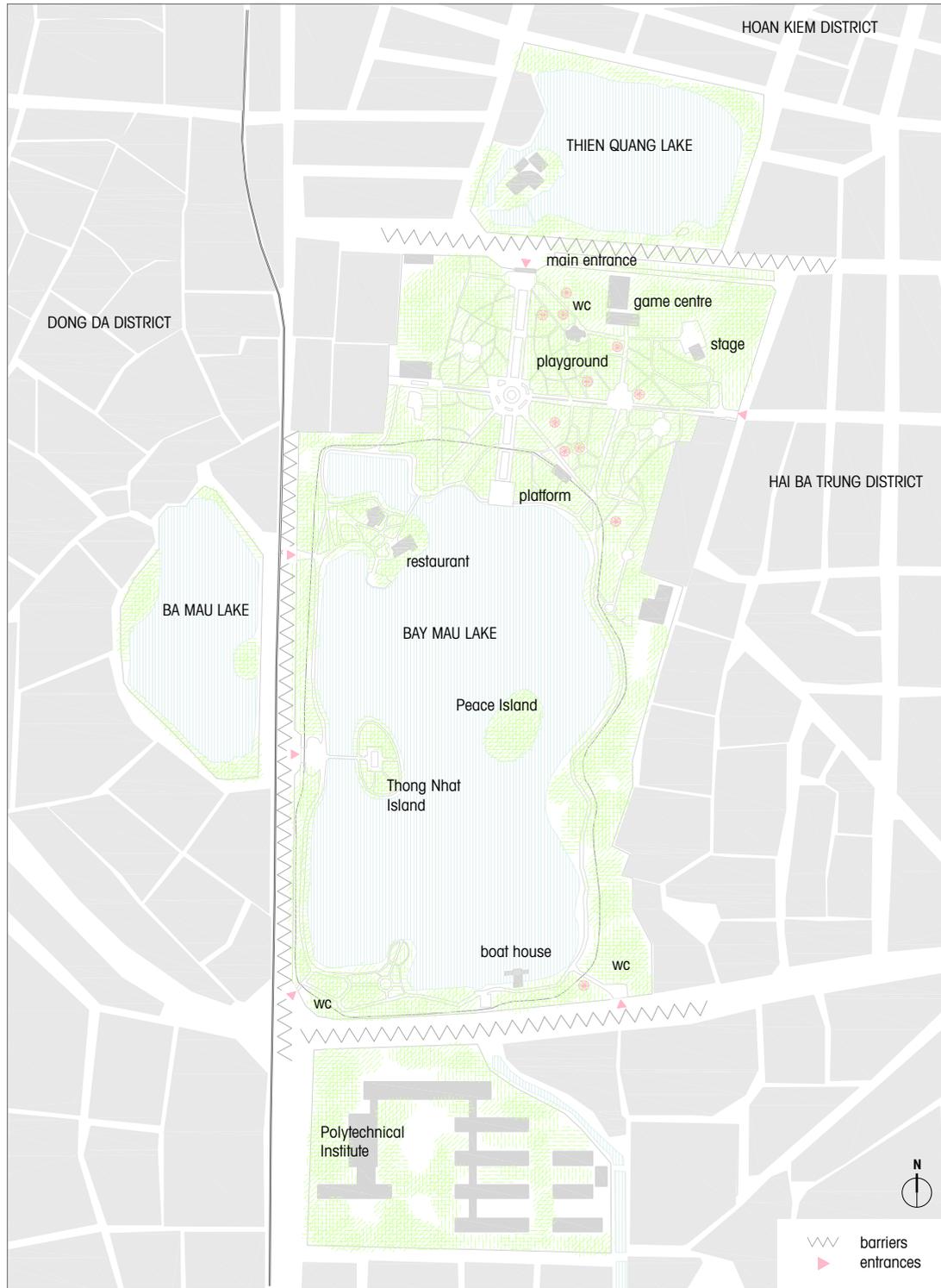


FIGURE 1: Districts and green structure of Hanoi. Source: (HAIDEP 2007b, figure 3-2-2) Used with permission.

(HAIDEP 2007a, p11-16). Looking at the map over green space in Hanoi, it is obvious that Thong Nhat Park helps that number considerably. For the large parks, of which Thong Nhat Park is one, 38 percent of the users travel more than 5km to get to the park, while 33 percent of the users live within 1km (HAIDEP 2007b, p3-15). In the HAIDEP report Thong Nhat Park is ranking in the top five when Hanoians were enquired about their favourite parks and landscapes (HAIDEP 2007c, p3-25).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> All numbers are based on a survey that the HAIDEP team carried out as part of the work with the Masterplan 2020. 20.000 households throughout Hanoi participated in the survey.



plan; 1:10 000

**THONG NHAT PARK: BASIC FACTS**  
 Size: 51 ha, of which 21 ha is water surface  
 Location: Hai Ba Trung District  
 Inauguration: May 1961  
 (Official) Opening hours: 7am-10pm  
 Entrance fee: 2000 Dong (1 SEK)

Thong Nhat Park is laid out around the Bay Mau Lake, which take up 21ha of the total area of 50ha. The influence of French park design is evident in the axis from the main gate pointing to the Polytechnical Institute to the south of the Bay Mau Lake. This spacious and green university complex was built in the 1950s with assistance from the Soviet Union (Logan 2000). To the north of Thong Nhat Park is the Thien Quang Lake and in the west the Ba Mau Lake, both with narrow strips of green space along the edges. The links from the park to the surrounding areas are cut off by busy streets with no pedestrian crossings. On the western side the railway also runs along the street, adding further to the barrier-effect.

*“There are thousands of trees surrounding a large lake in the park, which makes it ideal.”*

Regular park user Nguyen Thi Tinh, living nearby with her husband in an 11m<sup>2</sup> house without garden. (Thu 2007)

Thong Nhat Park is planned for both official manifestations and quiet promenades, with the grand axes crossing a more informal pattern of winding paths through groves and small open spaces. In its layout, the park is not intended for group sports, but rather for strolls enjoying the fresh air and greenery, or forms of exercise that does not demand much surface, such as the brisk walks and gymnastics of the older users. The park is loaded with symbolism, in the statues depicting the ideal members of the communist state; the workers who built the park, model school children concentrated over books and women doing gymnastics.

The main area of the park is to the north, while to the east, west and south of the Bay Mau Lake there are only narrow strips of park. Most of the northern part is shaded by large trees. Under the trees is a mishmash of paths and places, an over-layered composition where each function has been placed over the other as time passes, resulting in a mix of pavings and surfaces with additional hand drawn badminton fields. The overall impression is of a park in much need of refurbishment, but well kept under the circumstances. Even though the lake is dirty, half of the lights are out of function and the benches are crooked, the plantations are kept immaculate and the crackling paths are being swept on a daily basis.

FIGURE 2: Thong Nhat Park with surroundings



FIGURE 3: The skyline is still dominated by the trees of the park, creating a closed off haven, but new towers are beginning to pop up among the low housing that still dominates the surrounding areas.



FIGURE 4: With plans for a Central Business District in the Hai Ba Trung District, the skyline will change considerably in the coming years, making the surrounding city increasingly present in the park.

## TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL LAYERS OF USE

The distribution of people and activities in the park is strikingly steady. The rush hours in the afternoon and in the evening are constant throughout the week. In the weekends the addition is the families coming to use the modern playground, get on the rides and walk around the park. The park is thus used more evenly during weekends than during weekdays, when it is mainly deserted during the day.

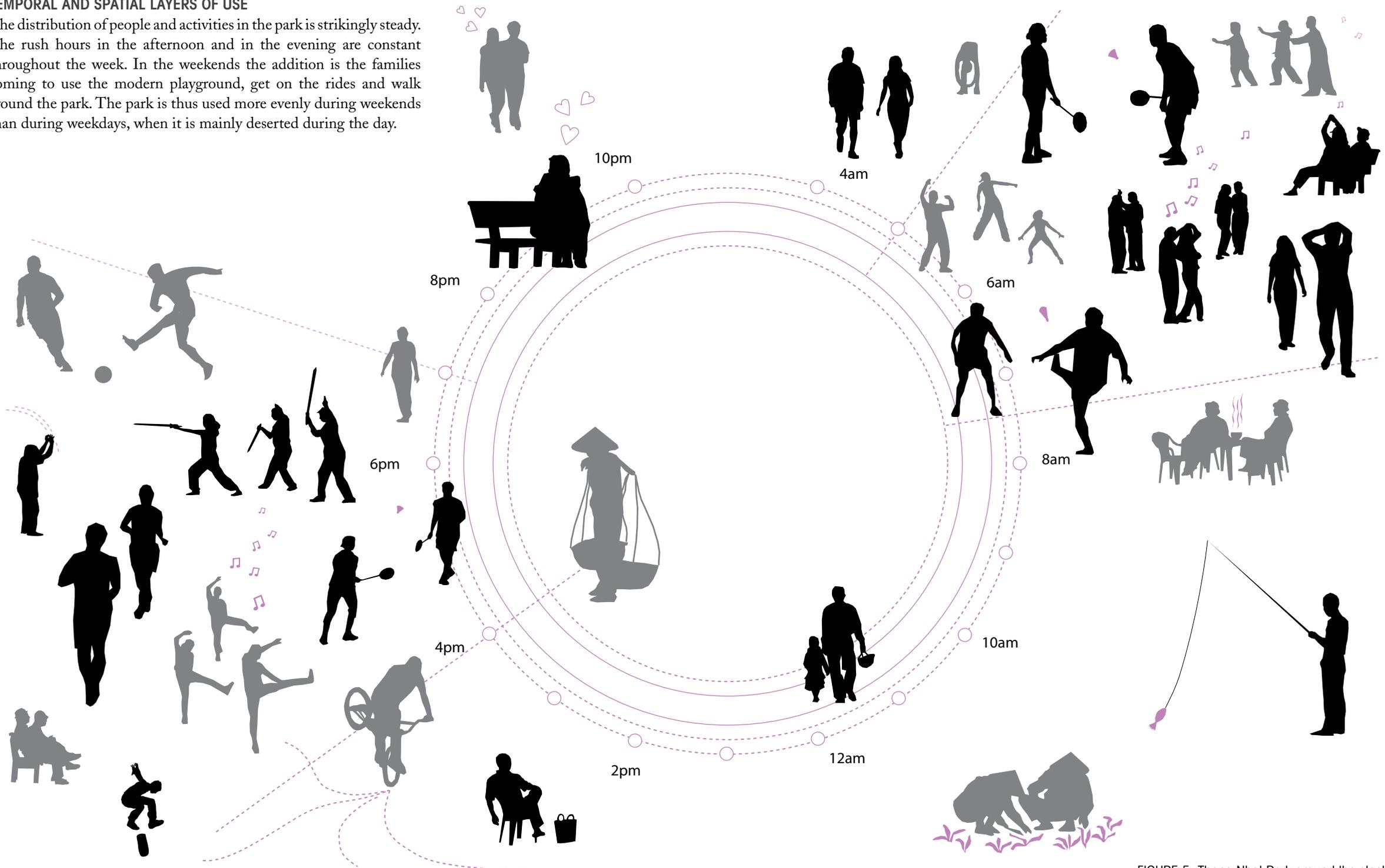


FIGURE 5: Thong Nhat Park around the clock

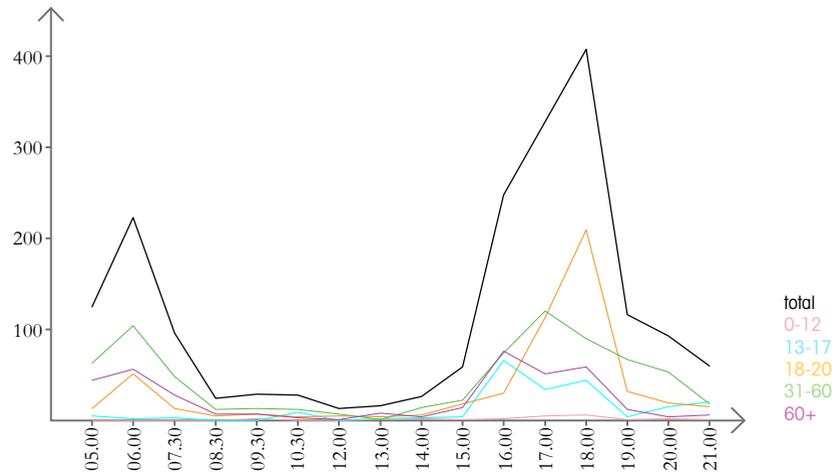


TABLE 1: Age distribution on the circulation path, weekdays.  
Based on own observations.

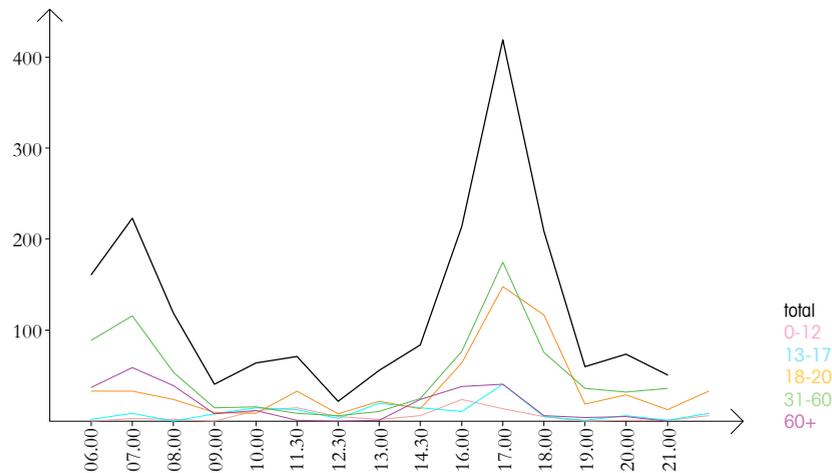


TABLE 2: Age distribution on the circulation path, weekends.  
Based on own observations.

Comparing the graphs<sup>11</sup> of age, sex and activity distribution of the circulation in the park (Tables 1-6), a few things can be noted. The most obvious is of course the prominent morning- and afternoon peaks, which are stable through the week. In the weekends the dip between the peaks is not as distinct, as more people are making all-day excursions to the park.

The age groups which are underrepresented are mainly children and teenagers, especially during weekdays. Children tend to be the play areas rather than on the circulation path, as reflected in Tables 9 and 10. Families with children use the park mostly on weekends.

<sup>11</sup> The graphs and tables which are not from the HAIDEP report are based on our own studies in the park, where we have counted people in two ways. During four periods a day, morning, noon, afternoon, evening we have studied the distribution of stationary activities. The amount of people, type of activity and location was registered. Each count was performed on two occasions on weekdays and two occasions on weekends. Throughout the day we have also counted

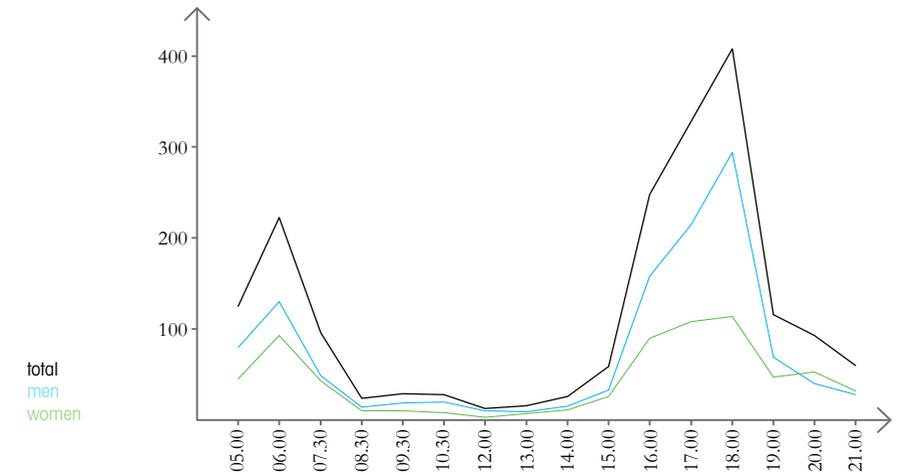


TABLE 3: Sex distribution on the circulation path, weekdays.  
Based on own observations.

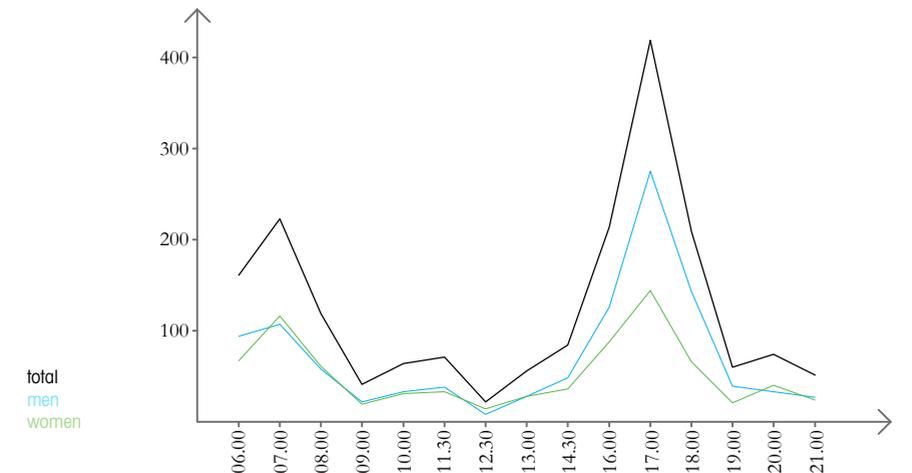


TABLE 4: Sex distribution on the circulation path, weekends.  
Based on own observations.

the circulation around the main path. Here we have also counted people based on activities, age and sex distribution. There have been difficulties in counting due to the large numbers of users, and the constant movements of people. Hence these figures can not be seen as strictly scientific, but gives a rough picture of the distribution of activities in the park, over time and over the week.

Teenagers are not as present in the circulation numbers, as they mostly sit in couples along the waterfront, and might be interested in other types of sports and activities than walking and jogging. The main groups are the middle aged and the old people, which is not in proportion to how the age distribution looks in general, with over half of the population under the age of 16. (Drummond and Thomas 2003) It is also clear that while the middle aged and the old are using the park evenly, both in the morning and the afternoon (many come two times a day), the group between 18 and 30 is substantially larger in the afternoon. This can be explained by the large group of male

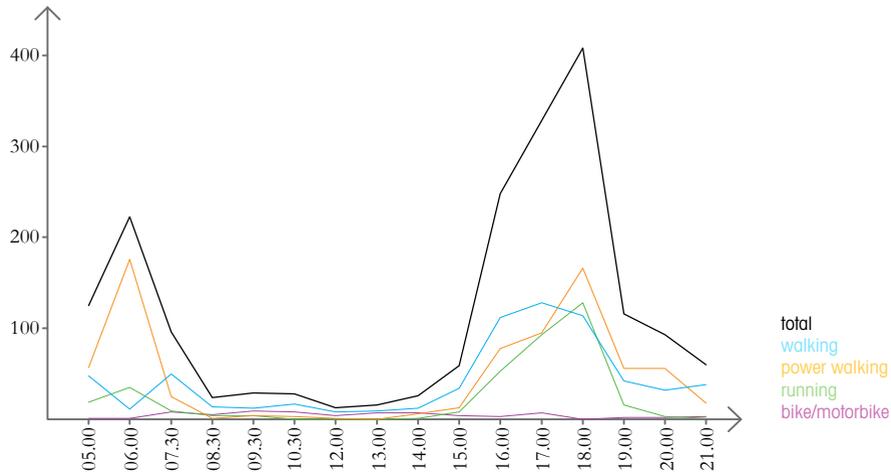


TABLE 5: Activity distribution on the circulation path, weekdays  
Based on own observations.

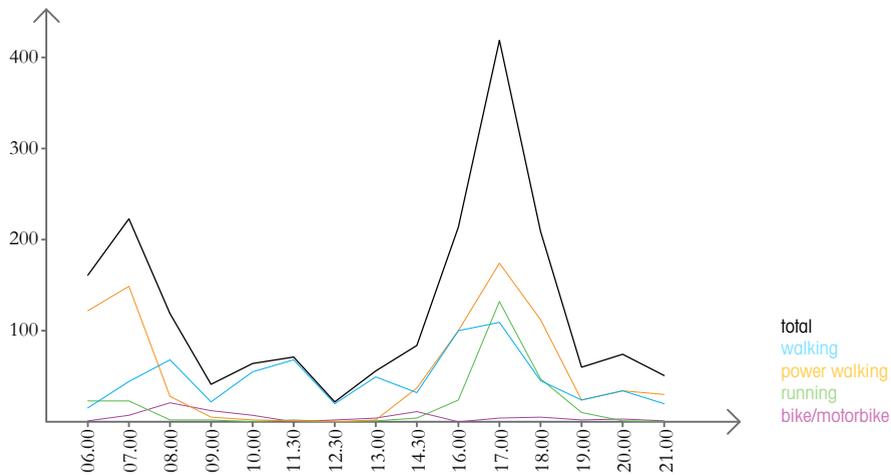


TABLE 6: Activity distribution on the circulation path, weekends  
Based on own observations.

joggers mainly present in the park between 17 and 18 o'clock, which is apparent when the tables are compared. The sex distribution is more even in the mornings than in the afternoons. We can only speculate as to the reason for this, but one feasible factor is that women are doing household chores in afternoon. The main morning activity is power walking, while jogging is mainly for the afternoon. Jogging is mainly done by men, and mostly younger men. Power walking is a more neutral activity, popular among all ages and both women and men. Results from the HAIDEP survey shown in Table 7 and 8, confirm

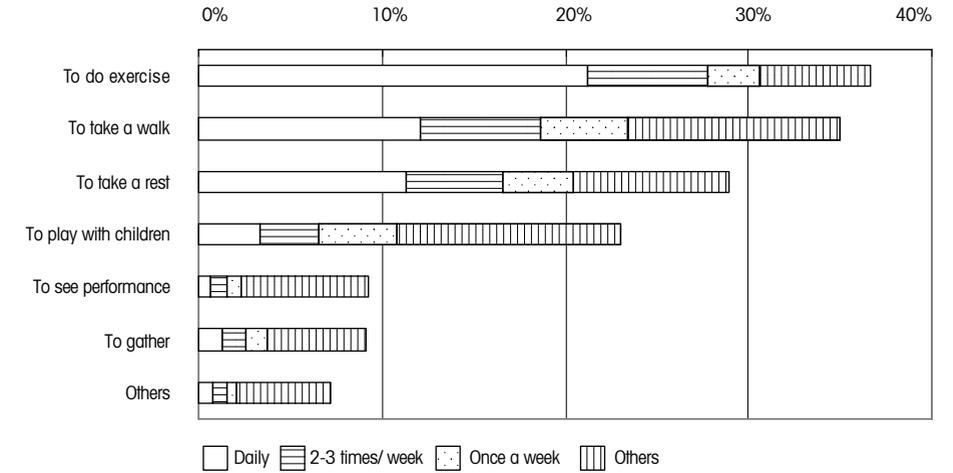


TABLE 7: Frequency of Current Major Activities in the Parks, HAIDEP survey  
Multiple choice to the questions "What do you do in parks and green spaces?" and "How do you use them?".  
Source: (HAIDEP 2007a, figure 11.4.4)

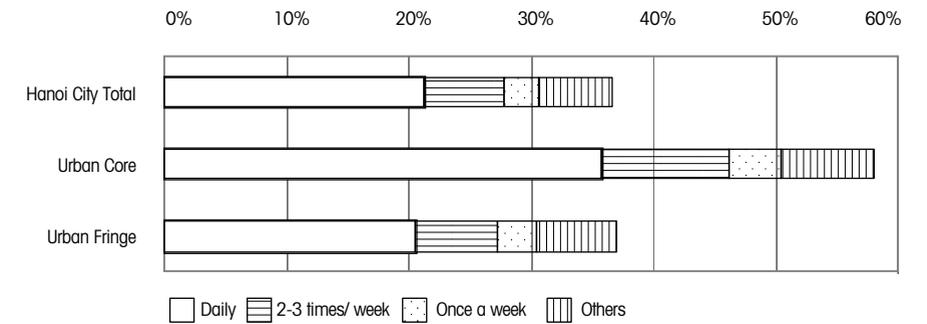


TABLE 8: Frequency of "to do exercise" by area, HAIDEP survey  
Source: (HAIDEP 2007a, figure 11.4.5)

our impression that a visit to the park is a part of peoples everyday routines. People living in the central areas are the most frequent park users, with over 60 percent responding that they use parks on a daily basis, and 30 percent responding that they use parks everyday for exercise. According to the HAIDEP survey, exercise is the major activity in the parks of Hanoi, followed by walking, resting and playing with children. Our own observations (Table 9 and 10) confirm these results. Again, the morning and afternoon peaks are distinct in these staples, as is the dominance of sports, especially in the mornings. There is a clear difference between how the park is used on weekdays

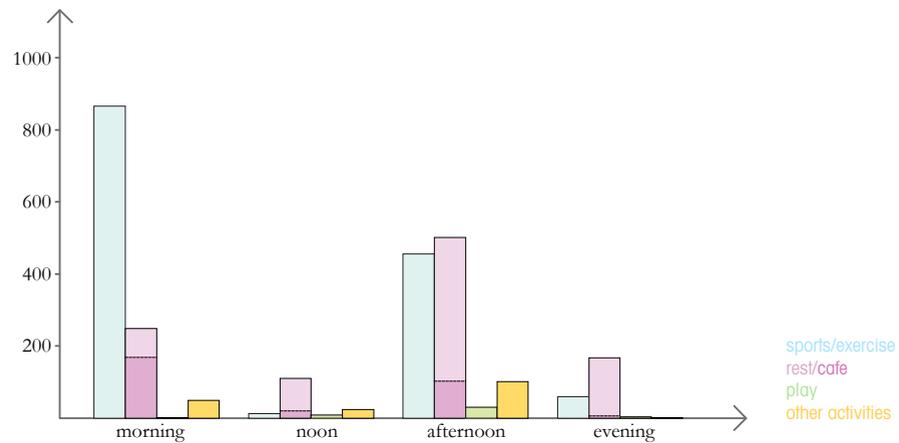


TABLE 9: Stationary activities weekdays. Based on own observations.

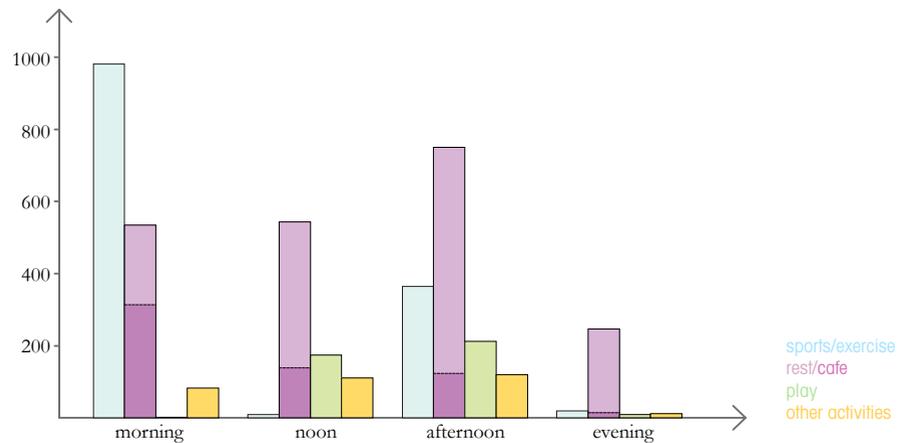


TABLE 10: Stationary activities weekends. Based on own observations.

and weekends. While the weekday users tend to come throughout the week for their morning and afternoon exercise, the weekend users tend to be spread more evenly throughout the day, and come more for relaxing and taking the children to the playground. A large portion of the rest category in the weekends is the parents waiting by the play area. Another large group here is the café guests, as the temporary cafes and food vendors in the park double in number during weekends. In the evening the high numbers in the rest category reflect the couples on the benches along the waterfront.

The dot-maps in Figure 6 and 7 illustrate the layered use of the park

when it comes to where certain activities take place. As an effect of the limited and scattered hard surface areas different activities have to share these areas during the rush-hours, resulting in a crowded mix of exercise forms. Still there is some kind of order to the chaos, as each group find their own place and mould the space to their needs by drawing up badminton fields, putting up basket nets, setting up loud speakers etc. People seem to feel very at home in park, one example being how they use the bushes as a place to store equipment such as brushes to sweep the badminton fields. The areas which are empty in the maps are areas with ground cover plants, which are not usable in the same way that lawns are used in temperate climates. In the weekends the play ground as well as the area around the carousels in the northern part of the park is taken over by families on day-trips, while during weekdays this area is mainly empty or used for exercise.

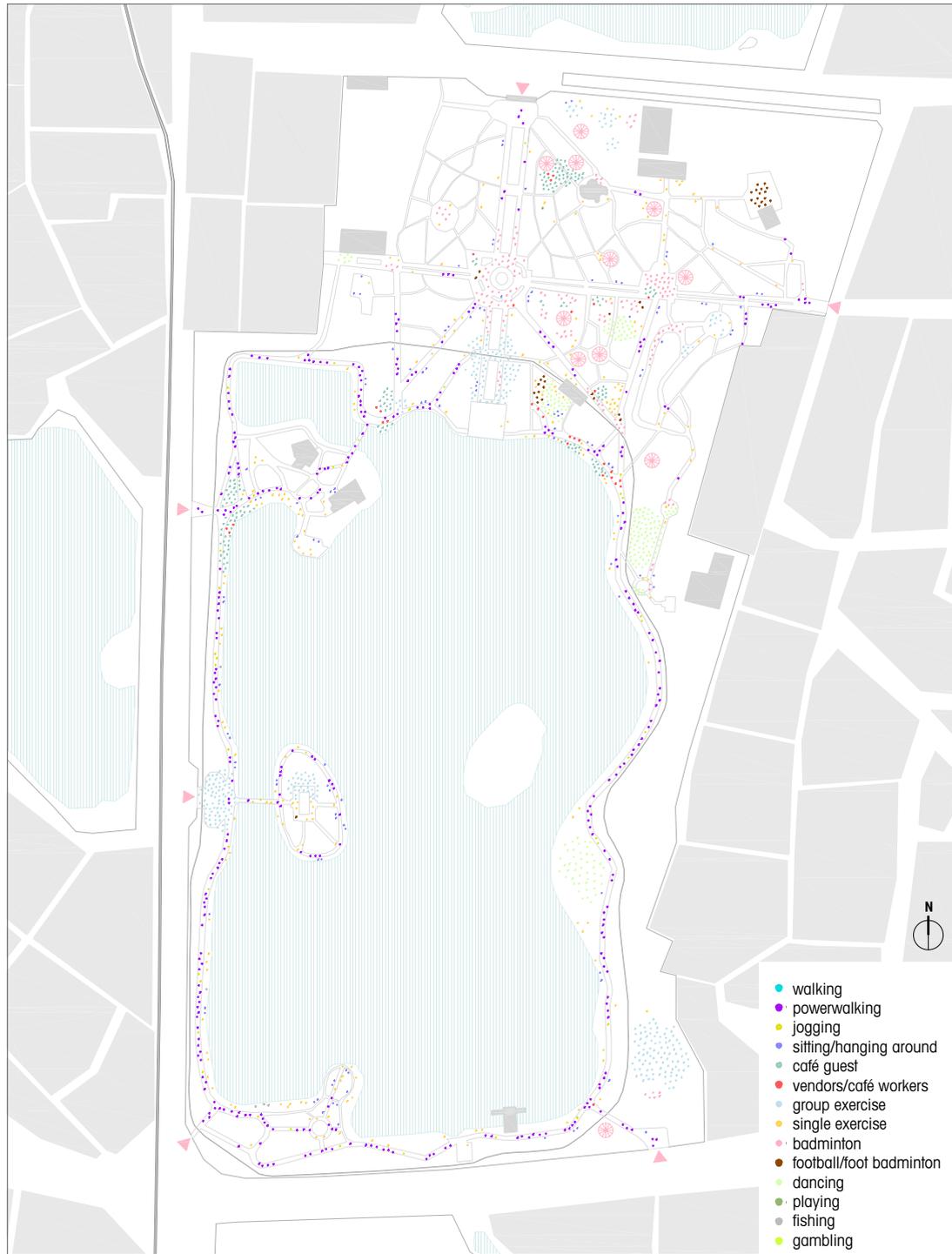


FIGURE 6: Map of activities, weekday morning. Based on own observations.

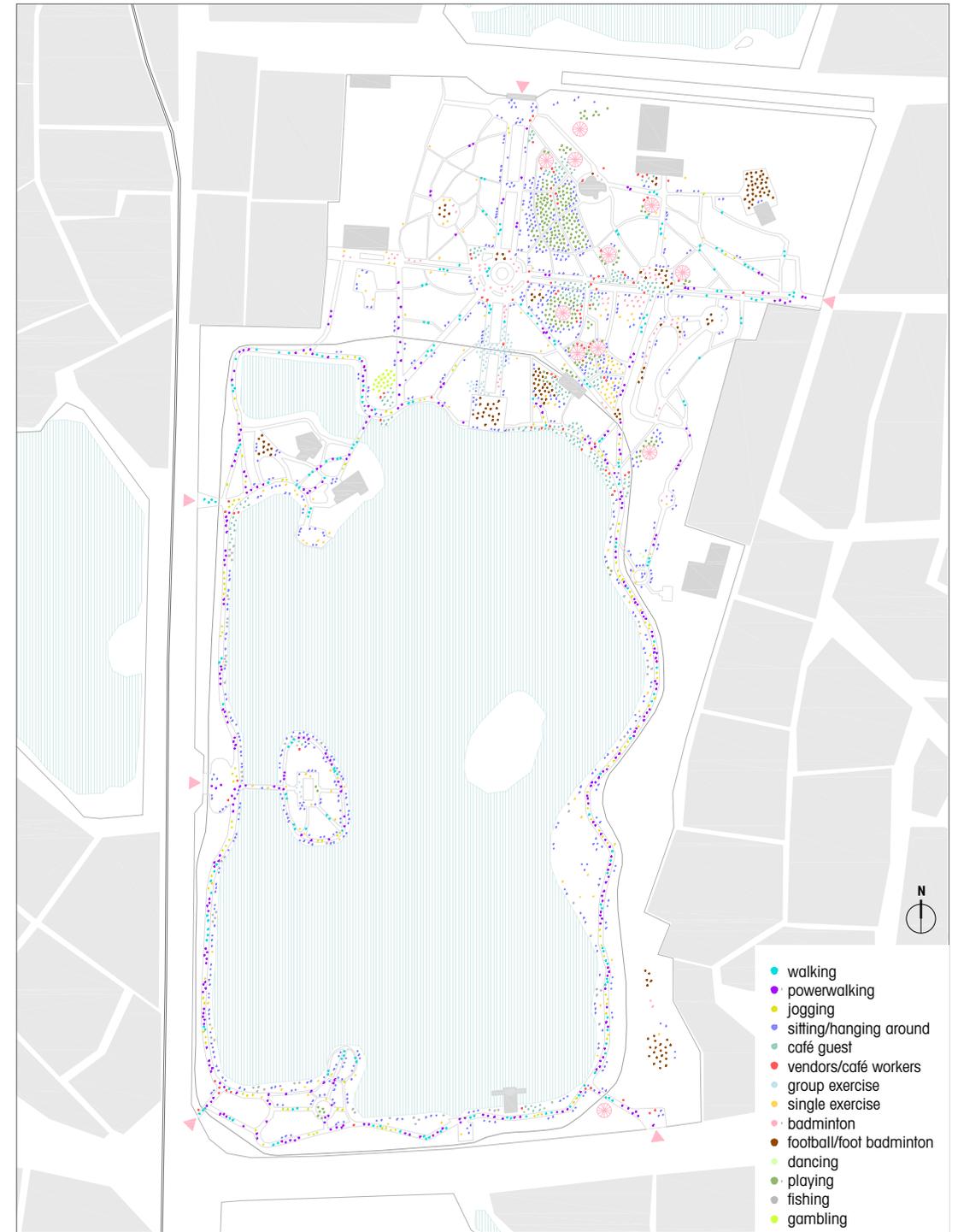


FIGURE 7: Map of activities, weekend afternoon. Based on own observations.

## THONG NHAT PARK AS PUBLIC SPACE

The use of Thong Nhat parks is in many ways traditional, but new influences and lifestyles are making themselves known in how the space is used. Private investors have gotten the opportunity to move into the park in diverse ways. Since the summer of 2006 Thong Nhat Park features the first playground of international standard in Hanoi, sponsored by Unilever Vietnam. (Hayton 2006) A prominent sign by the playground is displaying the name of the company, and of their washing powder brand OMO, so that the parents will know which product to use for the children's clothes dirtied by playing.

Global influence and new private interests are also obvious in the commercial events now taking place in the park. During our stay in Hanoi a couple of large weekend events were arranged in the park, organised by companies manufacturing milk products, a novelty to Vietnam where dairy products is not a part of the traditional food culture. These commercial events were clearly directed at middle class families, an emerging consumer group deliberately drawn to the park as the companies were sending out invites to families with children in Hanoi. Global companies using the park as an arena to launch new products show the increasing interest of private firms to act in public space and the large crowds turning up for these events demonstrate the great appeal of happenings, entertainment and new products. The domination of middle class families in the audience could be seen as a reflection of a changing society and a manifestation of the differentiation of social classes. While the everyday users of the park are not necessarily low income takers, they do not represent the suburban upper and middle class. The more affluent social groups use the park in different ways than the everyday users, as they come to the park primarily at weekends, travel longer distances to get there and are mainly present in other areas of the park. Evidence of this is the multitude of shining motorbikes in front of the main gate at weekends, and the crowded play area with parents standing by in designer clothes. The segregation in the urban landscape of Hanoi is making itself known in the park, in the layered use and clear distinctions between different user groups.

There are also smaller signs of clashes between the local and the global, and between the old and the new in the park. The sparkling new play equipment of the Unilever playground stand in contrast to the old carousels decorated with hand drawn versions of Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse. The ladies in cone hats making their rounds of exercise next to runners in iPods and trainers, groups of dancers practicing tango and salsa next to groups practicing taiji quan and the bmx-riders and skateboarders competing for space with the

*"They say there is nothing interesting in the park. It's true there aren't enough games for children. Most of the games are at least one or two decades old. That shabby old mirror house has been here for 30 years I'd say."*

Hoang Thanh Van,  
a portrait photographer who has  
come to the park for 15 years.  
(Thu 2007)

*"I once was robbed by two heroin addicts while walking with my boyfriend in Thong Nhat Park. They took our cell phones and wallets, but fortunately they didn't harm us. Since then, I have never considered returning to that park."*

Le Thu Trang,  
a young employee of the FPT Company.  
(Viet Nam News, 2007-05-27)

gymnasts are all signs of the constant negotiation between old and new, global and local. This is not least noticeable in the soundscape of the park, where traditional music with a revolutionary flavour from the official loudspeakers compete with hip hop and disco from the mobile speakers of the users.

The transitions in the use of space are appearing gradually, sometimes in conflict with established norms. By each gate of the park is a long list of regulations, ranging from the obvious to the absurd. Among the activities which are forbidden here are the shooting of birds or animals, fishing, sleeping on benches, carrying guns or explosives, swimming in the lake, camping, playing football and doing business. At least half of these are broken on a daily basis. Even if not all activities are in direct violation of the rules they are still redefining the intended use of this space. When people are drawing new badminton fields on the main axis and using the colonnaded platform for skateboarding, the meanings of these symbolic spaces are redefined, as they are appropriated by the users. Sport might not be controversial in itself, but the excessive, unintended use of Thong Nhat Park for sports is a part of the negotiation about the proper use of the public spaces of Hanoi. The everyday transgressions of established rules in the park can be interpreted as a sign of the need to take place in the city, to shape the space around you. This is a part of the constant negotiation about what constitutes lived space, a claim for the right to a space for everyday activities. In this light, it is not the activities in themselves but the fact that so many are performing them in a space not indented for these activities that is a powerful statement of the wish to appropriate and transform urban space for personal expression and use. In Thong Nhat Park, as in the rest of Hanoi, people are voting with their feet in their use of public spaces for apolitical activities that signify a resistance against established norms. This becomes especially clear in the negotiation about space for new sports which are a part of global lifestyle cultures, such as skateboarding, basketball and break dancing.<sup>12</sup> These sports are controversial as they are seen as a sign of the consumer culture and an individualized lifestyle, turning away from the collective ideals that still dominate the political rhetoric in Vietnam. (Thomas 2001)

As the largest, and essentially the only, park in central Hanoi Thong Nhat Park is an irreplaceable part of people's lives as an arena for everyday activities. It is truly an appropriated space, as the users have taken over both the design and definition of the park. Where there is no badminton field they draw their own, where there is no basket net they put one up, and they feel enough at home to use the bushes for

<sup>12</sup> We got one interesting comment from journalist Dan Kirk on how the break dancing kids got a higher level of acceptance than other subcultures:

"What really changed a lot of parental and conservative opinion on sub culture activities in public places was break dancing. The kids who were into it worked hard to show their parents and critics that it was good clean fun and exercise. They worked a great culture and exercise angle - like the old communist rhetoric, but for their own agenda. It was clever and it was a big breakthrough." (personal communication)

storing equipment. This leads to transformations both of the physical reality and the meaning of this space, where people are moulding the park to their own needs, adjusting it to both their everyday needs and their dreams of a future Hanoi.



FRIDAY 11:50



SATURDAY 16:28



SATURDAY 14:17



SUNDAY 06:22



SUNDAY 13:03



SATURDAY 08:05



MONDAY 17:17



SATURDAY 14:22



## TOWARDS NEW PUBLIC SPACES

About the time when the debate about the Thong Nhat Park was taking off, a group of young Vietnamese artists initiated an exhibition exploring the Hanoians dreams for the future. 250 citizens under the age of 35 were interviewed and their visions for the future of Hanoi was collected and interpreted by the artists in huge paintings and installations – an explosion of imagination and colour representing a utopian Hanoi. Standing at the crossroads between history and progress the young people’s visions seemed to point in all directions. As some reminisced a quiet past, dreaming of a city with “no cars”, “abundant nature” and “no high-rises”, others welcomed new technological achievements and modernisation. Top of the line transport like “the biggest metro in world”, “transport with no wheels”, “streets transformed into escalators/moving roads” and “airplanes for daily use in the city” seemed to be an important element in the image of modernity. Others reached for the sky wishing for “many skyscrapers”, and hoping that “in 2010 the highest building will be built in Hanoi”. Some even thought one step beyond, imagining a city “built in the air” with “houses constructed on the wings of kites”. Many reacted to the over-crowding, wishing “there won’t be narrow roads, streets and sidewalks will be wide” and that there would be “more parks and big squares such as Ba Dinh”. Following the same line many wished for a green city where “there will be many trees”, flowers will be everywhere” and “people will plant roses everywhere”. The younger school children didn’t let anything limit their imagination when dreaming about a future Hanoi where “all the houses will be made from chocolate and the lakes filled with soft drinks” and “people will wear the costumes of cartoon heroes”! (Kraevskaia 2007) The exhibition gave voice to a young generation with great visions and beliefs in the future of their city, showing a commitment and curiosity to what the future holds.

The gap between generations in contemporary Hanoi might now be

bigger than ever. The young generation is growing fast and over 50 percent of the population is under the age of 16 (Drummond and Thomas 2003). As discussed previously the younger generation have little emotional attachment to the communist regime and look to the west and to neighbouring countries for new influences and references. The answers to the question “What is your future image of Hanoi City?” in the HAIDEP survey\* show a clear distinction between the young and their elders. Where the young strongly prefer images of modernity and development, the older respondents focused on cleanliness combined with modernity (HAIDEP 2007c). The young Hanoians hold dreams of new lifestyles and of a modern urban life, and it is becoming evident that they are turning their backs to rural traditions, reaching towards the modern to become true urbanites. New subcultures, where western lifestyles are adopted with a Vietnamese twist, are emerging - one example being the large gangs of bmx riders holding up traffic during weekends. In a conversation we have with Pham Thuy Loan, lecturer at the Faculty of Planning and Architecture, National University of Civil Engineers in Hanoi, she describes how a whole generation is now grasping for something new and modern – a new way of living in a city. She portrays a generation reaching for an image of modernity, but without having a clear picture of what to expect or wish for. As the young don't know how to spend their evenings, choices being karaoke bars and cafes, there is a demand for new types of urban spaces and more thrilling entertainment. (personal communication)

*“I don't know where I should take my kids on the weekends except for the West Lake Water Park or a few big supermarkets that have games,”*

Nguyen Ngoc Huyen,  
young mother in Thong Nhat Park  
(Huong 2007)

While the young generation reaches out for the modern and for a global urban culture, the answers to their needs and demands are rarely given by the state or by public institutions. Private investors, both local and foreign, on the other hand are fast to spot the emerging demands as possible sources of profit. Rich in initiatives, the private investors have come to represent an image of development and progressiveness that appeals to a large part of the population, not willing to patiently wait for public initiatives and funding. The proposed future for Thong Nhat Park is in this context a clear example of a general trend in the urban development of Hanoi, describing a typical process of gentrification. Lack of investments and care has resulted in a run down park with decreased popularity and a regeneration with private means appear in this case as one possible, or perhaps the only possible, way to regain material standards and popularity. What distinguishes the Thong Nhat Park project from the general trend is the intense debate it has generated in newspapers and other media, engaging park users as well as professionals. The debate points to two

things - the emergence of a public sphere engaging itself in public media, and to the crucial point in which the Vietnamese society is standing at this very moment – in a transition from a communal system to one based on individual desires. As the debate in the west concerns ‘the end of public space’, due to much the same processes of privatisation that are occurring in Hanoi today, the Vietnamese context is different, as described in previous chapters. The complex history of public space in Vietnam is not comparable with the western context, where public space is considered an almost institutional presupposition of democracy (Drummond 2000). In Hanoi the case is rather a direct handing over of spaces from the domination of the state to the domination of private interests. The recent recapturing of

*“I think a foreign company doing this is better. If the Hanoi People's Committee could have done it, they would have done it already. They can't come up with innovative ideas quickly enough.”*

Pham Viet Dung,  
Thong Nhat Park  
(Hayton 2006)

public spaces through everyday contestations by the users, described in previous chapters, is in this fast forward reaching for modernisation and development easily disrupted in favour of commercialisation and individualisation.

When Mitchell in his book *The Right to the City* discusses ‘the end of public space’ he underscores the notion that public spaces in themselves have never been guaranteed, but are rather constantly *produced* through the usage of them as *public*. In accordance with Lefebvres terminology he refers to lived spaces, spaces-in-use, as ‘representational spaces’, which are set in contrast to ‘representations of space’, characterized by order and control. (Mitchell 2003) The distinction between the two types is important to bear in mind when trying to bring clarity into what is put at stake in the current development in Hanoi and in Thong Nhat Park. If public spaces are defined by the usage of them, it becomes crucial to unravel who has the right to participate in the production and definition of these spaces. Normally the process of privatisation includes a transition of these rights from the communal and collective to the individual and commercial. In Vietnam, as mentioned above, the case is rather a transition from a situation where a strong governmental machine have attempted to define the boundaries and limitations of public space, to a situation in which commercial interests of economical profit set the rules. Under the communist rule, access to and restrictions in certain spaces could/can be defined by for example political belonging or state position while in the case of commercial and private space, access is to the outermost defined by the financial ability of the visitor. (Drummond 2000) These seemingly contrasting spaces, the first representing communist power and the second the logics of capital, have in fact a fundamental resemblance in their general characteristics as spaces of domination, or ‘representations of space’. On the surface

they may appear as public, using the symbolic of public space, but the limited accessibility and the narrowed possibilities for the users to take part in the making and remaking of these spaces mark a clear distinction from representational, or 'truly' public spaces. As described in previous chapters the actions performed when reshaping and redefining public space are not necessarily controversial in themselves, given the example of sport. It is rather the aggregated effect of many acting in public space in a way that shapes their everyday use of these spaces that become political in its very nature. (Thomas 2002) The politics of public space and the spatial expressions of an emerging public sphere make democracy and democratization physical and concrete. Sassen describes these processes as "politics embedded in the physicality of the city" (2006, p29).

The current everyday negotiations of public spaces occurring in Hanoi indicate a process of democratization. While the Vietnamese state is not voluntarily loosening their control, due to the fear of social unrest they have been forced to a negotiation resulting in an increased scope of action for the citizens when acting in public. (Koh 2008, Thomas 2002) Ultimately this is a negotiation about who have the right to participate in the definition of the boundaries of public culture. The disruption of the spatial democratization of Hanoi that comes with privatisation, reversing the recapturing of public spaces, gives narrowed potential for the emerging public sphere. What appear to be a movement towards a spatial democratization, thus risk becoming a parenthesis in Vietnamese history.

## BEYOND DISNEYLAND

In a western context, 'disneyfication' and 'themeparking' have become often-used terms when discussing privatisation of public space. As exaggerated stereotypes for spaces dominated by private capital they point to the worrying processes and consequences when handing over public spaces to private hands. Offering well-choreographed experiences of public space where the stage is set using the symbolism of the public, with benches, 'public' transport, traffic signs, police force etc, they also underline what is not present. With a 'public' consuming the experience of the space, what is missing are the risks and possibilities connected to public spaces - the risk of unwanted encounters and situations, and the possibilities of shaping your own reality in public. (Sassen 2006, Zukin 1995)

As seen in the debate about the Thong Nhat Park project, offering the idea of a 'small Disneyland' in the largest park in central Hanoi

*"We want to see a new modern face for Thong Nhat Park. We all are keen to buy tickets to enter the park when it is completed but we hope that prices will be reasonable."*

Trinh Duc Cuong,  
60-year-old citizen living near  
Thong Nhat Park  
(VietNamNet 2007-03-27)

*"Personally, I'm for the project as there are not too many entertainment places available for Hanoian, especially teenagers. I hope that the park will add to a healthy entertainment environment for our youth."*

Hoang Thanh Thuy,  
People's Committee chairwoman of  
Le Dai Hanh Ward  
(VietNamNet 2007-03-27)

*"Disneyland – a nature copy construction originated in America, a huge machine making false animals swim in the water, fly in the sky or ride the waves up and down as if they are going to swallow the players. The customers are anxious to watch, shrinking for fear...Actually, all turn out machines!"*

Tran Thanh Van,  
China-educated landscape architect with  
over 40 years of experience  
(Trang 2007-08-04)

proved to be a demanding balancing act. It seems that the dusty image of a shiny Disneyland was not the answer to the dreams and hopes of people in search for the modern - and it also proved to be a concept easy to attack. The previous statements about the intentions to model Thong Nhat Park after Disneyland were, after harsh criticism in media, denied by the developers. Chairman of Vincom Le Khac Hiep was quoted saying: "We have never considered anything like building a Disneyland theme park in VietNam, like the reports stated. The incorrect information has brought us a lot of trouble." (Huong 2007, p2) As the debate heated up, the private investors struggled to overcome the image of Disneyland, outbidding each other on how little they would effect the current park life - entrance fees would only concern the actual entertainment facilities, while the rest of the park would be kept intact or improved. (Hoang 2008, Ngoc 2007, Thu 2007)

Despite all promises, presenting Disneyland as an image for the future of the Thong Nhat Park could be regarded as a not-so-subtle description of the real intentions of the project. Although the developers later referred to the project as a "healthy entertainment environment" (VietNamNet 2007-03-27) rather than Disneyland, the fundamental question about who have the right to participate in the making and remaking of public life in a renewed Thong Nhat Park remains. Sassen relates to the distinction between 'representational spaces' and 'representations of space' when emphasising accessibility. She points to a crucial distinction between *public-access space* and *public space*. (Sassen 2006). Zukin argues along the same line when underscoring the risk that commercial and dominated spaces may only "appear to be public spaces because so many people use them for common purposes" (1995, p39). Simultaneously as privatisation and commercialisation of public spaces have accelerated, the discourse on public space has also become more nuanced. Hajer and Reijndorp point to the fact that a "fixation on true public spaces can lead to a disregard of other collectively used spaces that are appearing" (2001, p101) They use the term *public domain* to describe the kind of 'publicness' that places of shared experience, although privately managed, can provide. (Hajer and Reijndorp 2001). Without disregarding these kinds of spaces of 'publicness' and the diversity and complexity they potentially contribute in a city, the specific role of the Thong Nhat Park must be considered. In being practically the only open space accessible to all in the city center - not occupied by small-scale commercial and domestic activities as the sidewalks and not holding the strong political symbolism of the squares - its function as public space in

the context of Hanoi is unique. This shows not at least in the way this everyday space is constantly being negotiated, as described in the previous chapter. Handing the park or even parts of the park over to private investors will have effect on the current park life. Some might regard it as a positive regeneration of a worn down site, and others as an intrusion in an already functioning space. A statement by Nguyen Van Thinh, deputy head of the municipal People's Committee office, illustrates how politicians have to balance conflicting views. He assures that "Investors can implement a number of entertainment services to gain profits but have to ensure security and a natural environment. No matter how the park is renovated, it should not look like Hanoi's West Lake or Dam Sen, Suoi Tien and Ky Hoa parks in Ho Chi Minh City, which are for entertainment and profit-making. Thong Nhat park is for the public." (Thu 2007) One of the portrait photographers working in the park, Hoang Thanh Van, is sceptical though: "I don't believe in investors because normally, any investor considers the [financial] benefit as the most important thing for a business strategy." (Thu 2007, p2) Even if the access to the park itself is not limited by entrance fees, as promised by the investors, new groups of visitors will be attracted to the park, setting a new agenda for who belongs to the park and who do not. Hopes for increased security, expressed by many park users in the debate, can also be presumed to be fulfilled resulting in further seclusion of unwanted groups such as the homeless. The processes of exclusion through normalisation have consequences not only for the everyday-life of many citizens but also for the potential that is present in the park today – the potential of serving a public sphere in defining the outlines of public culture. Zukin points to this when describing how centrally located public spaces are especially important holding the "greatest claim to be symbolic spaces for the city as a whole" and how handing over such spaces to private investors means "giving them carte blanche to remake public culture" (Zukin 1995, p 32).

While many similar processes of privatisation of public green space in Hanoi pass unnoticed, the intense symbolism of a park built by socialist workers for the common good being turned into a commercial spectacle like Disneyland brought discussions to the surface. While global actors win rights to restructure, produce and maintain spaces for its (paying) users, the awareness of lost possibilities for the users to redefine and remake these spaces is growing stronger. As the debate over Thong Nhat Park has progressed, it has become obvious that the image of a Disneyland in the city center doesn't answer to of the dreams and expectations of most Hanoians. That the park still exists

*"The government haven't spent any money on this park since I was a child. They should have invested in this place a long time ago."*

Pham Du Trinh,  
Thong Nhat Park  
(Hayton 2006)

in its present state probably owes a lot to Disneyland though – or at least to the mistake made by the developers in using that name.

The many dreams of the Hanoians will surely get answers in spectacular entertainment facilities and shopping centres developed by private investors keen to make profit. But answers to these dreams will hopefully also be seen in public spaces around the city and in Thong Nhat Park. Bearing in mind the obvious risk that the discussion on privatisation of public space become stereotypical with representations of good and evil forces, one must not forget that these processes are attached to the everyday life of the citizens. In the end space cannot be discussed in the abstract; it has a physical, everyday dimension in which it is lived and experienced. It is where people carry out their daily life activities. At the same time as the outside world and the flow of global capital become more present, collective practices and memories are constantly being re-defined on a local basis (Ahn 2005). This becomes more than evident when entering the Thong Nhat Park early morning, any given day. This park belongs to the middle aged pyjama ladies gossiping on power walks, the guys showing off their muscles on the worn out gym, the couples after dark, the hundreds of dancers in the morning, the old ladies struggling around the lake, the skateboarders on Saturday afternoon, the children taking rides in rusting carousels, the men gambling in the shade and the school classes practicing badminton.

Keeping Thong Nhat Park public is about sustaining tolerable living conditions for its thousands of users. But the issue goes deeper, as the park plays an important role as public space. How can the park be developed to meet a new reality, while not losing its public value?

PART 2

## CONCEPT AND PROPOSAL

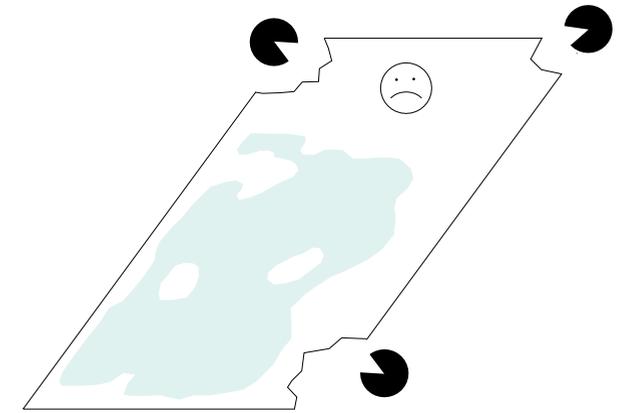
Thong Nhat Park is today the most important piece in the fragmented network of green spaces in Hanoi. Considering the important role that parks and green spaces have come to carry in Vietnam as practically the only spaces of true public access and appropriation, this park is left with much weight on its shoulders. The future for Thong Nhat Park is also about the future for public space and public life in Hanoi. It is becoming a key-factor for deciding which path to choose in the fast forward urban development of the city.

Deciding not to hand over Thong Nhat Park to private investors would be a statement marking the importance of public spaces in Hanoi. But what happens next? Leaving the park in its present state means leaving it open for continued pressure from private investors, with new proposals followed by new debates. In this process the consistency of planning principles will be tested and probably in a weak moment fail to resist. Leaving the park untouched also leaves an opening for the slow and steady disappearance of the park, through 'the tyranny of small steps', where new constructions are continuously added to the park, limiting the green area. The only way to release the pressure on the park is to take action. It is important to make the park visible, present and integrated in the city, rather than introverted, turning its back on development. The park must evolve to meet a new reality with new challenges and new groups of users. Something needs to be done and this 'something' has been the starting point for our work with a proposal for an alternative future for Thong Nhat Park.

Our aim with the proposal is not only to come up with an idea for how to develop the park but also to explore the boundaries of design practice. It would be easy to get caught in the obvious need for refurbishment and improvement of material standards in the park. We have chosen to leave these issues, and instead we want to try out how design can be used not only to solve problems but also to bring important issues to the surface. Rather than presenting a complete

solution for a future Thong Nhat Park, we want to raise questions on how to deal with the complex array of processes that are at work in Hanoi today. The focus in our design process has been to find a concept for the development of the park based on its function as a public space, with a perspective ranging from concrete figures to abstract discussions and from global processes to local specificities. Our observations and mappings of the everyday life in the park have formed the foundation in this work. We consider our proposal to be an argument in the discussion concerning the future of Thong Nhat Park and the future of public green space in Hanoi.

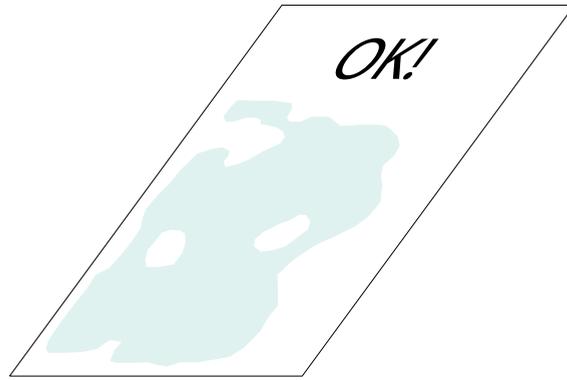
## CONCEPT



### 1. NO FURTHER REDUCTION OF PARK SPACE

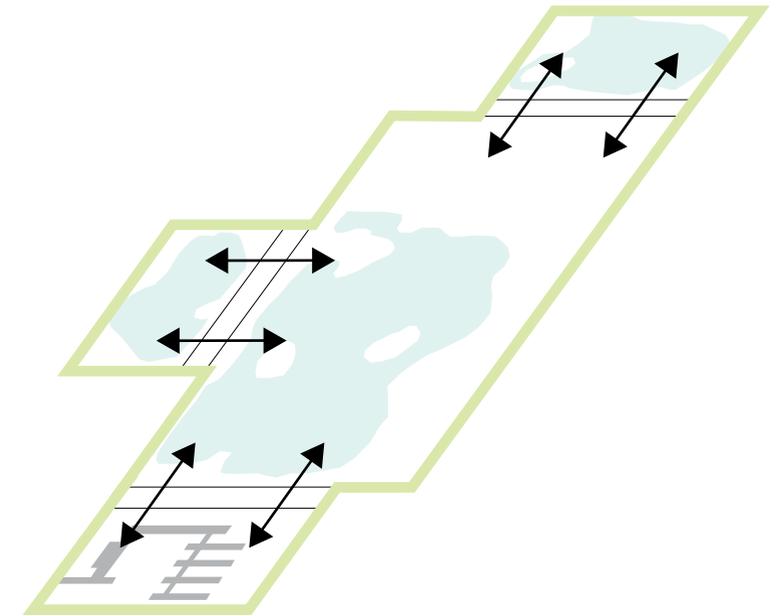
With levels of park area per capita already alarmingly low it is not acceptable to further reduce the green space. Much park area has already been eaten away by construction in central Hanoi, and to build in Thong Nhat Park would be another step in this direction. With a key role in the green structure of Hanoi, the effects would be devastating if this park space was lost, leaving the inhabitants of the city centre with literary nowhere else to go for exercise, rest and fresh air. As discussed in previous chapters, in a densely populated city the provision of public green space is not just a matter of leisure and recreation, but also of satisfying basic human needs.

The park area in Hanoi has to be increased rather than decreased to meet the target of 5.2-5.5sqm/person stipulated in the Master plan 2020 (HAIDEP 2007a, p11-10). Decreasing park area in central Hanoi is not only a threat in health and environmental aspects, but also risks the implosion of the city centre and a flight to the suburbs.



## 2. KEEP THE EXISTING PARK

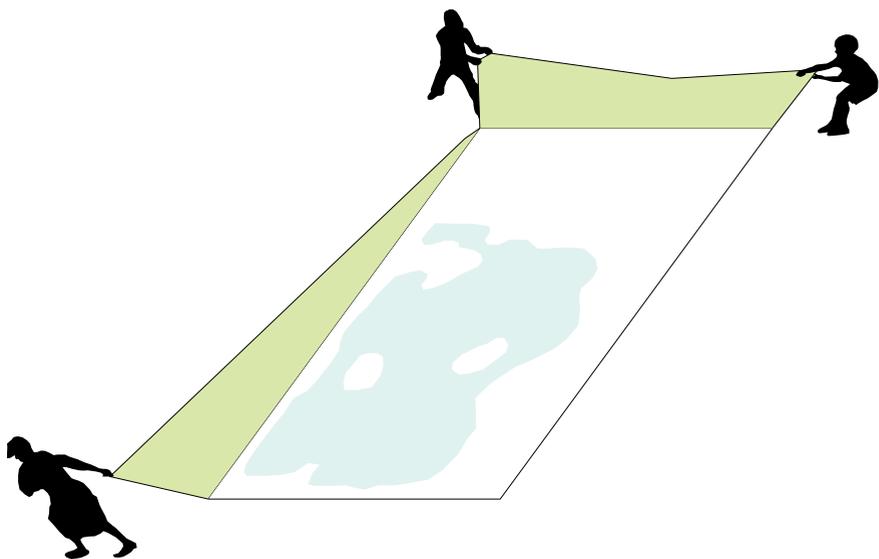
The large numbers of visitors in Thong Nhat Park, and the varied use of the park, show that there are no urgent deficiencies in the park today. While there is obviously much need of refurbishment, the park is working okay as it is. To sell out the park to private investors in a desperate situation is unwise, as this decision is unlikely reversed. For a long lasting change that works for the public good it is better to wait for a time when there are more funds available in the city administration, and upgrade the park gradually.



## 3. LINK AND INTEGRATE

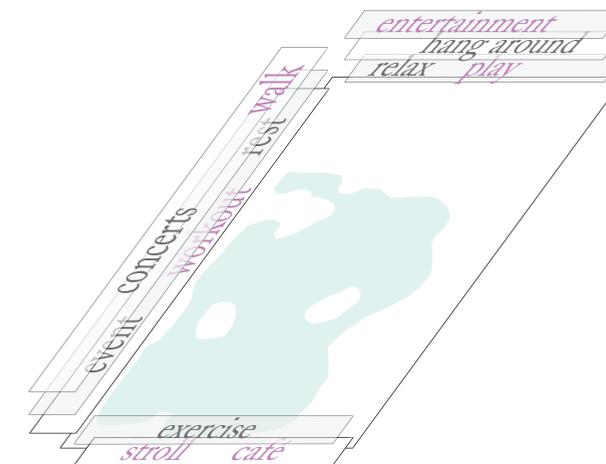
The green structure in Hanoi today is fragmented and incoherent. Many of the green patches surrounding the lakes in Hanoi are too narrow to give any respite from the busy streets, and too small in size to be used efficiently for exercise and other activities. To link and expand the existing fragmented green spaces is a key in creating a coherent green structure in Hanoi.

Surrounding Thong Nhat Park are three smaller green areas - the Thien Quang Lake in the north, the Ba Mau Lake in the west, and the Polytechnical Institute in the south. These areas are all cut off from Thong Nhat Park by busy streets without pedestrian crossings. Linking the surrounding green spaces to Thong Nhat Park would add in usage and function to these park areas. As part of a larger context, these areas would be more resistible to further construction, whilst helping to reduce the pressure on Thong Nhat Park. During the rush hours the activities in the park could be spread out, with more available space and longer circulation routes adding to the main path around the lake.



#### 4. EXTEND AND MAKE VISIBLE

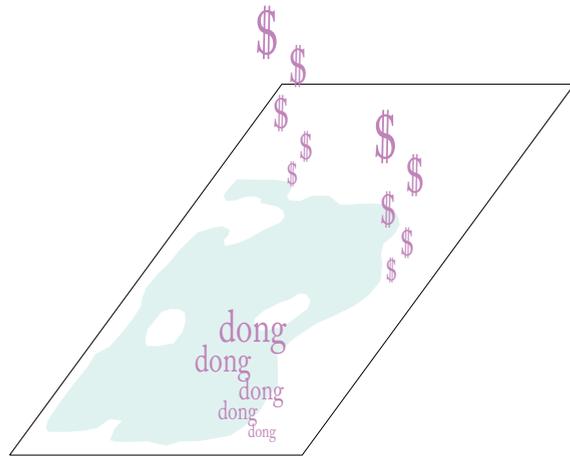
With limited areas to expand the green spaces in central Hanoi, the only way to go is up. An extension of the park in three dimensions over the surrounding streets would give the park a defined edge and make it more visible. This new layer along the edge of the park would be a modern addition, complementing the older areas of the park and continuing the over layering of different periods in the park's history.



#### 5. LAYERED STRUCTURES OF MULTI-USE

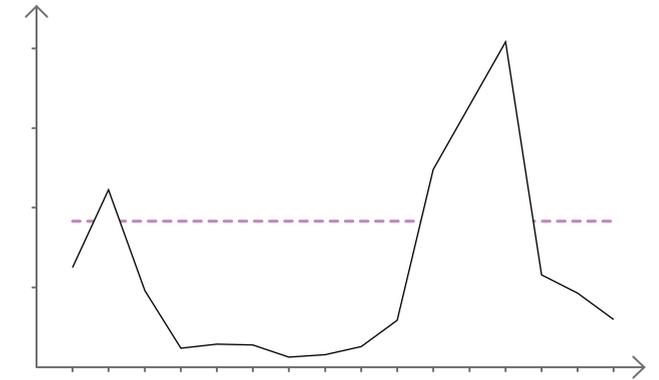
The extended park area should provide a continuation of the spontaneous and multi-layered use of the park that exists today and a maximisation of the potential functions. Different functions can be incorporated in the extensions in a layered structure, with spaces for greenery, exercise, private businesses and cultural events. The aim is to offer more park space, while not programming the added areas too much. In Thong Nhat Park today, people are using every opportunity to shape and transform the park space to their own needs. The added structures should also have the potential to change and adapt as people appropriate the space for new activities, to continuously play a role as an everyday space.

A guide to what types of functions could be incorporated in the extended park area is given in the table of what functions people expect in large parks in the HAIDEP survey. The main aspects listed were entertainment area, children's playground, functions for an improved environment, exercise areas and places to study. (HAIDEP 2007b, p 3-14)



## 6. MORE PARK THROUGH JOINT VENTURES

In the current situation the city is responding to proposals made by private investors, rather than setting its own agenda, using private investments to reach that goal. The interest of private developers to invest in Thong Nhat Park could be used by the city administration in joint ventures as a means to enlarge the park. There is a possibility to integrate private businesses in the layered extensions of the park. Private developers can be used to attract new groups to the park, adding a new dimension to the public life of the park with more activities around the clock. Instead of privatising the park, turning it into an amusement facility with limited public access, the park could be extended with the help of private means, creating new links with the surrounding green space while maintaining the park area as a public space. The every day use of Thong Nhat Park is thus kept while new functions are added in the links to the outside. This would be an extension of the park through private means but with the public interests in mind.



## 6. MAXIMISE THE USAGE

As the diurnal rhythm of the park is uneven, it is currently not utilised to its full potential. By activating the slow hours, the benefits of the park can be maximised. This can be done through the introduction of new types of functions. Public institutions, learning-centres and private establishments can contribute with a broader range of activities attracting new groups of users throughout the day.

## A PROPOSAL FOR THONG NHAT PARK

There are innumerable ways to go further with our concept for the development of Thong Nhat Park. We started out with wild ideas, stretching the park out over the rooftops, to eventually land in a more realistic proposal for the extension of the park, while not going into detail. The park as public space has been the focus of our work, and the most important issue has been how to let the park develop at its own terms, leaving the added spaces open enough to be used in a multitude of ways. In our proposal Thong Nhat Park is expanded in the north, west and south with new park areas growing in three dimensions. The extensions add a new layer to the park that works as an interface between the park and the surrounding city, incorporating new functions and establishments in the additions while leaving the park as a public space.

In the west, a connection with the park surrounding Ba Mau Lake is created, with a flyover-park stretching across Le Duan Street and the railway. The flyover works as a hub for activities. The main part is an activity platform with multi-use surfaces for sports and cultural events. Two wings are stretching above the platform, incorporating seating areas with view over the park life. On the Ba Mau Lake side a new park slope meets the flyover, adding to the small green area surrounding the lake and shielding it from the railway.

Along the remaining stretch of the west side a foldout structure is extending the park, with varying green, sports and seating functions. The foldout gives Thong Nhat Park a defined edge with opportunities for outlooks over Bay Mau Lake, whilst shielding the park from the busy traffic outside. The foldout consists of varying inclined planes, joined together in a dynamic structure. The material is shifting with function, from transparent metal espaliers with climbers to solid parts. Small-scale private establishments such as cafés can break through into the park, with entrances from Le Duan Street.

In the southwest corner the foldout structure once again turns into a flyover, as the park stretches out over the large intersection connecting to the opposite side through stairs and elevators. A slope with possibilities for exercise is leading up to an activity platform with room for a multitude of uses. The flyover park ends in a wing with incorporated steps, seating and plantings. The wing offers extensive views over the park and the surrounding cityscape.

Elevated paths are connecting the main circulation path around Bay Mau Lake to the foldouts and flyover structures and over to the

flyover park -  
extension west

foldout structure

flyover park -  
south-west corner

elevated paths

extension of polytechnical  
institute

extension north

surrounding parks. These are gently sloped for easy access. The paths give possibilities for longer laps and greater variation for walkers and joggers.

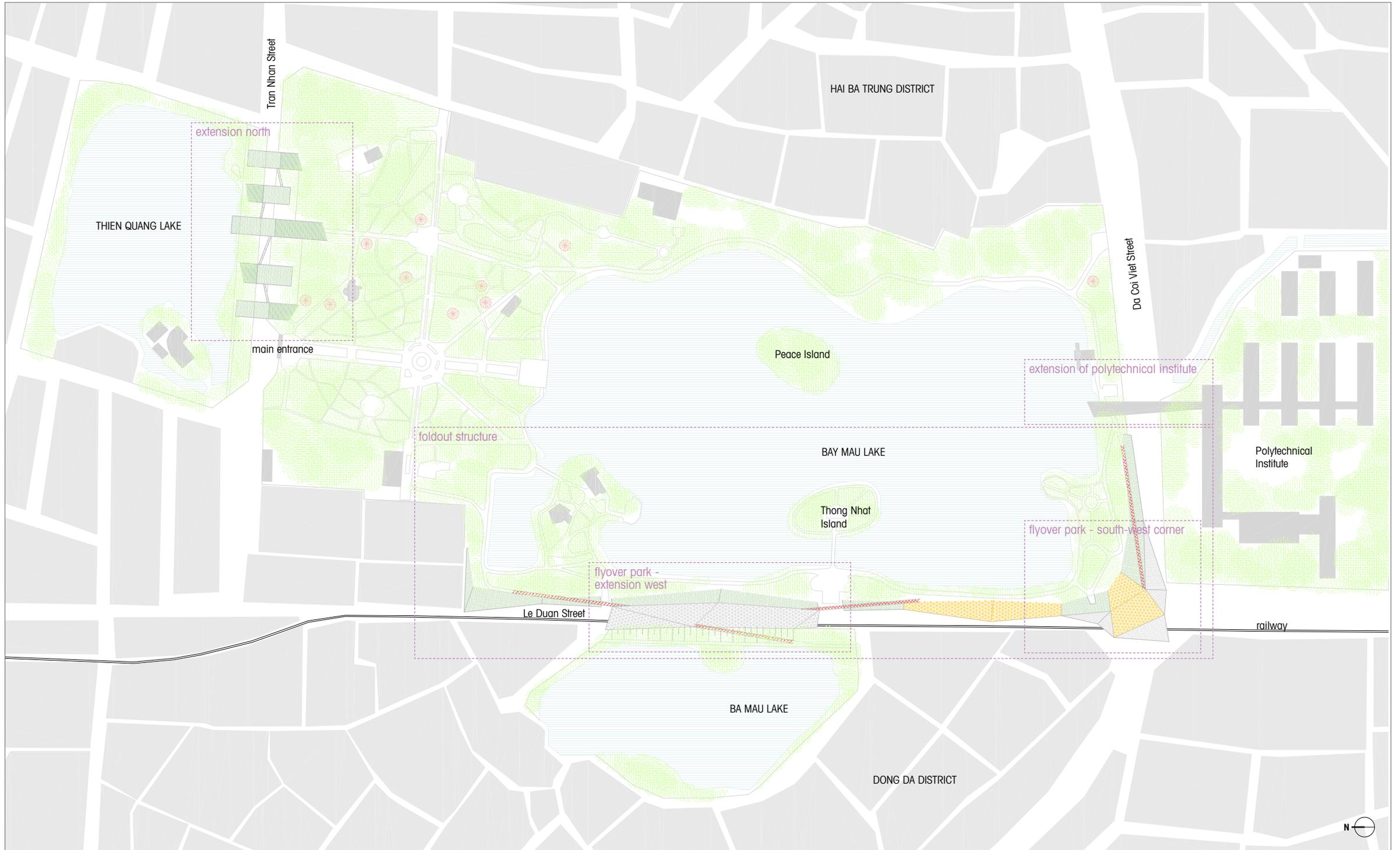
In the south the wide and busy Dai Co Viet Street presently cuts off the Polytechnical Institute from Thong Nhat Park. In our proposal the Polytechnical institute is connected to Thong Nhat Park with a structure reaching out over the park, with space for library, reading rooms and cafes. The large university complex is thus brought into the park, giving the many students easy access to the park, through elevators. This also provides enlarged possibilities to use the park as resource in the study experience.

In the north, an entertainment strip is created along Tran Nhan Street. New buildings for entertainment and cultural facilities are stretching over the street, with cars and motorbikes passing right through while the park continues up on the roofs. The rooftop parks are weaving Thong Nhat Park together with the Thien Quang Lake area, thus enlarging the narrow green space surrounding the lake today. As the public spaces of the park continue up on the roofs, small plazas are created between the glass facades of the building, with room for open-air cafes and restaurants.

Private and public establishments are added in the extensions of the park, at the edges of the Thong Nhat Park of today, with a concentration in the north. Private investors wanting a space here also contribute in the financing of the park extension. The type of enterprises that could be interested to invest here range from cafés and restaurants, sports and fitness clubs to game centres and cinemas. The additions are of a varied scale, which give the possibility of a number of smaller actors to invest. There could also be room for non-profit establishments such as museums or communal culture houses.

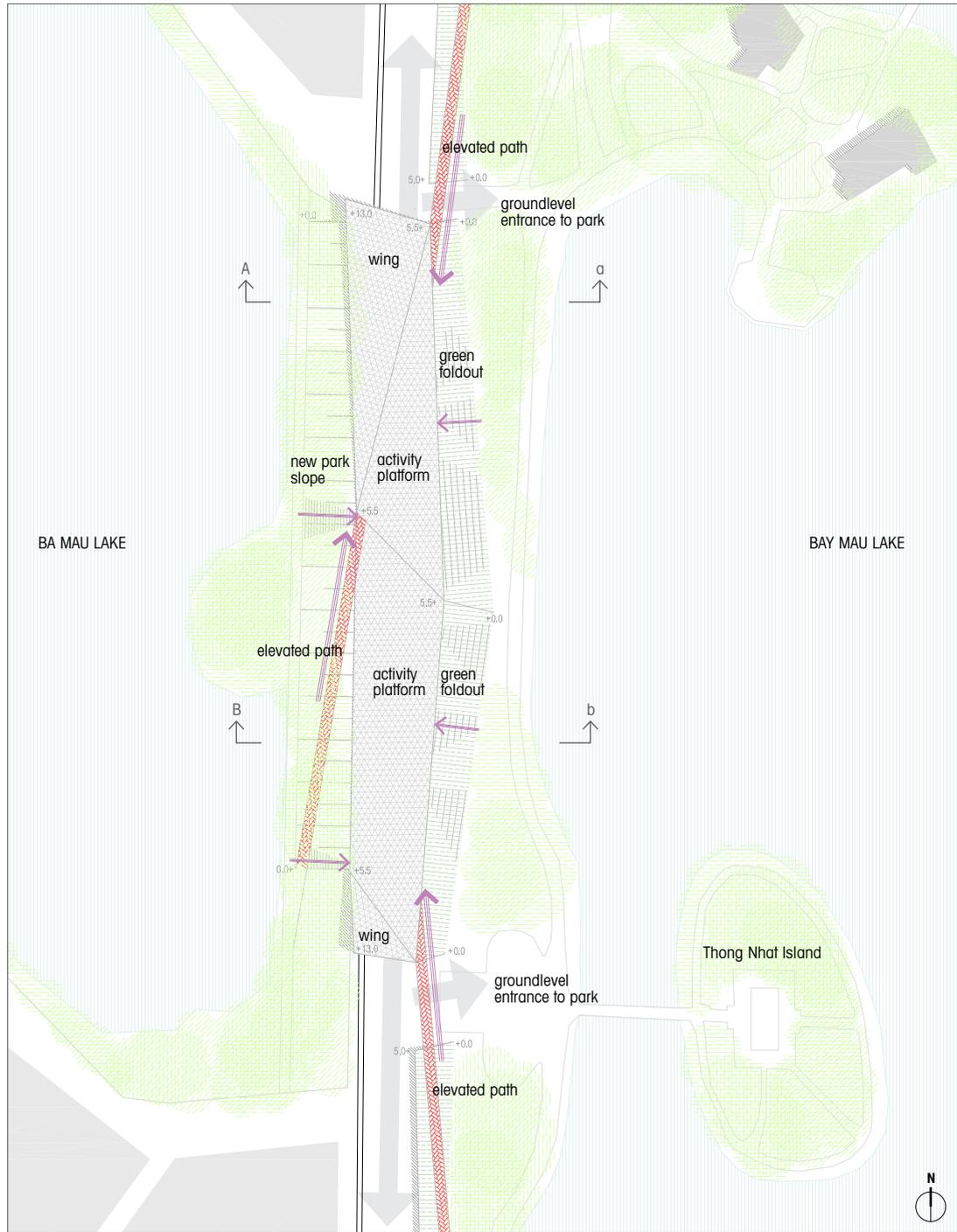
With the new links and extensions, Thong Nhat Park is enlarged by about 6 percent counting just the new additions of park area, and by 35 percent when counting the incorporated existing green spaces around Ba Ma Lake and Thien Quang Lake. Keeping in mind that almost half of the available space in Thong Nhat Park is taken up by the lake, the enlargement of usable space is even higher than these figures indicate. Through these extensions the park is not only expanding in surface, but the scope is also widened. The park is more present in Hanoi, and the city more present from the park.

PROPOSAL



plan; 1:6000

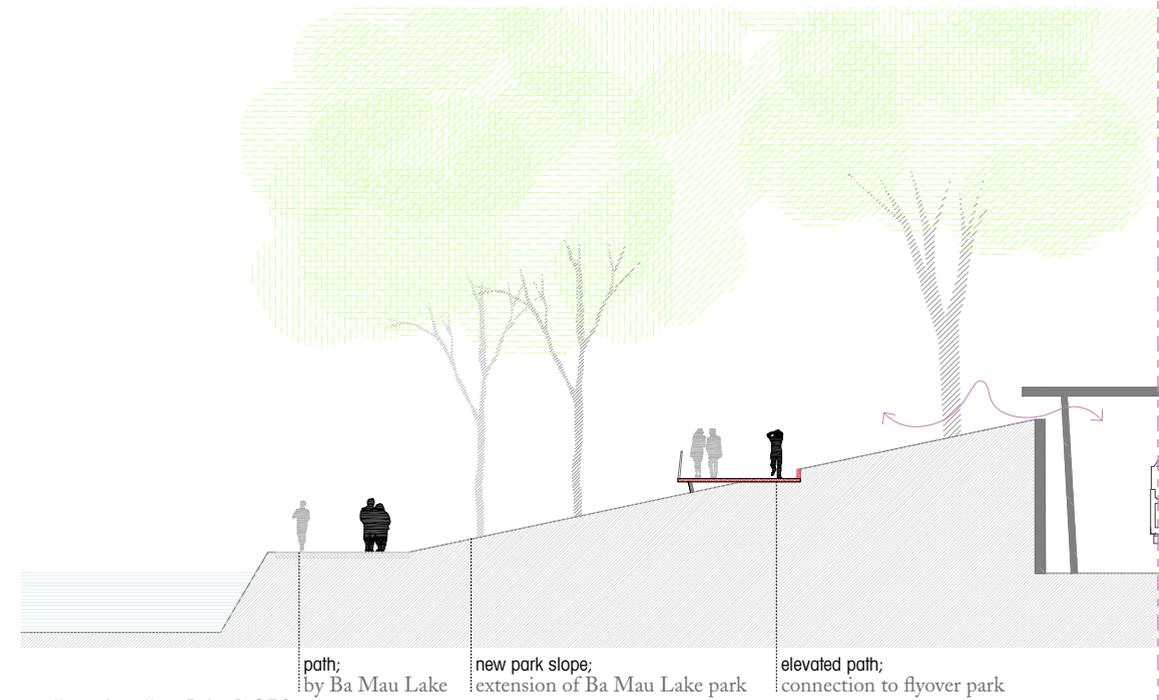
FOLDOUT STRUCTURE: FLYOVER PARK - EXTENSION WEST



plan; 1:2500

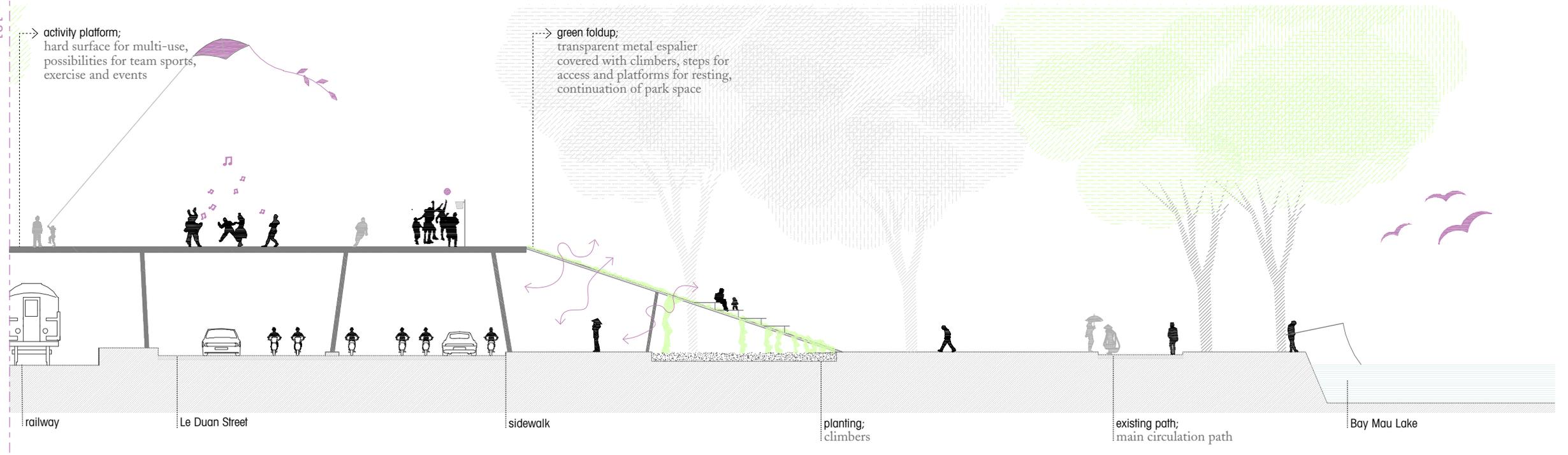
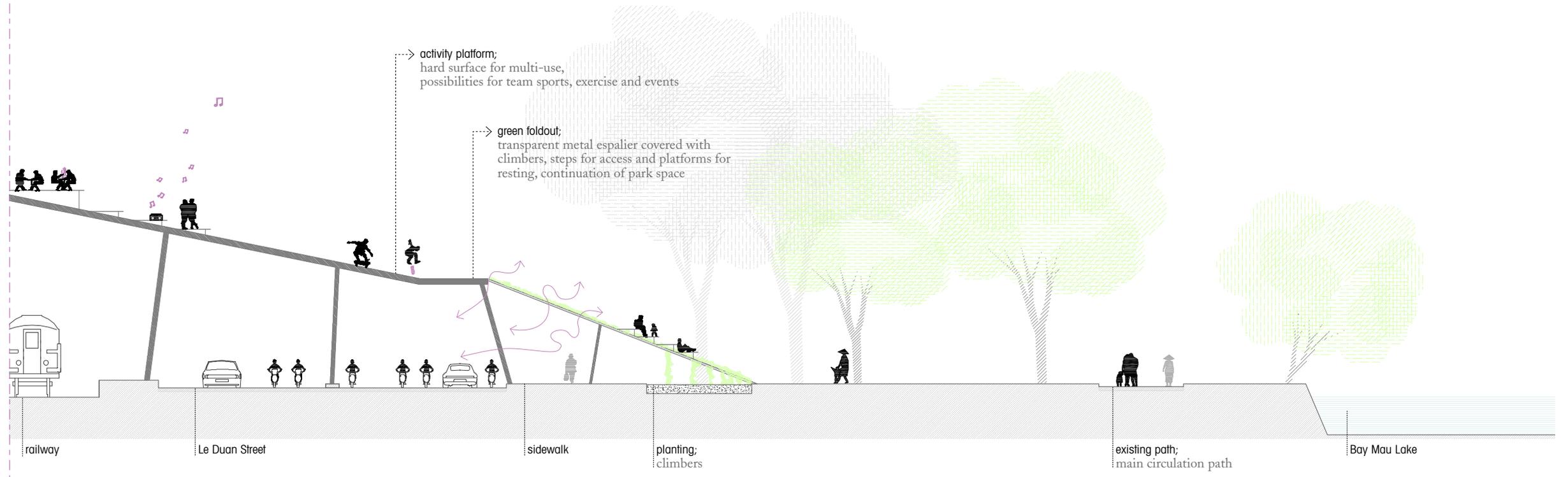


section elevation A-a; 1:250



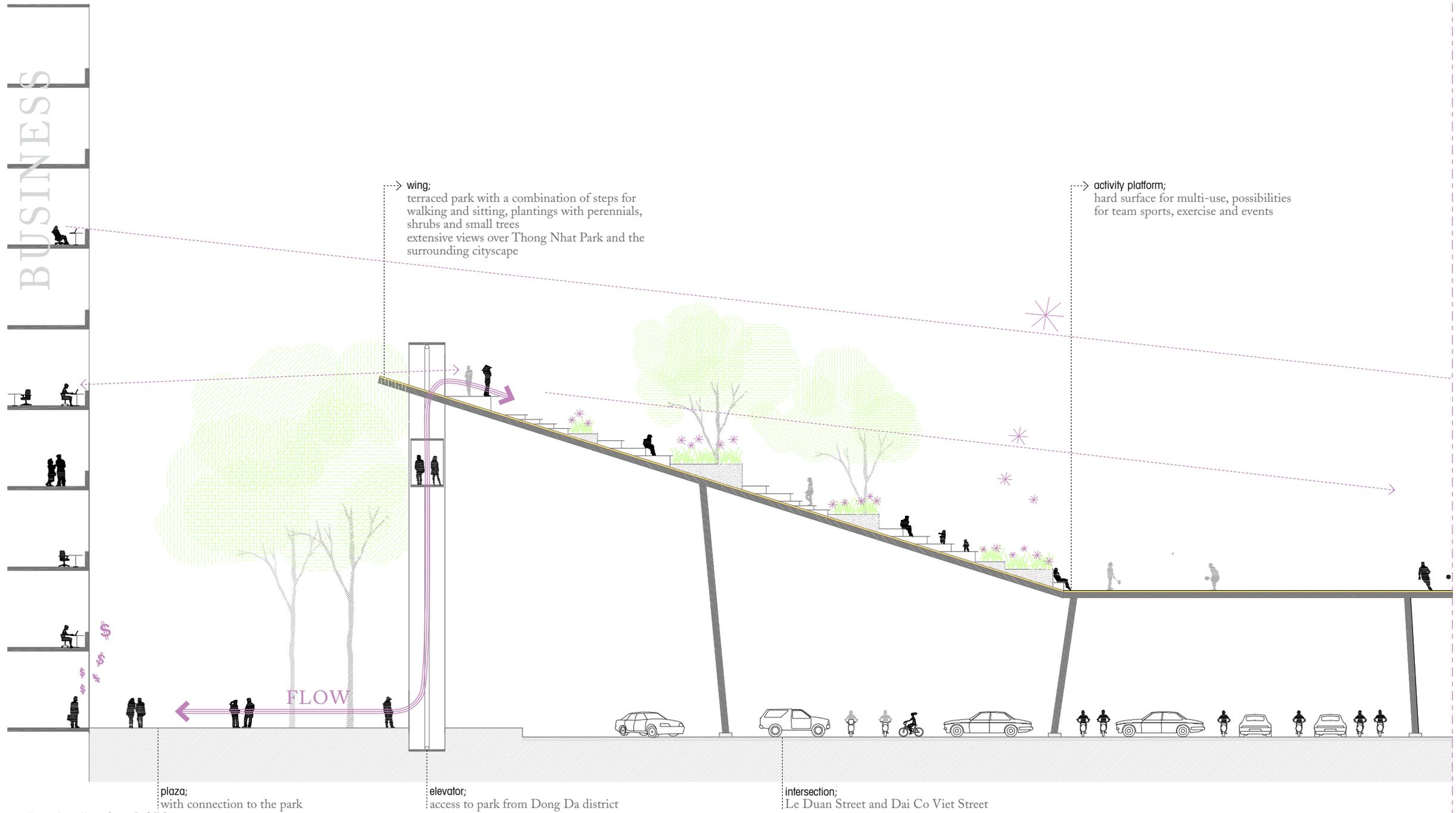
section elevation B-b; 1:250

cont. p.121



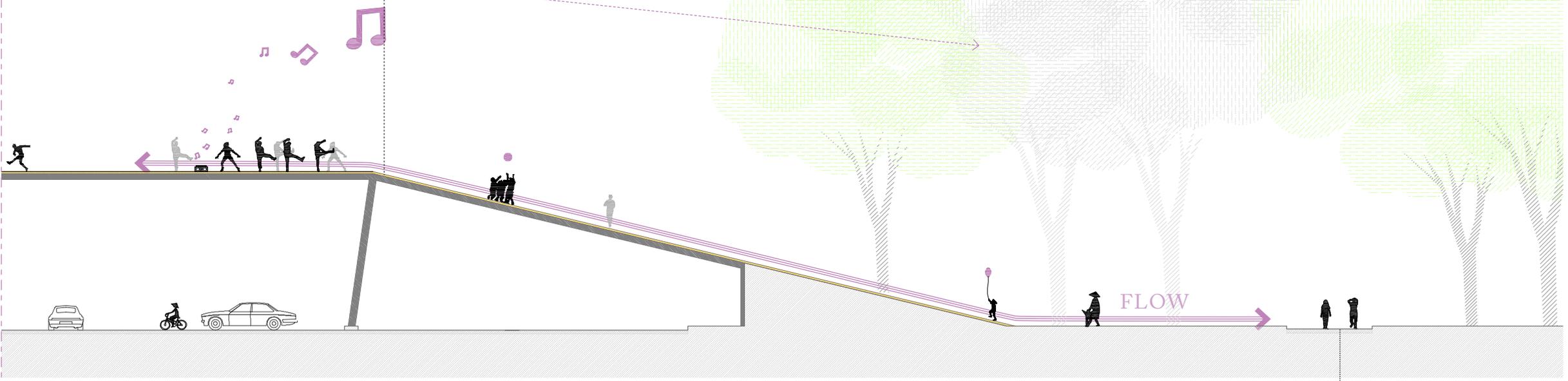
objectives: connect extend add link invite make visible

FOLD OUT STRUCTURE: FLYOVER PARK - SOUTH-WEST CORNER

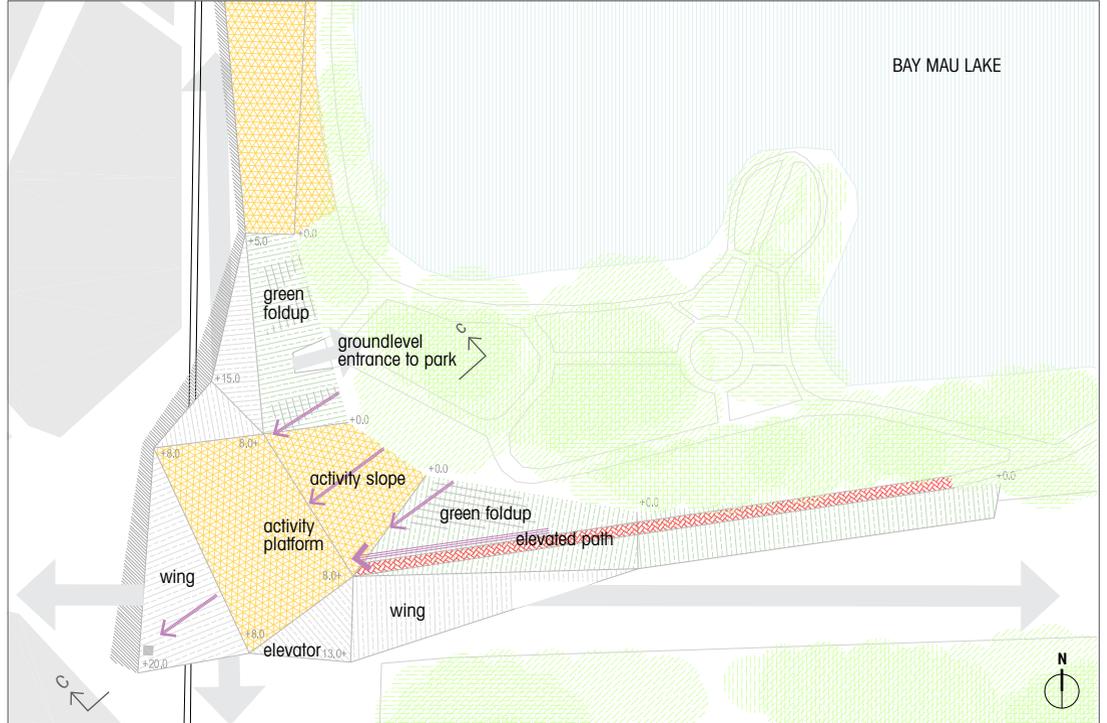


cont. p.123

→ activity slope;  
access to park,  
hard surface for exercise and play



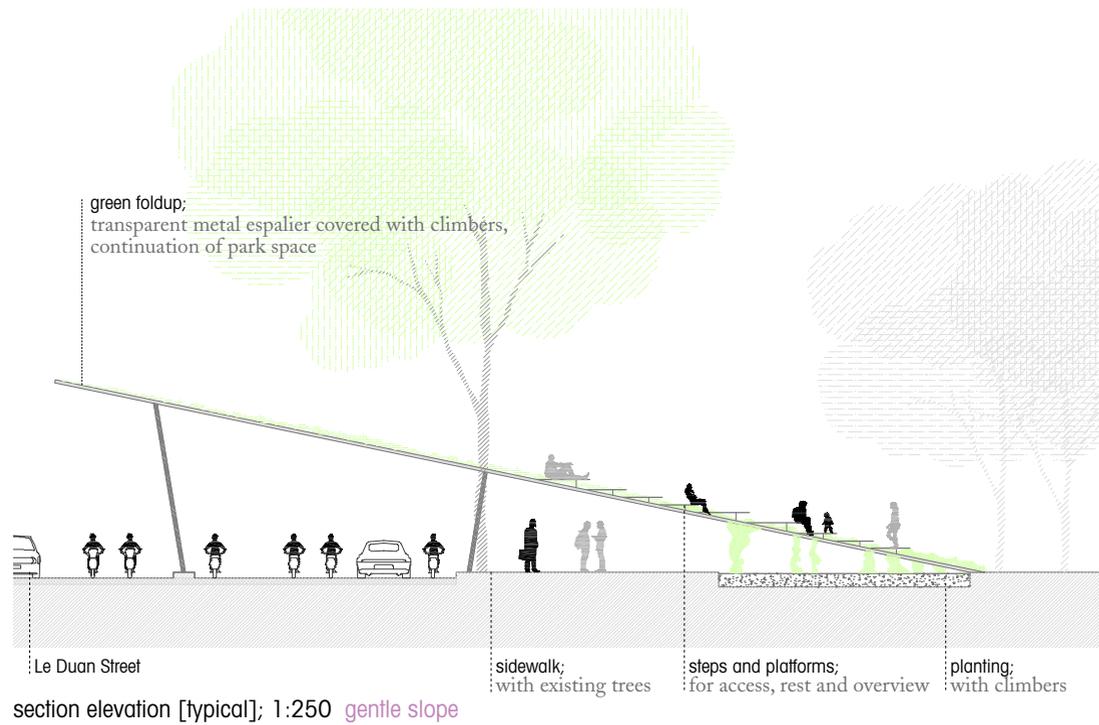
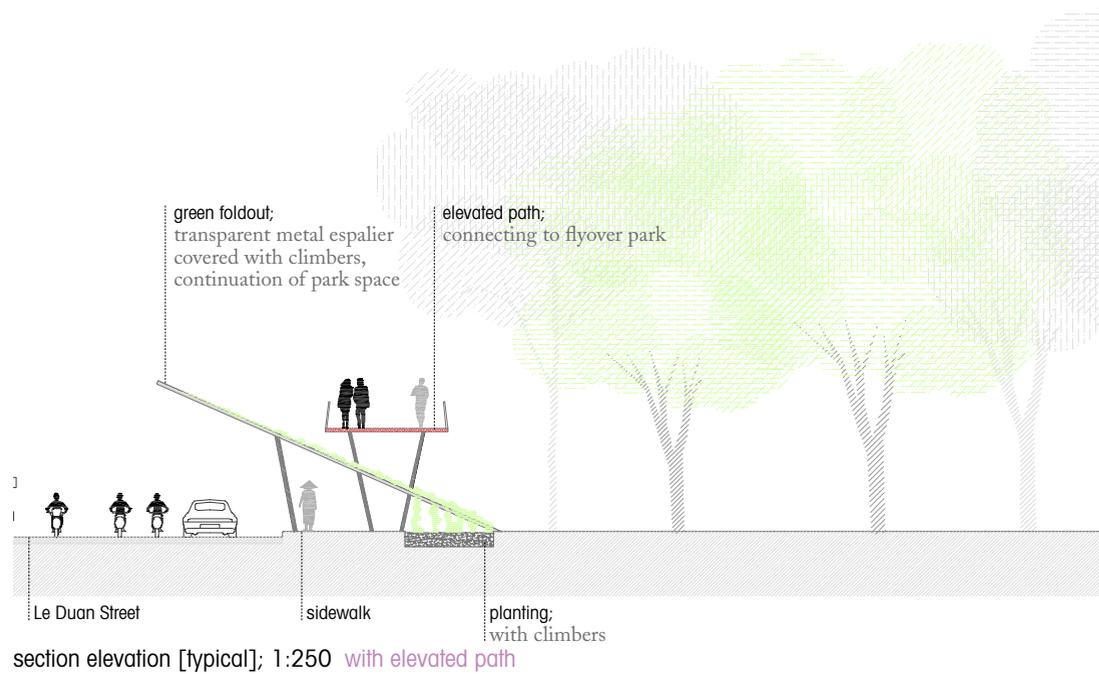
existing path;  
main circulation path



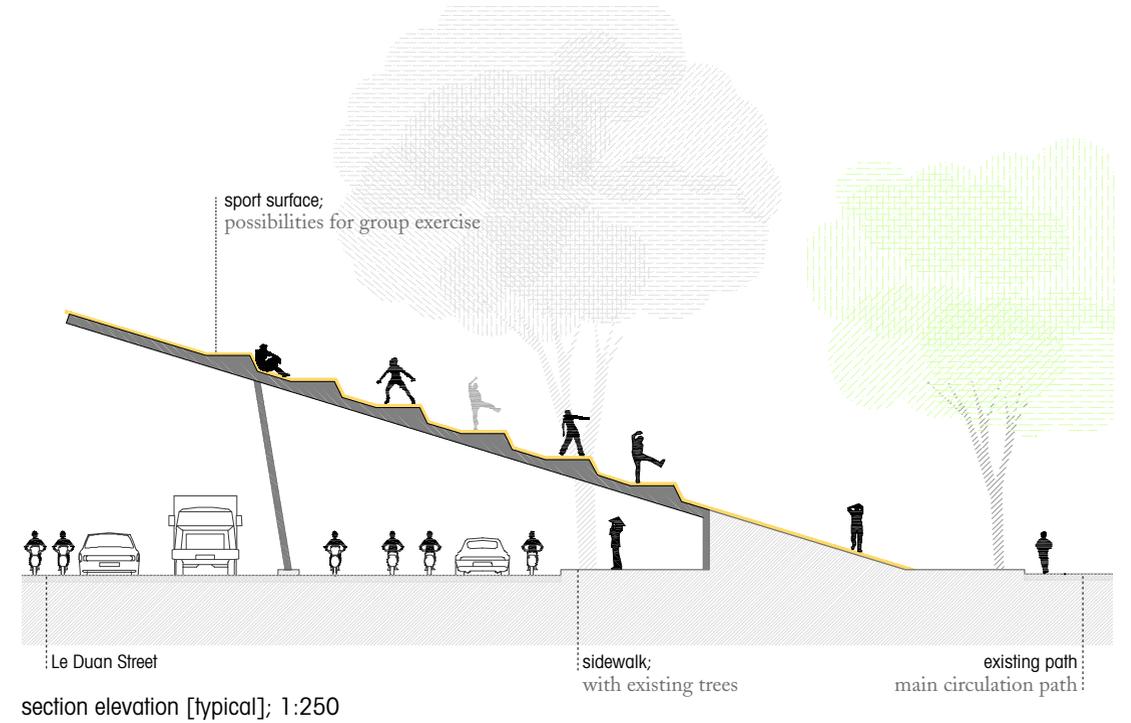
plan; 1:2500

objectives: connect extend add link invite make visible

FOLDOUT STRUCTURE: GREEN



FOLDOUT STRUCTURE: SPORT

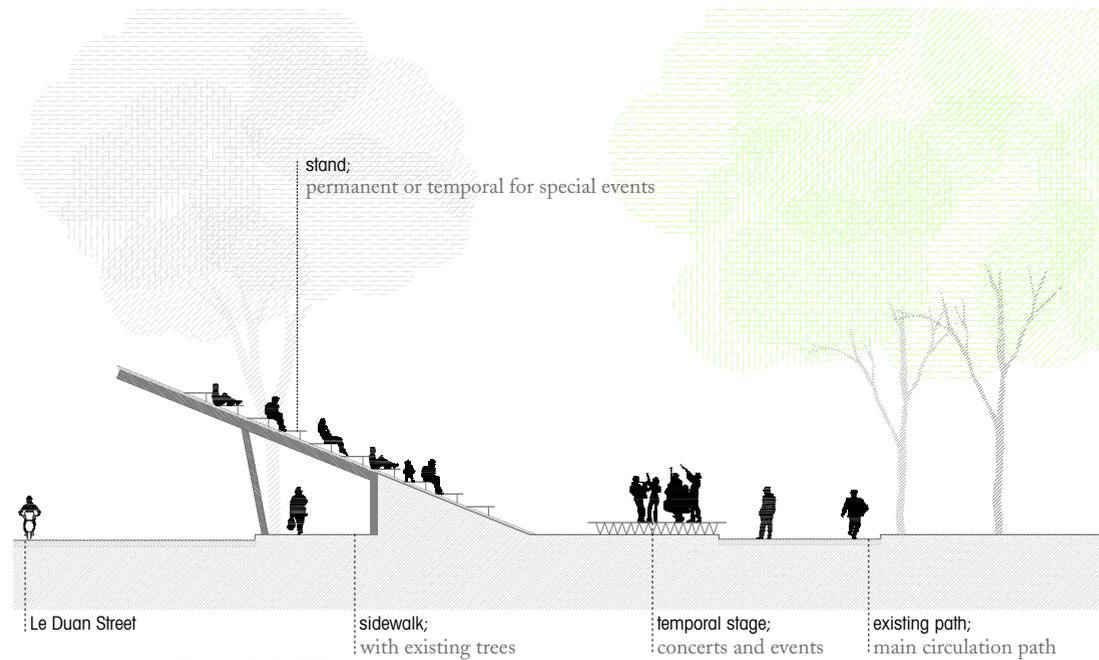


These sections are examples of how the use of the foldouts can vary along the stretch. The structure also gives possibilities for other uses, both permanent and temporary.

FOLDOUT STRUCTURE: **PLAY / EVENT**

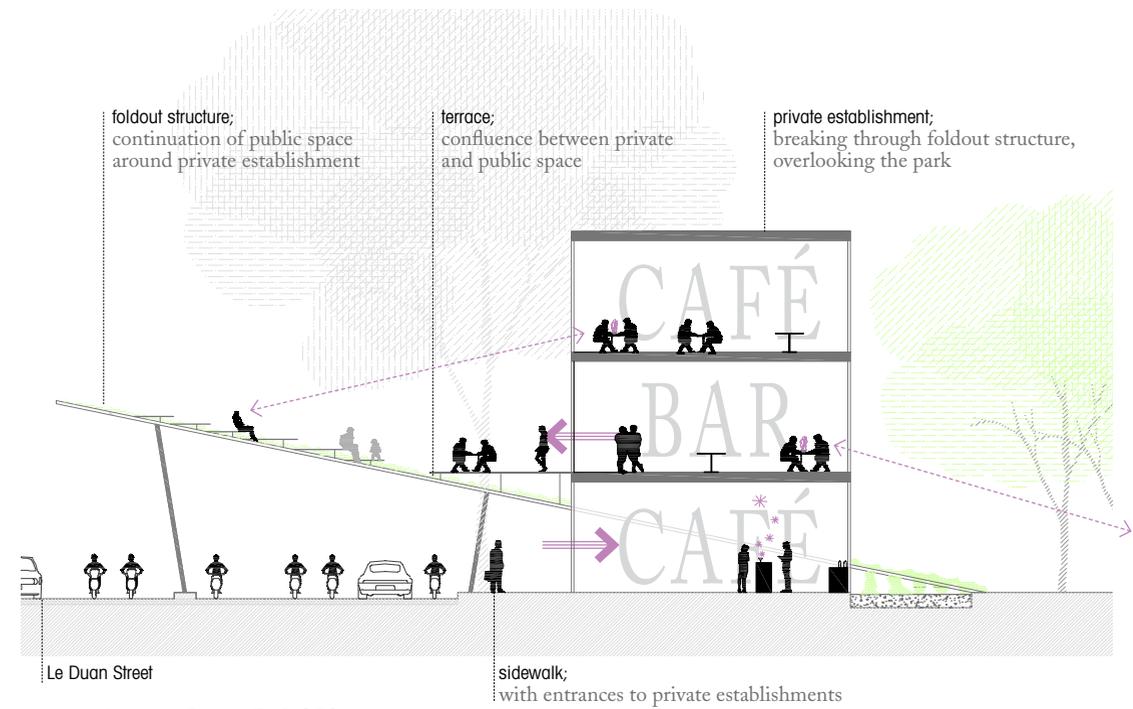


section elevation [typical]; 1:250 **play**



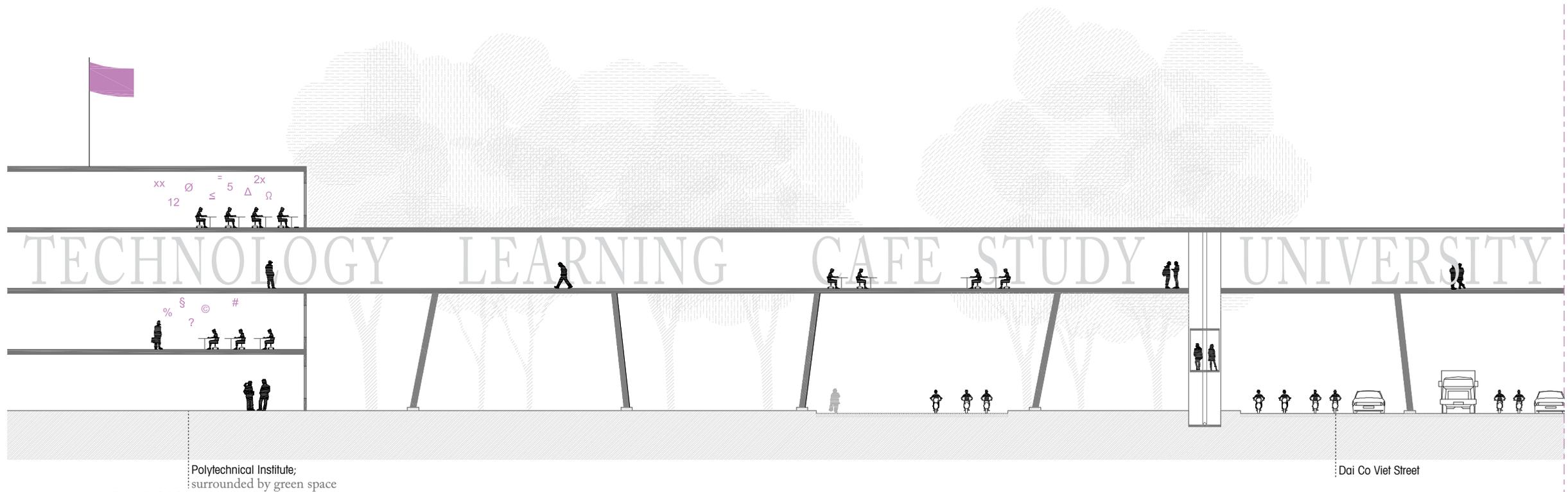
section elevation [typical]; 1:250 **event**

FOLDOUT STRUCTURE: **PRIVATE ESTABLISHMENTS**



section elevation [typical]; 1:250

These sections are examples of how the use of the foldouts can vary along the stretch. The structure also gives possibilities for other uses, both permanent and temporary.

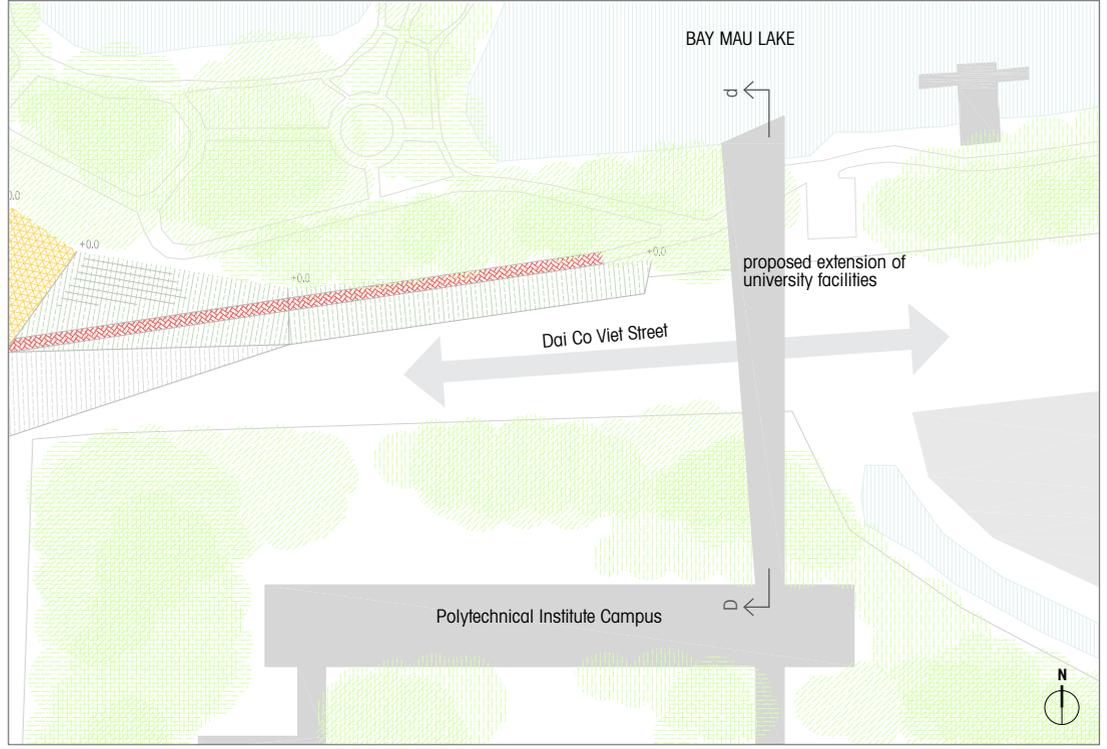


section elevation D-d; 1:300

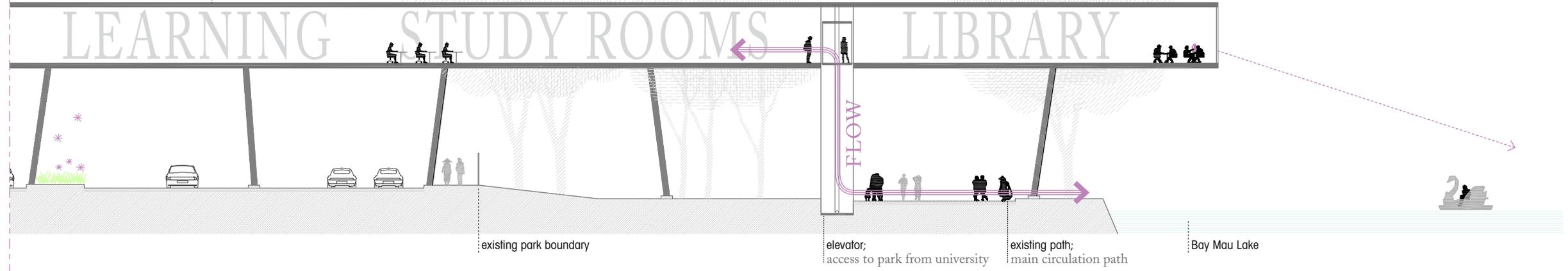
Polytechnical Institute;  
surrounded by green space

Dai Co Viet Street

→ expansion of university facilities; bridging the wide and busy Da Co Viet Street, creating a new connection within the city and to the Thong Nhat Park, improved access for new group of users, expanded scope of use as park becomes an integrated part of study experience

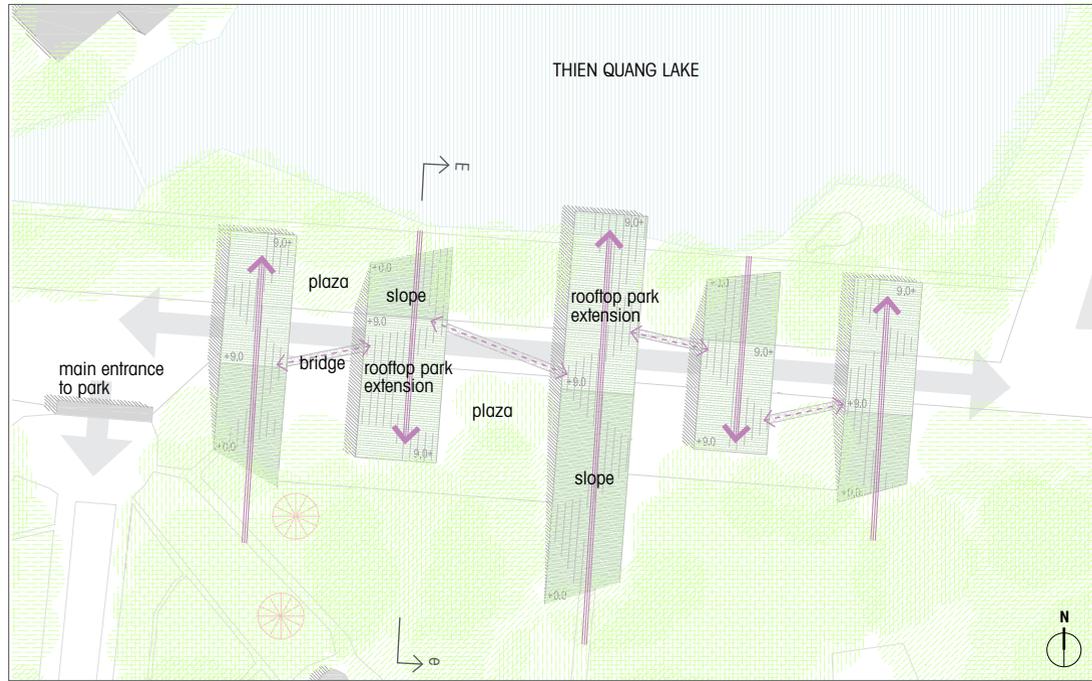


plan; 1:2500

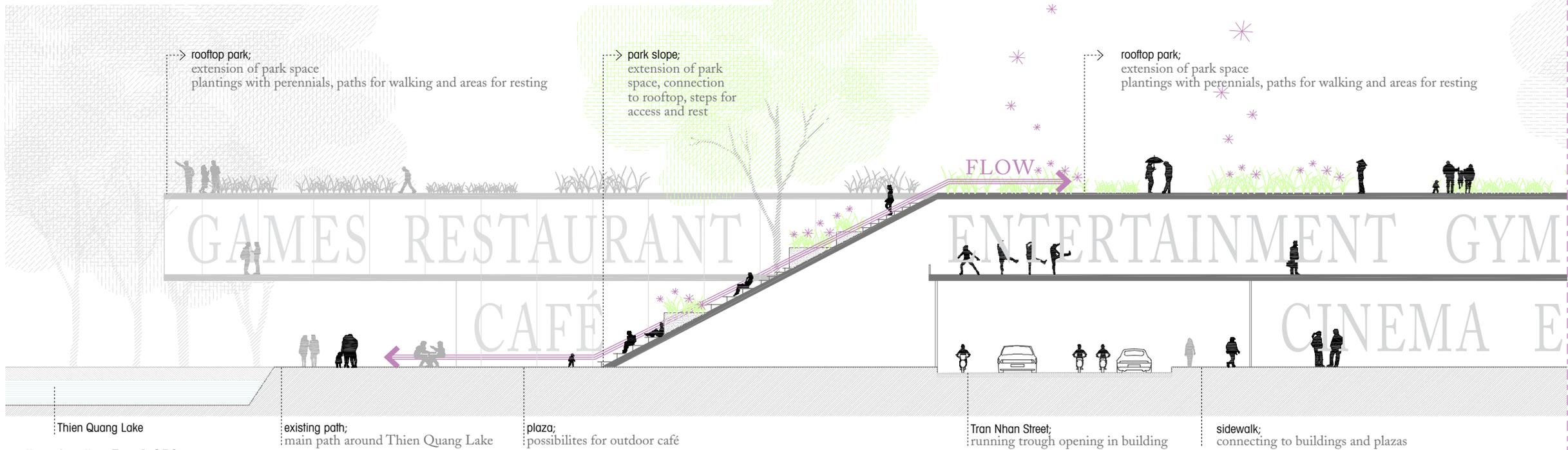


objectives: connect bridge lift link invite integrate

ENTERTAINMENT ZONE: EXTENSION NORTH



plan; 1:2500



section elevation E-e; 1:250



new facilities;  
for private or public establishments, transparent with glass facades,  
traffic running through opening in building  
creating an entertainment strip along Tran Nhan Street

park slope;  
continuation of park space up on rooftops,  
connection to Thien Quang Lake

plaza;  
possibilities for outdoor café/restaurant, events etc.

objectives: connect extend lift link add integrate weave

## FUNCTIONS

The areas added in Thong Nhat Park contribute new functions to the park. According to the HAIDEP survey, the functions that people mainly expect in large parks are entertainment areas, children's playgrounds, functions for an improved environment, exercise areas and places to study (HAIDEP 2007b, p 3-14). In our proposal for Thong Nhat Park we have had the result of this survey in mind, adding the result to our own observations and mappings.

The figures reflect the great need for neighborhood playgrounds, which are currently not well provided in Hanoi. The need for both entertainment and playgrounds is clearly demonstrated in Thong Nhat Park in the weekends when parents bring their children on daytrips to visit the only modern playground in Hanoi. Today the playing facilities are concentrated to the northern part of the park. New play areas can be incorporated in the extensions to the west and south.

As discussed in the previous chapter there is a great demand for entertainment facilities in Hanoi, providing new forms of entertainment for the young population. We believe these have to be multi functional, able to adapt to quickly changing trends, and not built at the expense of the existing park area.

Nature and environment was one important aspect in the protests over Thong Nhat Park. Keeping the existing old trees of Thong Nhat Park is important in a wider perspective, considering the lack of greenery in Hanoi.

The need for spaces for exercise is obvious when observing the crowded use of the park in the mornings and afternoon, as illustrated in Chapter 4. More coherent areas for sports can be incorporated in the new park extensions, with room for larger groups and both new and traditional forms of exercise.

The fifth function Hanoians expect to find in large parks are places to study. With the Polytechnical Institute, one of the largest universities in Hanoi, next door to Thong Nhat Park such places are much needed here. Through extending the university into the park, we make the park more accessible and usable for the students and teachers of the Polytechnical Institute.

Activity	Large Park	Medium	Small Park	Total (%)
To take a rest	44.0	40.5	57.7	45.4
To do exercise	27.5	45.1	35.6	33.9
To take a walk	51.8	69.0	46.9	55.7
To play with children	12.8	8.2	7.7	10.6
To gather	15.9	13.4	14.9	15.1
To see a performance	2.2	1.3	0.5	1.6
To study	19.6	6.9	10.3	14.4
Others	5.7	4.6	18.6	7.7

TABLE 11: Users' Activities by Park Size, Required Functions, HAIDEP survey  
Source: (HAIDEP 2007b, table 3.3.6)

## REFLECTIONS ON THE PROPOSAL

As we have been processing the issues discussed in Part one into a proposal for Thong Nhat Park, our focus has been the park as public space. Through our work we have constantly shifted between theory and practice, and the link between the two has been one of the most demanding aspects of the design process. When moving into the design process it is tempting to start rationalising the complex situation, which needs constant shifts in scale and perspective to be comprehended. The basis of our proposal is a web of co-related issues, where concrete figures on loss of green space co-exist with abstract discussions about the future for an emerging public sphere and the multiplication of actors taking part in the urban development. Processing these issues through a design proposal will hopefully bring new perspectives and present a way forward.

A dilemma in the work with our proposal has been the issue of how to increase the park area without dominating or programming it and how to incorporate private establishments without letting these set the agenda for the park. In the extended park area it has been important for us to make an expansion which is open to be transformed over time, to be appropriated and changed by the users. Our main focus has been to offer more space and more possibilities to the park. In remaking and transforming a space, there is always the risk of programming and controlling instead of allowing for a spontaneous use of the space, offering a fixed set of options instead of allowing for the appropriation of the space by the users through everyday actions. As seen all around Thong Nhat Park, people are now taking every opportunity to shape and transform the park to their own needs. This appropriation gives a sense of belonging to a place, which is reduced when offering a limited and limiting range of activities, as is the case in Disneyland. The programming of space can lead to displacement of the present users, even when implemented with the best intentions. We have attempted to avoid this by leaving the existing park to be renovated gradually instead of through one great makeover, and by letting the new park areas become an extra layer, enlarging the existing park and adding new functions without reducing the park space or taking away functions from the existing park.

When incorporating private investors it is important to provide opportunities for a range of establishments, which gives a greater potential for these additions in the park to be dynamic over time, to change and adapt to new trends. Providing links with institutions such as the Polytechnical Institute also ensures a variety of actors in

the park and a mix between public and private establishments. In our proposal, the form and function of the park is the basis for the addition of new establishments. The additions contribute an extra quality or dimension to the park life. One example is the houses stretching over Tran Nhan Street in the north, where the houses create a bridge and an extension of the park space. This is a contemporary addition offering a new type of urban public life that many hunger for, creating a new public arena at the edges of the park in the interface between private establishments and the park life. This is a type of public life which is missing in the park today; a space where to meet, to take part in or observe happenings and events, to hang out, to observe, and to be seen.

The potential for a varied range of businesses is a main difference of our proposal compared to letting one actor set the agenda for the whole park. When creating a Disneyland, or any other type of theme park, there is an obvious risk that the concept feels outdated after a few years, and a situation where there is a need to remake the park or risk degeneration arises over again. According to the commercial logic the park is transformed into a product which needs to be regularly updated to keep its appeal. This procedure will then be repeated time and again with new concepts for the remodelling of the park; until the park has been remade so many times that the original users have been displaced in the process.

There are many potential problems in incorporating private businesses and bringing in private investors in the financing of the new park areas, as discussed in previous chapters. One of the main issues is that when private businesses are financing the parks they also have the power to set the agenda for who is welcome and who is not. On the other hand, there are also weaknesses to a strategy where private investors are left out of the park, with the great pressure being put on the park both from investors and from the expectations of the users. With limited funds in the city administration, private investment is a potential asset in the development of the park. The key factor is to keep the end goal and the public interests in mind, using private investments to enlarge the park area and incorporate new functions. As new times are rolling in over Hanoi, active measures have to be taken for the park to meet the new demands, and to make an argument for the value of green space in a time driven by market forces.

One aspect that has been prominent in the debate about the park is the need for entertainment places for tourists. There are a few points to be made here. It is doubtful that the future tourism industry will be going in the same direction as today, with consumption of the same

concept all over the world. We believe that a proposal like ours can add qualities that attract tourists, while not imposing a standardised concept on the park, displacing the everyday users. Sustainable tourism can never be at the expense of local people, as is clearly the case if Thong Nhat Park is transformed into an entertainment area. If these plans were carried out there would literally be nowhere else to go for the people who use this park for their daily exercise and enjoyment.

In our proposal we have attempted to show a way of developing the park while not reducing it, taking in private establishments while keeping the park area public, to extend and link the park area with the surroundings and to bring in new groups while not displacing the people who are using the park today. We have aimed for our design proposal to function as an argument in the ongoing discussion on the future of Thong Nhat Park and also for public green space in general.

## CONCLUSIONS

So which answers have we found to the questions we asked ourselves initially;  
What stands to be lost as the agenda is shifting from communal ideals to private interests?  
Can the public value of the park be maintained through changes to come?

The conclusion that Thong Nhat Park should be kept as a public space might appear as obvious and simple at first. But what we have seen when working with this project is that the future for Thong Nhat Park concerns more than just the park. In building an understanding for public spaces at large in Hanoi and Vietnam, we have identified public green spaces as a crucial link in a larger context.

The heated debate following the news of the Thong Nhat Park project points to the broad relevance of the issue. As the debate about the park was picked up by the media, the everyday negotiations over space going on in the park was consequently lifted to a higher level. Being more than just a matter of keeping the park or not, this was now turning into an open negotiation on the use of urban space in general. Questions were raised over who has the right to define and control the development of urban space.

These questions are also on the agenda in a western context and in Sweden, but with one big difference - the presence of democracy. When dealing with public spaces, relating to democracy is unavoidable and a stumbling stone through our work has been how to handle the concept of public space in Vietnam. The production of public space is tightly linked to a democratic practice, as it comes down to who has the right to participate in this production. In this perspective; is it even relevant to argue for public space in a non-democratic context?

As discussed before, in Vietnam the history of public space is a history of control and symbolic gestures. Still, while the end of public space is being proclaimed in the west, a democratic practice is now

growing in the public spaces of Hanoi, and especially in the public green spaces. We have found that the *potential* for these spaces to become a growing ground for a democratic process is what is mainly put at stake as they are going into the hands of private developers. This is a fragile process as these potential public spaces of the city are quickly vanishing.

Turning Thong Nhat Park into a Disneyland and still arguing for its potential as a public space is an attempt to simplify the production of space – a process formed through negotiations over time. This type of simplification leads to the production of spaces which are public on surface but not in essence. To us it has been important to reflect on our role in these processes, as one of the professions with power to influence urban development. The reality in which landscape architects are acting is changing rapidly with urbanisation and globalisation, and thus our ways of working must also constantly be regenerated. The multiplication of actors that follows with globalisation increases the level of abstraction in urban development, making local and global processes too intertwined to be separated. In this new situation there is a need to develop new methods to handle these shifting scales – strategies for how to simultaneously grip the local and the global context. For us this project has been a way to explore a method of approaching projects, reflecting beyond the immediately apparent. Reflecting the local context against global processes has been a way for us to not simply transfer and inscribe western values and ideals in our design proposal for Thong Nhat Park.

To keep its public value, Thong Nhat Park has to be carefully developed, with changes rooted in the current use of the park, and the ongoing negotiations and appropriation of space. The future for Thong Nhat Park reaches beyond the being or not being of this particular park space. It concerns the future for public space and public life in Hanoi at large. As we write this the future for Thong Nhat Park is still an open question. Our proposal is not to be regarded as a final solution, but rather we hope for this document to be an argument in the ongoing negotiation.

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