

Sidewalks in Hanoi Today from A Cultural Perspective

Nguyen Thi Phuong Cham¹

¹ Institute of Cultural Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences.

Email: ngphuongcham@gmail.com

Received on 15 December 2019.

Revised on 2 January 2020.

Accepted on 11 January 2020.

Abstract: In Hanoi, sidewalk activities take place every day, in a diverse and vibrant fashion, but they do not seem to be viewed objectively from a cultural and managerial perspective. This article shows that sidewalks in Hanoi provide both diverse and flexible livelihood spaces, open living spaces, specific social spaces, unique art spaces and as well as dynamic living memory spaces. At the same time, sidewalks are subject to multi-ownership and characterised by multi-functional spaces where multi-dimensional interactions between managers and people, and between people themselves take place. The above demonstrates the liveliness, diversity and complexity of the sidewalk cultural life. Sidewalks, therefore, play an extremely important role in the culture of Hanoi.

Keywords: Cultural space, sidewalk order, sidewalk culture.

Subject classification: Cultural studies

1. Introduction

By the end of 2016 and early 2017, the issue of sidewalks, sidewalk encroachment, sidewalk order re-establishment, etc., in big cities became a topic hot on the mass media. The press used strong words that are often used by the military such as "campaign", "war", "launching an operation", "making a raid", "troops" to depict the situation in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Management of the use of sidewalks and road surfaces has, in fact, been mentioned since 1995 in Decree No.36/CP on ensuring

road traffic order and safety and urban traffic order and safety. In respect to Hanoi, this issue was clearly stated in Decision No.63/2003/QD-UBND, then replaced by Decision No.227/2006/QD-UBND and has been applied since 22 February 2006, whose implementation is still limited.

By the beginning of 2017 with the determination of Hanoi's leaders, the campaign to clear Hanoi's sidewalks was carried out drastically and synchronously, in what the press called the "iron fist campaign" starting in the central district of Hoan Kiem. In Ho Chi Minh City, the

deployment was even more drastic with the "committing troops to battle" of Mr Doan Ngoc Hai (Vice Chairman of People's Committee of District 1), who was determined to clear sidewalks and strictly enforce any violations in his campaign to return sidewalks to pedestrians. After only a few months into the implementation, however, the campaign failed and Mr Hai resigned at the beginning of 2018.

In Hanoi, the campaign was not as boisterous as in Ho Chi Minh City, but the press also talked a lot about the modest results, using phrases such as "noisy and then soothing", "throwing stones into a pond of duckweeds", "beating the drum without the stick", "Hanoi still remaining the same", "the cat is still the cat", "catching a toad and putting it onto a plate", "like a sudden brief shower", etc. [8], [9].

From a cultural perspective, the issue of sidewalks should be viewed from a more multi-dimensional perspective that should be more closely linked to its context and life.

In *"Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed"*, James C. Scott discussed the mode of state management and the real life of society. He said that social activities happen naturally with many complexities, multiple layers, and multiple meanings. Many relationships are interwoven, and they are complicated and binding. For the state to manage such social activities in an easier way, they are often standardised, simplified and made easier to identify. However, when large state programmes and plans are implemented with the aim of bringing goods to the people, administrative standards are applied and the life of its citizens is identified in a simple and one-

dimensional way that causes these programmes and projects to fail and, in many cases, creates new complications, and even clashes and conflicts [5].

James C. Scott's argument can be applied in order to consider Hanoi's sidewalk culture from a different perspective. We think that Hanoi's sidewalks have a cultural life that is much more multi-faceted, complex and multi-dimensional than the perceptions of regulators. To better understand the sidewalk culture and to see the dimensions of its interactions, it is necessary to look at the diverse cultural practices taking place on the sidewalk from the inside out. In *"Wards of Hanoi"* [3], David Koh focused his study on the differences in macro-control management and control mechanisms (the state) and the implementation of that policy at the grassroots level (namely the ward). He said that the management and control mechanisms at the state level were tight, but at the local level, they were relaxed by mediation and compromise. From this point of view, it is necessary to consider the dimensions of interaction of the stakeholders in the sidewalk cultural practice in Hanoi.

With the rapid development of Hanoi today, sidewalks are diverse and have different uses, such as the sidewalks of the old town, the sidewalks of new neighbourhoods, the sidewalks in condominiums and urban centres. In this article, we focus only on the sidewalk cultural space in Hoan Kiem district and part of Hai Ba Trung district (areas of Ngo Thi Nham, Thi Sach and Ham Long wards) - where sidewalks were formed early and many sidewalk lively activities continue to take place.

Along with a rapid change in economic and social activities, the concept of culture is always changing in accordance with the context and perspective of the times. Currently, culture is considered to be present in all areas of social activities, so it is used in combination with various fields such as transport culture, tourism culture, diplomatic culture, and managerial culture; with space such as marine culture, mountainous culture, and delta culture; with type such as reading culture, audiovisual culture, display culture, etc.; with social phenomena such as “envelope culture”, drinking culture, blame culture, etc.; to form the necessary operational concepts for each specific issue. Sidewalk culture is also a concept to indicate a type of culture, a cultural place and cultural experience of many related objects. Sidewalk culture covers all aspects of cultural activities that take place and relate to the sidewalk space. This article highlights key aspects such as cultural space of sidewalks, cohesion of sidewalks in cultural and social activities, and cultural interaction of those related to sidewalk.

2. Hanoi sidewalks - a unique cultural space

In the late nineteenth century, after the colonisation of Hanoi in 1883, the French renovated and planned the streets around Hoan Kiem Lake and the sidewalks of Trang Tien Street. These are considered to be the first “Western style” sidewalks in Hanoi. Gradually the 36 areas of Hanoi streets had sidewalks. The French government also leased out the sidewalks so people could open shops. By the early

twentieth century, when a number of luxury hotels appeared around Hoan Kiem Lake, the hotels rented sidewalks in the front to open cafés with awnings: these cafés were popular and perhaps the term “sidewalk coffee” emanated from there. Thus, right from the inception, it can be seen that the sidewalk was not merely a physical space for the use of pedestrians but also an integrated space for other cultural elements. Further surveys and research show that Hanoi's sidewalks have the following types of space:

Economic space: Many diverse and flexible economic activities take place on the sidewalks of Hanoi. Examples include the sale of food, vegetables, meat, fish, utensils, souvenirs, necessities, machines equipment, repair and consumption services, foreign exchange, purchase and sale of tickets, and labour hire. Both private economic activities and organised business activities take place on the sidewalk and include the economic activities of the popular class and the middle and affluent classes.

Living space: Hanoi's sidewalks are where daily activities of the people take place such as hair-cuts, hair washing, laundry, vegetable washing, rice washing, cooking meals, and boiling *bánh chưng* (a traditional Vietnamese food which is made from ingredients including glutinous rice, mung beans and pork) for *Tết*, or the lunar New Year Holiday. When families perform social functions, sidewalks are also where venues are set up for weddings, funerals or for organising collective activities such as celebrating Mid-Autumn Festival, Children's Day on 1 June, and the get-togethers of the neighbourhood.

Social space: Hanoi's sidewalks are also home to all walks of life in the city, forms of cultural expression and behaviour, ways to make a living, with diverse kinds of language being used, where all kinds of stories are shared, from real life stories to social news stories. The "sidewalk news agency" updates and spreads information sometimes faster than the official information sources.

Art space: Hanoi's sidewalk is the best place to see the movement of the streets, the car traffic and lines of people, colourful street vendors, skilled craftsmen, various kinds of food and drink with recipes being shown as they are being made, various art forms being created and performed on the spot, together with roofs, doorways, busy bars and restaurants, sounds of life. All this contributes to making living art which is colourful and attractive.

Memory space: Hanoi's sidewalks are not only associated with beautiful and fond memories, nostalgia through familiar dishes, friendly greetings, social interactions, but also associated with people, landscapes, lines of trees, and street corners as the witnesses of history, etc. All this becomes a recorded memory that every person who has ever experienced such things in those places cannot forget. That memory follows them throughout their lives, so that whenever they are away they always remember it, and every time they come back they want to experience it again. The sidewalks of Hanoi have been immortalised in poetry, music and art such as paintings of Hanoi streets by Bui Xuan Phai and Nguyen Truong, or the song "*Người Hà Nội*" (Hanoians) by Nguyen Dinh Thi with lyrics including "Living a sidewalk merry

life/ A handsome Hanoi lad fretting with obsessive memories of the past/ Dreamy eyes of a pretty Hanoi lass".

From a cultural perspective, Hanoi's sidewalks are a unique space that, since first appearing in the 1880s up to now, people have constantly created and attached a cultural meaning to it and that is also the process of cultural creation; making it a cultural space. Sidewalk culture has become an extremely important part of the cultural fabric of Hanoi's urban area.

3. Sidewalks in the cultural life of Hanoi people

Why are those narrow streets and sidewalks making such significant contribution to the shaping of the soul of Hanoi capital as such? Mr Nguyen Thich, 78 years old and a resident of Phan Chu Trinh Street, said: "The sidewalk is the life of Hanoi people. If this capital city no longer has a sidewalk culture characterised with draft beer, iced tea, coffee, rice vermicelli, rice buns, sidewalk gathering, frolicking, trading, then what else is there?". Why are sidewalks so closely associated with the lives of Hanoians?

For every Hanoian, the sidewalk is alive; it's a place to eat, a place to play, a place to meet friends, a place to buy, sell, repair items, use services, share information, enjoy art, show how one is stylish and trendy. Nowadays, many sidewalks in Hanoi have become attractive places for young people to "check in" like Hang Ma Street, Ta Hien Street, Nha Tho (Church) Street. Many Hanoians live a colourful and vibrant life on the sidewalk, utilising the

sidewalk from childhood to old age. For residents, sidewalks have become a part of their lives, living in their memories. Thus, Hanoi's sidewalks are no longer infrastructure with physical and technical functions only, but have been constructed as part of the "cultural place". This place is not only meaningful to Hanoians but also attractive to tourists, and the latter themselves have contributed to making Hanoi's sidewalks a vivid "cultural place". A cultural researcher who regularly sits and enjoys iced tea on a sidewalk of Tran Xuan Soan Street asserts: "Surely, the sidewalk is a cultural place. Urban centres will die if they have no cultural place".

A survey was conducted in 2010 in Orange County in the state of California, USA among some people from Northern Vietnam working there, and they shared their nostalgia for Hanoi. Some people said that remembering Hanoi was also about remembering the sidewalk tea shop where friends used to gather. Others remembered the *Bat Dan pho* (Bat Dan noodles), snacks, Lam's and Giang's coffee bars, night street vendors' voices, etc. Looking back, we realise that their nostalgia is related to the sidewalks, and specifically to the cultural features created on the street space. Hanoi's sidewalk is a place to record traces of the people's daily lives, a place for those who travel far away to remember, a place to keep their memories alive and such a place is a "cultural place", and therefore making an important contribution to the shaping of the soul of Vietnam's capital.

One of the most exciting things occurring on Hanoi's sidewalk are culinary-related activities. It is these activities that have contributed to creating, maintaining

and enriching the culinary culture and shaping the "culture of eating while sitting flat on the ground" in Hanoi. The culinary culture in Hanoi is diverse and it is the countless number and variety of dishes present on the sidewalk that make the diversity. Hanoians love to eat on the sidewalk not only because of convenience (there are many places to eat on the sidewalk), affordable prices (eating on the street is always cheaper than in bars, restaurants) or the abundance of dishes and beverages (rich variety, different ways of processing and enjoying, availability according to time of day, season or substance and taste), and but also because of dining space, eating and drinking style, socialising when eating, watching the process of making food and drinks, and the atmosphere of the surrounding streets. Food and drinks on the sidewalk of Hanoi are especially delicious and are the essence of Hanoi. Dishes such as pho, vermicelli and chicken soup, vermicelli and grilled chopped meat, water snail vermicelli, fresh crab paste vermicelli, soya cheese vermicelli, boiled snails, steamed rolled rice pancakes, green sticky rice, pyramidal rice dumpling, etc., have been the heart and soul of Hanoi cuisine for many generations, but when the foods appeared in restaurants and luxury hotels, they were not comparable to the cheap, quick and delicious eats available on the sidewalk.

For the people of Hanoi, sidewalk cuisine has become an indispensable part of the way of life of the city, which also extends to visitors. Hanoi cuisine has always been sophisticated, attractive and is a draw card for tourists to this city. Sidewalk cuisine is so popular in Hanoi that

it forms a particular culture namely “culture of sitting flat on the ground”, which literally means sitting and eating on the ground that has been lined with newspapers or a cardboard, or sitting on very small and low stools, with or without tables - or with stools as tables. On the sidewalks of Hanoi, familiar images include makeshift eateries with piles of bamboo baskets, boxes, cookers, saucepans, and pots with diners sitting around, rows of coffee shops selling iced tea and lemon tea located all around and near street corners and on the porches of narrow houses, as well as vendors roaming the streets and both buyers and sellers sitting down on the ground to check, weigh, measure and count the goods. The "culture of sitting flat on the ground" always creates a feeling of closeness, friendliness, openness, joy but stylishness. It is no coincidence that Hanoi's sidewalk cuisine is famous around the world because sidewalk culture is constantly reported by famous newspapers and magazines. In 2016, according to the Telegraph (UK), Hanoi topped the list of the most attractive culinary cities in the world. In July 2019, The Guardian (UK) voted for the 20 places with the best culinary tours in the world and Hanoi appeared on the list.

In addition to food, the other diverse economic activities taking place on the sidewalks of Hanoi have largely contributed to promoting economic growth and improving the livelihoods of many social groups in Hanoi, especially the working poor. According to the survey by Annette Kim in Ho Chi Minh City, in 2014 the sidewalk economy provided about 20% of jobs and food for the city [6]. Further

research in 2016 showed that the sidewalk economy of Ho Chi Minh City provided up to 30% of jobs and met about 30% of the local people's food needs [10] in that city. Although there are no specific figures on the sidewalk economy of Hanoi, they would be similar to those of Ho Chi Minh City's sidewalk economy. So it is clear that sidewalk economy plays an important role.

On the sidewalks of Hanoi, one can find almost every essential item necessary to life such as food, drink and other necessities. Hanoians are accustomed to buying and selling goods on the sidewalk and prefer sidewalk trade for convenience, cheaper prices, negotiability, fun exchanges, comfortable commentary and even free preliminary processing, which is not possible when buying and selling goods in the supermarket. Observing the old streets of Hanoi, it is easy to see that economic activities take place in a lively, diverse, rich, interconnected and interdependent manner. This is a special form of economic activity because in addition to profitability, sidewalk commerce also achieves other goals such as social, emotional, creating acquaintances, building trust, assistance, so it is easy for people to establish connections and network.

The economic activities on the sidewalks of Hanoi have nurtured a significant portion of the poor labourers who "live on the street sidewalks" as put by Ms Tam - a street hawker in the old town area - when talking about herself and "people in the same boat". "This is a huge team and they come from many provinces, including Hanoi. Day by day they run around the old town. The income of this street vendor group, as well as the group of service providers on the

sidewalk, is not high but not bad, which can help them a lot in life", she said. Ms Tam earns about VND 200,000-300,000 per day, which helps support herself, pay for the boarding house and even save money to send home to her family. The street vendor group like Ms Tam's is just one group. There are many other groups "living on the street sidewalks" such as repairmen, sellers of housewares, souvenirs, food, service providers. They all make a living and they are the happier for it. Hanoi's sidewalks provide a location for diverse and rich economic activities to take place, all of which are especially attractive for tourists and good for development of the tourism economy, improvement of livelihoods for poor and unskilled labourers, thus effectively contributing to the capital's economy.

Eating, buying, selling and gathering on the sidewalk are familiar activities on any street in the centre of Hanoi, because the sidewalk maintains democracy and equality in communication. Hanoi's sidewalks are noted for their particularly lively and buoyant characteristics concerning practices of eating, buying, selling and living. Therefore, a diverse number of citizens appear on the sidewalk, but there is little discrimination in terms of social position, class or economic conditions here. For example, when sitting and eating on the sidewalk, everyone is the same and is served the same. Even though they do not know each other they are still free to talk to each other, to join in chats of others and to give their comments. An elderly man who is a retired cultural official and frequent customer of tea shops on the sidewalks of Nguyen Huu Huan Street said: "Sitting and drinking tea on the sidewalk is mostly a

hobby, one can chat leisurely, feel comfortable, be heard, talk about any topic and you can be sure others will join the talk anyway. This is a lot of fun". In the narrow space of the sidewalk, the seats and small tables and chairs are not comfortable, so people have to sit closer to each other, so it is easier to talk to each other, and people can address one another freely without looking at faces or even asking about the age. The content of stories told on the sidewalk tend to be totally free, with topics ranging from the inside décor of one's home to the outside of one's neighbourhood, from politics to transport, from weather to soccer, from corruption to examinations. Many things by their nature should be approached cautiously and with sensitivity in other settings or spaces, but on the sidewalks they can be discussed and analysed. Any discussion or story can be heard and joined at any time. People are working, selling and buying and chatting at the same time. The story contributors can be young or old, boys or girls, customers or shop-owners, strangers or acquaintances, Vietnamese or foreigners. Everyone contributes to creating an atmosphere of democracy and equality in the social interactions occurring on the sidewalk. Because of this democracy and equality, many foreign researchers have "spent their time leisurely engaged in gossip" on the sidewalk, and have collected an abundance of living capital and sidewalk stories that have become a rich source of useful information to help them establish in-depth research into Vietnamese culture. For example, Conor Lauesen with *Hanoi in the Eyes of an American* (2011); Martin Rama with *Hanoi Promenade*; Annette Miae Kim

with *Sidewalk City: Remapping Public Space in Ho Chi Minh City* (2015); Eric Harms with *Luxury and Rubble: Civility and Dispossession in the New Saigon* (2016).

Sidewalks, at first glance, appear messy and complicated, but this is not the reality. In each area, country and region, sidewalks have their own characteristics and activities, and the sidewalks in Hanoi have helped to create a unique cultural style for Hanoi. Author Martin Rama opined that: "In Hanoi there is a 'sidewalk culture'. People eat, exchange relations, earn a living, date, trade, etc., on the street. It is no coincidence that foreigners really love Hanoi" [2]. Hanoi's sidewalks, especially those of the old streets in Hanoi, are distinctive and in that they feature the items each street has for sale: Hang Ma Street sells votive objects and mid-autumn toys, Hang Buom Street sells cakes and candies, Hang Dao Street sells ready-made clothes, Hang Dau Street sells shoes etc. Each dish that is considered a specialty of Hanoi is also associated with the street's sidewalks such as vermicelli and the grilled chopped meat of Hang Manh Street, *Thin's Pho* of Lo Duc Street, the sticky rice ice cream of Hai Ba Trung Street, dried beef salad of Hoan Kiem Lake, roast shrimps in batter of Hang Bo Street, water snail noodles of Hang Chai Street, soya cheese vermicelli of Phat Loc Alley, vermicelli and chicken soup of Hang Hanh Street, eel vermicelli of Phu Doan Street etc. Accompanying the dishes, the way of enjoying sidewalk cuisine also creates its own characteristics that are difficult to name but can best be described as a "kind of suffering" because the sidewalk shops lack the physical space necessary for

eating, provide an unprofessional and noisy service, and they often have to "rush" (putting the utensils hurriedly away from the "functional agencies") due to squatting on squashed sidewalk, etc. Customers of these shops generally have to squat on small plastic chairs that are provided with no tables or small chairs are used as tables. Sometimes they have to wait in long queues, and then have to sit close to one another while eating. They may not have finished eating, but others are already waiting to take their seats. It is worth mentioning that hungry customers must be "suffering" not because they desire cheap prices (because the prices of some sidewalk restaurants are not cheap), nor because the food is so delicious, but maybe because of the "convenience", "recognised brands" and "delicacies" that are tied closely to nostalgia and memories, such as the water snail noodles that have been served for 40 years and are particularly Hanoian; Nhan's, Nhi's, Di's and Giang's coffee bars that recall the coffee flavour of Hanoi as far back as the 1940s (Giang's was opened in 1946). Perhaps it is the people of Hanoi and their way of enjoying life concerning delicate cuisine, hobbies and leisure time, including strolling on sidewalks and the social interaction on the street, etc." (as put by Martin Rama) that has contributed to creating a unique lifestyle for Hanoi.

Hanoi's sidewalks are vibrant, with various nuances associated with the daily life of the local people. Sidewalk culture has become a multi-faceted concept and adds bold colour to the Hanoi cultural picture so that whenever people talk about Hanoi, people cannot help but mention sidewalk culture even in extremes (i.e. for or against).

4. Hanoi's sidewalks in interactive dimensions

Regarding the sidewalks and Hanoi's sidewalk culture, there are many different views and perspectives. Managers, i.e. state management officials, view the sidewalk in terms of public space as places with clutter and complexity that are uncivilised, and even as sleazy and uncouth. Urban planners see the sidewalk as an intermediary space between the house and the street, between public space and private space with the main function being serving as a pathway for pedestrians and housing technical infrastructure. Historians view the sidewalk as a hallmark of the time where the chapters of the city's history are recorded. Cultural experts consider the sidewalk to be a cultural space: a cultural place with the diversity and liveliness of cultural practices and those cultural practices convey many political, economic and social messages. Economists look at the sidewalk as a place of business and product promotion opportunities. Tourists see the sidewalk as a place to observe, be entertained, have exchanges and experience the life of Hanoi people. People who live on or close to the sidewalk see the sidewalk as a place to do business and earn a living. People who do not earn their living on the sidewalk consider it to be a place where they can eat, buy, sell and be entertained, and the space helps them meet the needs of their daily lives in the quickest and most convenient way, both physically and mentally. These different views sometimes clash and conflict, but can generally interact and co-exist to create diversity and the multi-facets of sidewalk culture.

With a modest physical space but in terms of function, Hanoi's sidewalks provide a multi-functional space. Sidewalks in Hanoi's downtown areas have never been used as a single function of a pathway for pedestrians, rather they serve many different functions, depending on the condition and nature of each sidewalk space. Hanoi's sidewalks maintain the function of spatial transition (i.e. between indoors and streets, between public and private), perform a number of functions: commercial, social communication, information and aesthetic.

In such a multi-functional space, who owns the sidewalk? The answer is not a space that is subject to sole proprietorship but a multi-proprietorship. Sidewalks are not only infrastructure for the people but also for the state, managers, public agencies, and to some extent for tourists as well. Sidewalks provide a vibrant space and it is the people who are there who create such the vibrancy and excitement. The highest number of people on the sidewalk are ordinary people but this is not a homogeneous cohort. Rather, they are composed of many different groups such as people living permanently on the streets with sidewalks, people renting fixed sidewalks, peddlers, beneficiaries including tourists who enjoy various types of service and activity on the sidewalks.. In addition, present on the sidewalks are the regular functional forces (i.e. related state management agencies, which in this case include the municipal department of transport, the district people's committee, and the related steering committee on re-establishing the order on the sidewalk) who maintain order on the sidewalk². Thus, many different social groups participate in

the use of and activities on the sidewalk, so the sidewalk becomes a special interaction space, in which there are two basic interactions: those between the people and management agencies and between the people themselves on the sidewalk.

In the minds of urban management agencies, the sidewalk is a messy, complicated place, where people largely occupy public spaces in unregulated ways so in the "sidewalk war", the authorities upheld such slogans as "winning the sidewalk", "reclaiming the sidewalk", "restoring the sidewalk order". In their eyes, people occupy the sidewalk to run small shops, so they need to reclaim the sidewalk and the message they communicated was "regaining sidewalks for pedestrians". This is away to simplify an issue that is complex and natural as James C. Scott discussed. Sidewalks, especially the sidewalks of central streets in Hanoi, have never been reserved for pedestrians from when the first sidewalk was built. Rather, they are multi-layered and multi-faceted spaces subjected to multi-ownership, as discussed above.

This different view has led management agencies to always try to restore the "sidewalk order" according to their standards, regularly assigning functional forces to inspect, supervise and seize goods and facilities, and prohibit people from peddling and displaying goods on sidewalks. When people are reminded and fined and their goods and facilities seized, they obey orders. When all has been done, all the trading, eating and drinking activities start again but the two sides "keep an eye" on each other. A common scene on the

sidewalk of Hanoi is that when the functional forces come, people start scurrying into the alleys, nearby houses or cover up items that they are reselling or pull them back into houses. A female shopkeeper of a shoe store on Hang Dau Street said: "I don't know what sidewalk culture is, but there are hundreds of ways to avoid and run to evade the police and order-keepers here". It is important to note that after these forces pass through, the sidewalks return to the way they were: active, busy with trading, serving and eating food, doing jobs and avoiding and running away to evade regulatory forces whose function it is to clear sidewalks. All this is a skill, a daily cultural practice on the sidewalks of Hanoi.

It is interesting to note that the standards set out in that "sidewalk war" are shaped by the concept of urban civilisation associated with the criteria of cleanliness, order, tidiness and modernity, while at the opposite end of the spectrum, the sidewalk is a lively and versatile space subject to multi-ownership. Sidewalk culture, characterised by its multi-layered, multi-faceted nature and the nature of being with multiple expressions, actually extends beyond the coverage and comprehension of predefined standards and the understanding that has been simplified by the state. James. C. Scott (1999) asserted: "It is of course difficult for such a standardised and simplified management approach to achieve the expected effect and the rhythm of displaying - taking back - running/ retrieving - displaying becomes a normal and familiar rhythm on the sidewalk, and compromise and negotiation between the two sides is thus

inevitable” [4]. That is the compromise between reason and emotion, between law and sympathy, between the "campaigns and operations", "monitoring", "arrest and fine" and strategies to respond in a "guerrilla-like", "blindfold", "notifying each other", "mutual help" manner. In many cases, the compromise turns into an arrangement characterised by a "win-win", "know all but still have to do", "keep one eye open and one eye shut then let go", "turn a blind eye to" as many people have responded to the behaviour of sidewalk order-keeping forces. Thus, the relationship between the sidewalk order-keeping forces with the people living, doing business and trading on the sidewalk not only includes clashes and conflicts but also compromises and arrangements made between the two sides. Those norms and regulations defined in the macro-level policies have been implemented in a very flexible way, and in a particular way at the micro level that is associated with the vivid realities of cultural practices on Hanoi's sidewalks.

In contrast to what is visualised by the urban managers and others about the clutter and complexity of the sidewalk, are the views of those people who are doing business and living on the sidewalk who are maintaining a settlement that is "satisfactory", "messy but organised all the way", "look-and-tell", "be reasonable, judicious, sensible", particularly in the way they talk about how they deal with each other on the sidewalk. Mr Nhan, 78 years old, born and raised in Bach Mai Street, a veteran discharged from the army in 1984, now living in Cau Go Street, explained the arrangements between people on the sidewalk: "Because it has become a routine,

there is not so many quarrels on the sidewalk. Rather, quarrels or even fights are normally started by the road-users in the street. In my opinion, road-users' behaviours are sometimes more rude and less civilised than those of sidewalk-users, because everyone says that the road definitely belongs to the state and which no one is responsible for. Regarding the sidewalk, although suffering a bad reputation of illegally encroaching the state's land, sidewalk users behave and act in an understanding, reasonable and sensible manner with one another, so they seldom have quarrels or arguments. Rather, they live beside each other with goodwill and affection, unlike strangers riding a motorbike or car. And I see that whenever there is a vehicle collision on the road, it is the people here on the sidewalk who will mainly run out to help, not the people participating in the traffic. The street vendors also have their own rules whereby they never occupy the place of the sidewalk shop without permission because they are judicious, reasonable and sensible people". Ms Luyen, 68, a butcher on Tran Xuan Soan Street, also talked about another arrangement on the sidewalk, namely the arrangement of sales times with each other. On this corner of the sidewalk, different people sell different things at different times of the day, such as meat in the morning, budget rice meals at noon, potato cakes or corn cakes in the afternoon, and tea services in the evening. Sidewalk user fees paid to the ward police or ward order-keepers are divided between sidewalk users. Our observations make it clear that those who do business on the sidewalks always have reasonable arrangements with each other so that all parties can benefit and can

live together peacefully on the sidewalk. They are very aware of helping each other. We have witnessed scenes of running to avoid the police and order-keepers with loads of goods hiding temporarily in residents' houses nearby and in the courts of offices and companies, or running into alleys and sending things to permitted permanent shops nearby. They are also very aware of the need to keep the common space clean and tidy so they have the best possible place to sell goods.

This arrangement between the sidewalk users also enjoys the support of those people who enjoy the sidewalk culture, who often buy, sell, eat and drink, and use services on the sidewalk. They are always willing to share the cramped space, and commiserate over the lack of facilities, the lack of attentive service of the shops or the lack of services. They sometimes have to run and carry their bowls while eating, and have to wait for the sellers to return from running to avoid from the police in order to buy things, and have to stop talking in the middle of a discussion etc. However, they always gladly accept this situation and take it as a matter of due course with the sidewalk activities.

Judging from the appearance of interaction between the sidewalk clearance functional forces and the people living and doing business on the sidewalks, one may think that there is always a conflict between the sidewalk clearance forces and the target groups of the clearance, and that the interaction between sidewalk users themselves is always a mess. However, the reality is not like that. There is an internal arrangement and a compromise between the parties and such a compromise and arrangement plays an important role in maintaining the current sidewalk cultural

practices in Hanoi. Therefore, Hanoi sidewalk can be considered as spaces of arrangements and compromises. This observation shares David Koh's research where he said: "The management and control mechanism at the state level is very strict, but when implemented on the sidewalk, it has been relaxed and effectuated by a mechanism of arrangement and compromise" [3]. He emphasised that the street space of Hanoi managed by the wards is a space of arrangement. In a recent interview, Mr Le Hong Giang also emphasised the aspect of arrangements on the sidewalks to achieve an equilibrium. He said: "A good sidewalk is a well-balanced sidewalk for the many components that revolve around it, not just for pedestrians" [11].

5. Conclusion

Efforts to have an in-depth understanding of the identification of sidewalks in Hanoi, the role of sidewalks in Hanoi's cultural life and the interactive dimensions of the parties involved in activities on the sidewalks, clearly show that the sidewalk is a cultural space and place, where the daily life of the people takes place with all manner of activities, livelihoods, communication, and behaviour. Such sidewalk life is expressed in dimensions that are rich, diverse, complex and moving, developing, and changing continuously. All these elements shape the sidewalk culture of Hanoi with its multi-faceted, multi-layered, multi-functional, multi-ownership properties which is closely linked to the capital city's political, economic, social and cultural context. If the sidewalk is viewed from such

a multi-dimensional perspective of life and culture, perhaps it will be more difficult to standardise and simplify its functions for the sake of management with the reasoning for a civilised and orderly Hanoi to bring about the desired result.

Notes

¹ The paper was published in Vietnamese in: *Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam*, số 12, 2019. Translated by Luong Quang Luyen, edited by Diane Lee.

² At the beginning of 2017 when Hanoi launched the campaign to restore the order of the sidewalk, 12 functional forces participated in this campaign including construction inspectors, traffic inspectors, criminal public security agents, criminal police, ward police, ward order-keepers, cadastral officials, urban management officials, demolition workers, cleaning workers, drainage workers and urban environment workers.

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