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TRY HANOI
biến chuyển
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giới trẻ

RELATIONSHIP OF RURAL YOUTH MIGRANTS TO URBAN AND VIRTUAL PUBLIC SPACES IN HANOI AND THEIR EVERYDAY RESISTANCE TACTICS WHEN LABELLED AS TRANSGRESSIVE BY OTHERS

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Partners : Vietnamese Women Museum

> How do young working rural migrants relate to, use, and perceive their place in Hanoi's urban and virtual public spaces? What resistance tactics do they draw upon to access public space when labelled as transgressive by others?

Highlights

About 100,000 internal migrants move to Hanoi every year. Over half of them move to the capital city in search of work (Coxhead et al 2015 and Hoang & McPeak 2010) and most go there to find work. This is a relatively young population, the majority of migrants being 15-25 years old. Some urban residents see the presence of these young rural migrants in the city as problematic. Critiques are numerous and relate to undesirable attributes or characteristics such as low socioeconomic status, a 'backward' rural accent and appearances, poor or even risky behaviors (e.g. sexually transmitted infections (STI)-spreading behavior). In line with this, some view migrants as making the city dirty, polluted, noisy, disordered, overpopulated, congested, unsafe, etc. Limited research to date has shown that many rural migrants feel that they are being looked down by urbanites and consider themselves 'outsiders' in the city. This social stigma, combined with institutional discrimination, causes social exclusion, a lack of a sense of belonging, and negatively impacts well-being and mental health. Against this backdrop, the aim of this project is: to investigate the relationships of rural youth migrants to urban and virtual public spaces in Hanoi and the everyday resistance tactics they draw upon to access public spaces when labelled as transgressive by others.

What was done this year (between April 2017 and September 2018)

Production of two extensive annotated bibliographies on the question of youth migrants in the East and Southeast Asian region respectively covering English- and Vietnamese-language sources. These have been used to inform the formulating of semi-structured interview guidelines used in the exploratory survey of 4 rural labour migrant categories (see below) ;

Preparation and launch of a large exploratory qualitative survey with 120 young rural labor migrants in Hanoi (started in August 2018);

Participation of Pham Quynh Huong to the 9th World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur (as representative of TRYHANOI);

Production of a 20-minute documentary on female youth working migrants' integration/adaptation to life in the city which involved a team of 5 Canadian and Vietnamese students (UdeM and NUCE) along with the Vietnamese Women Museum;

Production of an Honors' thesis on young rural migrants and public space in Hanoi (C. Zuberec, dept. Geography, McGill – in progress);

Production of a research paper (under review at the Journal Landscape and Planning) about youth access to public space in Hanoi (Pham Thi Thanh Hien is lead author and D. Labbé is a co-author) [Note, this paper uses data collected during the HYPS project, not data from the current one]

Preliminary results

The few preliminary results that we have, at this very early stage, concern the theoretical/conceptual positioning of our local case study in relationship to the overall TRYSPACES project but also in relation to topical scholarship on domestic youth migration in Vietnam and beyond :

Spatial Dimension of Identity Formation, and Sense of Place

Our case study is closely linked with general TRYSPACES research question: "How do youths construct their identity and find a place in physical public spaces?" In line with this, the interplay between relocation to urban locale and identity (trans)formation is a recurrent theme in the English-language literature surveyed for this case-study. Studies emphasize the fact that: i) rural-to-urban migration is a life changing/transformative experience and an identity-altering experience (Agergaard 2011, Anh et al 2012a); ii) Relocation to urban context trigger construction / deconstruction / negotiation of identity (Dang Thao Thi Thanh 2016a; Nguyen and Locke 2014; Karis 2013b); iii) Migration being a gendered experience, one important aspect of this transformation process is the (re)construction of gender identities (perceived roles, duties, etc.); iv) This is particularly salient for young urban migrant workers during the critical identity-formation period of early adulthood. Furthermore, the existing research indicates that relocation (temporary or not) in the city for work purpose doesn't necessarily entail the shedding of a rural identity or the wholesale adoption of an urban one. Instead, notions of in-betweeness (Agergaard 2011), rural-urban composite identity (Chang 2008; Resurreccion 2005), and trans-local identity (Dang Thao Thi Thanh 2016) are proposed.

Thus far, the question of migrants' identify (trans)formation has mainly been broached in relation to migrants' social life and working conditions. Two studies (i.e., Chang 2008; Anh et al. 2012a) have explicitly sought to link the geographic relocation of migrants' with identity transformation processes, both of them relying on conceptualization of 'sense of place.' This is a potentially interesting conceptual orientation in which to position our case study, especially if we explicitly distinguish between the sub-concepts of "place identity", "place attachment", and "place dependence." Questions in line with the above that we would like to continue explore include: How does the spatiality of the urban locale shape young rural labour migrants' identity (trans) formation process? And what role (if any) do public spaces (understood very broadly) play in this process?

Citizenship, Right & Access to the City (Inclusion/exclusion)
TRYSPACES general conceptual framework is focused on these themes with regard to privatization, corporatization, homogenization, sanitization, and policing of public spaces (ref. to Carmona 2010; Pomeray 2011; Smith and Low 2006; Purenne 2013; Boucher 2013; Germain 2013; Turner and Oswin 2015). These themes are also very present in the literature on rural labour migrants, but they are not approached from the same perspective (public space is not a focus). We expect the result of our case study to begin to fill this gap.

Transgression viz regulatory regimes + spatial dimension of authority-youth relations understood through lived micro-experience of regulation

The TRYSPACES conceptual framework focuses on power relations embedded in the tension between transgression and the norm (both formal regulation and collective social norms). This includes subthemes such as transgression's attractiveness to youth, transgression as a means to "control the loss of control" (Hayward 2002, Le Breton 2004, Kaulingfreks 2015), "how youths commit to, or refute, social norms."
These themes are also very present in the literature on rural labour migrants, but the terminology (resistance and agency instead of transgression) is quite different and so is the theoretical positioning. This body of literature is animated by a debate about the degree of agency of migrants viz force of exclusion from/access to city. This is closely connected to notions of tactical resistance/negotiation of state-defined and other dominant, normative conceptions of the appropriate way to 'be urban.' An important theoretical question for us regards the link (or absence thereof) between the 'resistance' discourse/practices of rural migrant labour and the 'transgressive' discourse/practice that our colleagues in Mexico City, Paris and Montreal are exploring.
Going back to the literature on rural migrants, the 'agency' debate is between those authors who emphasize migrant's lack (or deprivation) of agency (being denied full urban citizenship and access to city's resources) versus those who emphasize migrants' capacity to deploy everyday resistance strategies (ex: Eisde et al. 2016 on street vendors' resistance strategies). This raises interesting questions for our team including:
- Are young rural labour migrants subverting 'normative spatial aims of urban civilization'?
- Do they "sustain alternative conceptions of belonging to those promoted by the state" (Karis 2013b, abstract)?
- Do they "renarrate and enforce new legitimacies of 'being in the city' through their use of public spaces" (Kim 2012)?
- And if they do any of the above, how do they do it?

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