

From Neglect to Neighborly Pride

An evaluative analysis of the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương
Forest-Park in Hanoi

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in the Global South



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Executive summary

Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, has long struggled to provide adequate open and green spaces for its growing urban population. Despite significant governmental efforts to build and renovate parks, squares, and plazas, the provision of public spaces has yet to meet the growing demand for these amenities in this densely populated city. The lack of open public spaces is compounded by accessibility issues, with a large proportion of the urban population not having access to a public space at a walking or cycling distance from their homes. These issues result, in part, from a lack of attention by planning authorities to the provision and renovation of local-scale public spaces such as neighborhood parks. While this sidelining affects the entire city, it is felt most strongly in densely populated lower socioeconomic areas where the shortage of public spaces is especially acute and where residents are the least mobile.

Local civil society organizations in Hanoi recently stepped in to address these problems. This movement was launched by Think Playgrounds, a community architecture and social enterprise founded in 2014. Through their practice, Think Playgrounds, and the growing number of organizations it collaborates with, pioneered a new model of neighborhood-scale public space production in urban Vietnam. Departing from the conventional, top-down, state-led planning approach, this innovative model prioritizes the development of socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable public spaces through participatory and collaborative methods.

The present report examines the impacts, experiences, and challenges of this new model of public space production in Hanoi. It does so through the lens of the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park, a significant exemplar of the principles, approaches, and methods promoted by Think Playgrounds and its collaborators. The objectives of this evaluative study are to:

- Document the outcomes and perceptions of implementing an innovative approach and methods in developing public spaces in Hanoi;
- Understand how this new model and the resulting public space are experienced by local populations, particularly residents in the areas of implementation;
- Analyse the impacts of the new public space and development methods on local sociability and community dynamics.

Our analysis draws on both quantitative and qualitative data collected during the Spring of 2023 through questionnaire, interview and observational surveys with adult and children users of the forest-park and other stakeholders involved in this unusual public space experiment.

Key findings

From Environmental Neglect to Community Embrace

- The forest-park was established in an environmentally degraded site bordering the Red River which had long been used as an informal dumping site. Its inception combined environmental restoration with an incremental, participatory design and do-it-yourself construction process. The project developed in two successive phases. From a relatively modest playground and community garden, it was expanded, through community efforts, into a much larger multifunctional space.
- The adoption of the forest-park unfolded gradually, driven by word-of-mouth endorsements and the addition of new equipment and amenities. Two years into its development, the space had undergone a profound transformation, overcoming initial apprehensions rooted in the site's negative reputation and shifting perceptions from fear to joy. The active engagement of residents, spanning different age groups, has led to a positive cycle of continuous improvement, drawing users from neighboring wards.

A Clean, Beautiful, and Spacious Public Space... still In-Progress

- The forest-park emerged as a vital resource for Chương Dương, addressing the near complete lack of green spaces in this area of Hanoi and fostering a sense of community. Proximity, accessibility, and a lack of entrance fees have contributed in important ways to the forest-park inclusivity, particularly benefiting the elderly and children. Users praise the transformation of the site from a polluted and degraded area they used to avoid to a clean, beautiful, and spacious recreational and socialization space. The multifunctional programming of the new public space caters to diverse needs, promoting physical well-being and countering sedentary lifestyles.
- While user feedback is overwhelmingly positive, some concerns are raised. Unsanitary conditions persist, highlighting the need for improved waste and drainage management and sanitation. Users' perception of the park's status as incomplete, coupled with desires for a cleaner and more versatile paved surface and additional equipment, underscores the community's sense of ownership of the new public space and its ongoing commitment to enhancement.

A Catalyst for Positive Encounters and Social Cohesion

- While it was established recently, the forest-park has already transcended its role as a physical space, becoming a social hub where strangers become neighbors. The park's everyday social environment, open and welcoming atmosphere, and the presence of powerful social connectors such as fitness equipment and children playgrounds foster positive encounters between users.
- Both local residents and community leaders report that the social interactions made possible and supported by the forest-park have led to a heightened sense of community belonging in Chương Dương, contributing to improved relationships, reduced conflicts, and an overall more united and harmonious community life.

The Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park redefined what green and open spaces can be in Hanoi. This innovative project exemplifies the profound impact that public spaces, produced through community-based and environmental planning and design approaches, can have on local social cohesion and well-being. This model of sustainable urban development offers valuable insights for future projects seeking not only to palliate to an enduring shortage of open and green space but also to rely on these essential amenities to integrate environmental renewal with social enrichment in Hanoi.

Introduction



Women exercising at the forest-park, © D. Labbé, March 2023

This report presents the findings from an evaluative study of a neighborhood park recently established in a lower socioeconomic area of Hanoi, Vietnam's capital. Known as the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park (Công viên-Rừng Bồ vớ Chương Dương), this is one of the most ambitious exemplars of a new model of public space production in Hanoi. This new model represents a significant shift in addressing pressing needs for more and better-quality public spaces in Hanoi. It also reflects a growing recognition of the importance of these amenities in the Vietnamese capital. In this

very dense city, public spaces act as essential sanctuaries, allowing residents to freely engage in social interactions with their neighbors, practice physical activities away from heavy traffic and air pollution, and be in contact with nature.

Providing all residents with access to enough and good quality public spaces has long been a challenge in Hanoi. The built fabric of the Vietnamese capital has historically been characterized by a limited number of parks, squares, plazas and other green and open spaces. Starting in the 1990s, this public space

shortage was magnified by rapid population growth and by the rising interest and demands of urban residents for recreational and socialization spaces [1]. Planning authorities have since made significant efforts to address this demand.¹ Yet the provision of open and green spaces has been—and continues to be—outmatched by population growth in Hanoi. In 2023, the city had only 2 m² of urban green space per capita, a figure far beyond regional averages [3]. The limited number of public spaces in Hanoi further translates into limited accessibility. In the city's inner-districts for instance, four out of five residents do not have access to a public space within a reasonable walking or cycling distance of their home [4].

In Hanoi, these problems result in part from a lack of attention to local-scale public spaces [5]. In the last decades, planning and policy efforts have tended to focus on developing large municipal parks at the urban periphery of the city and on renovating public squares in its historic core [1]. This has come at the expense of the creation, protection, and renovation of smaller—yet more accessible—public spaces, such as neighborhood parks and playgrounds. This problem is especially pronounced in

¹ Including revisions of the national urban planning framework emphasizing the importance of green and open spaces in cities, new public policies seeking to incentivize the private sector to contribute to the provision of urban public spaces, and, in the case of Hanoi, the construction of new municipal parks and the renovation of existing public squares [2].

lower socioeconomic areas of Hanoi, such as the residential zones bordering the Red River or districts to the south of the historic core which boast some of the city's highest residential densities and are home to households who have limited time and resources to access public spaces located away from their homes [6].

As elsewhere in Hanoi, the population of these neighborhoods has tended to compensate for the lack of accessible public spaces by using streets and sidewalks for recreation and socializing. Yet sidewalks and streets are no substitute for places like neighbourhood parks and playgrounds where residents—and in particular children and the elderly—can socialize, play, and exercise in a safe environment, enjoy the environmental and wellness benefits brought by green spaces, and make use of quality community meeting spaces.

The forest-park project analysed in this report is a telling example of recent efforts, deployed by local civil society organizations, to address these needs in Hanoi. The bridgehead of this movement is an organization called Think Playgrounds. This social enterprise was established in 2014 in response to the observation of a lack of freely accessible, outdoor children's

playgrounds in Hanoi.² Over the last decade, this organisation has been involved in the design of over 200 public spaces throughout Vietnam. Its practice has further inspired and drawn other organisations into what we could call a “neighborhood public space production movement” in Vietnam, including domestic and foreign NGOs, international organizations such as UN-Habitat, local governments, and sponsors from both the public and private sectors.

The work of Think Playgrounds and of the many organizations it collaborates with has not only helped to produce several new open and green spaces in Vietnamese cities. It has also pioneered a new way to think about and develop these spaces. The innovative model forged by Think Playgrounds departs, in important ways, from the conventional, state-led, and top-down approaches through which public spaces are typically produced in Vietnam. Several of the defining features of this new model are embodied by the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park, including:

- A focus on developing neighborhood-scale public spaces in lower-income areas of Hanoi where, as mentioned above, they are particularly scarce;

² This realization was spurred by an encounter with an American artist called Judith Hansen who was staying in Hanoi as part of a project to photograph children playgrounds in cities worldwide. This same artist introduced the Think Playgrounds founders to the notion of children's right to play, which became a central tenet of the organisation.

- A redefinition of the role of public spaces in Vietnamese cities centered on social justice and environmental principles. This translates into the planning and design of spaces that are: open and welcoming to all, promote active and healthy lifestyles, focus on communities and social interactions, encourage creativity, are environmentally sustainable and resilient, and support urban biodiversity;
- The introduction of new types of local-scale public spaces in Vietnamese cities such as adventure playgrounds, collective gardens, food forests, etc;
- The involvement of new and flexible combinations of actors in the financing, design, construction, and management of these spaces (public/private, local/international, community-based, non-profits, etc.);
- The reliance on participatory and collaborative methods through which local communities are invited to actively participate in the design and construction of public spaces and, in many cases, to ensure their management and maintenance once they are completed.

What happens when a neighborhood public space is developed following these

innovative approaches and methods in Hanoi? How is this new model, and the public spaces resulting from it, perceived, experienced, and received by local populations and, in particular, by the residents of the areas where they are implemented? And what are the impacts of these spaces and of the methods through which they are developed on local sociability and community dynamics?

This report begins to answer these questions through an evaluative study of the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park. From March to June 2023, we conducted a series of observational, questionnaire, and interview surveys to document how its users experienced the development process of the forest-park, their usage and appreciation of this new space, and ways in which it has contributed to transform local

social dynamics.³

This report is divided into five sections. The next section presents the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park project, including its urban context, origins and intentions, and its development up to April 2023. We then move to a portrait of the usage of the forest-park and discuss its appreciation by its users. The following section explores the impacts of the new public space and of the process through which it was established on local social interactions and community engagement. The conclusion summarizes the main findings of this study.

³ See the appendix at the end of this report for a description of the methodology and a portrait of participants.

The data analysed in this report was collected in the early days of the forest-park. At the time we surveyed them, most users had only been visiting the space for a few weeks. Moreover, the public space underwent continuous improvements during the time of our study. New equipment and amenities (ex: concrete benches, solar streetlights, access ramp and staircase, etc.) were installed almost every week and residents were working together to beautify the site (ex: cleaning trash, planting flowers and trees, etc.). This particular context is important to keep in mind; just like the forest-park itself, the relationship its users have with it, have likely evolved since we surveyed them.

Overcoming Challenges, Shifting Perspectives: Urban Context, Project Timeline, and Community Involvement

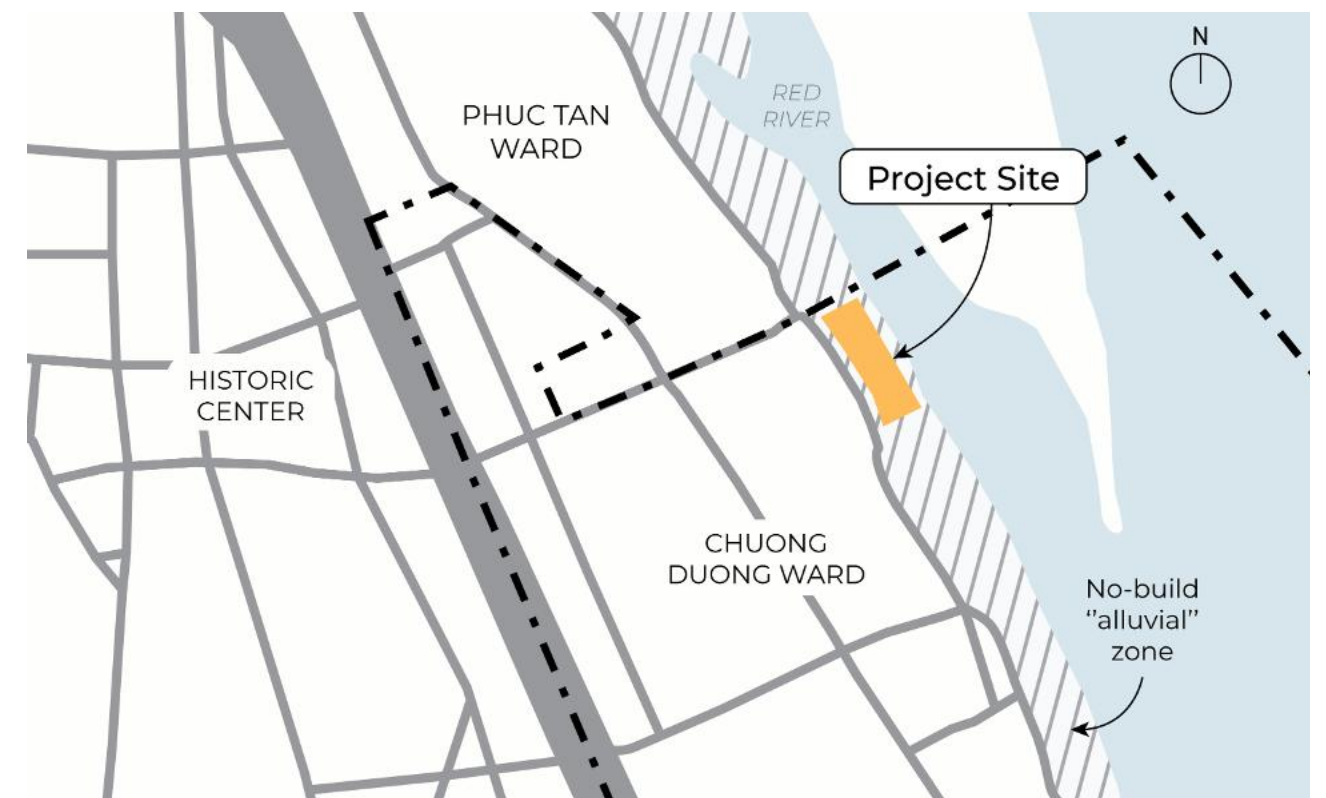


Banks of the Red river, © D. Labbé, March 2023

Reclaiming the Riverside

As its name indicates, the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park is located in the ward of Chương Dương. This ward belongs to the district of Hoàn Kiếm, which encompasses most of Hanoi's historical city. The ward of Chương Dương is part of the so-called "riverside area" (*khu vực bờ vồ sông Hồng*) of Hanoi. This expression refers to the urbanized corridor directly adjoining the Red River, on the outer side of the dike that has historically protected the inner-city from its floods. Up to about two decades ago, the ward of Chương Dương was heavily flooded every rainy season (July-September), with water sometimes rising one or more metres-high in its residential zones.

Despite its vulnerability to floods, starting in the 1980s, the riverside area experienced a rapid and largely informal urbanization process. Large numbers of households, looking for cheap but centrally located accommodation, settled in the area. Up to the early 2000s, Chương Dương, like much of the riverside area where it is located, was commonly referred to as a "slum" (*khu ổ chuột*) due to the concentration of poor households, to their precarious living conditions, and to the prevalence of illicit activities such as drug dealing. To this day, the area is rarely frequented by Hanoians many of whom still perceive and treat the "outer dike" (*ngoài đê*) residents as second-class citizens (*công dân hạng 2*).



And yet, environmental and socioeconomic conditions improved markedly in the riverside area of Hanoi over the last two decades. Chương Dương has not experienced a major flood since around 2005, most of its residential built fabric has been regularized, and the socio-economic conditions of its more established households have improved significantly. This ward, like the rest of the riverside area, nevertheless remains characterized by a sizeable deprived population, including many rural migrants involved in low-income and unskilled jobs. Many of these people rent makeshift rooms in residential buildings called *nhà trọ* that line narrow alleyways running deep into the ward's urban fabric. The ward has a high population density, even by the standards of Hanoi, of about 22,000 inhabitants/km². It is also plagued by a shortage of public amenities, including a near complete lack of open public spaces other than streets (most of which are devoid of sidewalks).

The forest-park is located on the eastern edge of Chương Dương, on a long strip of the Red River's alluvial plain. The elevation of this area is approximately 7-8 meters lower than the rest of the ward and has, therefore, historically been more exposed to floods. For this reason, planning authorities have long banned permanent construction in this part of the riverside area. The designation of the alluvial plain as public land and the fact that it is under the

jurisdiction of the Ministry of agriculture (rather than of the City), the fact that it is uninhabited, and its location at the confines of the city, next to a socially deprived residential area, have however facilitated the development of informal usages.

Two informal practices contributed to the degradation of the environmental and sanitary conditions of the alluvial plain, including in the area earmarked for the establishment of the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park. The first is the decades-long use of this area as an informal dumpsite. Up to the establishment of the new forest-park, local households and other residents of Hanoi have long disposed of their refuse on the alluvial plain of the Red River.¹ By the time the construction of the forest-park began, the waste accumulated in the area reached up to three metres.

A second problematic informal practice relates to the residential buildings that front the alluvial plain in Chương Dương. Most of these buildings are irregular constructions and, for this reason, are not connected to the ward's sewage network. For several years now, local homeowners have solved this problem by discharging their untreated wastewater through pipes running from their house to the alluvial plain.

¹ This informal practice resulted in part from a deficient public garbage collection service in residential neighbourhoods of the riverside area and from the long-established habit of inner-city residents to dispose of larger waste (ex: broken furniture, demolition waste) there.



Waste accumulated on the site
© Think Playgrounds

The expressions used by local people to describe the site of the forest-park prior to its redevelopment, include “very bad,” “very dirty,” “very ugly,” “abandoned” and “dilapidated.” They also spoke of an area “filled with garbage” from which came an “unbearable stench.” Many residents further described the area as “a messy place,” “full of social evils,” with “many drug addicts gathering to smoke or inject drugs.” Because of these poor environmental and social conditions, local people tended to avoid the area, except to dump garbage.

Despite these sanitary and personal security problems, the absence of flooding since around 2005 led to marked

transformations of the landscape and use of the alluvial plain in Chương Dương. Over the years, a dense vegetation grew between and over the accumulated waste. “When I first came here,” an elderly female resident recalled, “I thought I was going into a dense forest. No one would have believed there was such a forest in the city.” At the same time, residents started to clear small areas in the plain to raise fowls and dogs, grow vegetables, and organize (illegal) cockfights. Other residents planted and tended to jackfruit, guava, soursop and banana trees. Others established commercial activities with the approval of the city government, including, for instance, a large car parking area.

“It was all garbage here. Every time I passed by, I thought that this garbage couldn’t be cleaned up. The smell was unbearable. It was so dirty! Because very few people ever came here, it became a spot for drug addicts. It was full of social evils. No one wanted to come here.”

- woman, 47 years old

Making it Happen

The landscape and usage transformations outlined above played a pivotal role in the birth of the forest-park. In 2021, when local authorities first approached the two civil society organizations which drove the development of this project (ECUE-For a Liveable Hanoi² and Think Playgrounds), they wanted to create a small community playground in the upper-part of the alluvial plain³. However, during a scoping visit, members of the two civil society organizations ventured into the lower part of the plain and concluded it could become the site of a much more ambitious public space.

In the early fall of 2021, ECUE and Think Playgrounds rallied two

other organizations to tackle the larger and more complex project they had in mind: Keep Hanoi Clean, a local social enterprise with experience organizing community-based waste cleaning and management, and the Center for Environment and Community Research (CECR), a local NGO with experience in wastewater and waste management. In October 2021, this enlarged team presented local authorities (at the district and ward levels) with a proposal to develop a multifunctional forest-park in Chương Dương’s alluvial area. The area, they argued, was already informally used by local residents for livelihood activities such as urban gardening and fowl husbandry. Moreover, years without floods had allowed greenery to develop next to the river, opening the way to establish a green open space.

² ECUE is local social enterprise working to promote ethical business and sustainable consumption. The head of ECUE also leads the civil society network For a Liveable Hanoi. The two organisations were closely intertwined in the development of the forest-park.

³ The two organizations had just completed such a project named the To 16 Community Playground in Phúc Tấn, a ward next door to Chương Dương.



Vegetation on the site prior to construction
© Think Playgrounds



Informal vegetable gardening and fowl husbandry
© Think Playgrounds

Reflecting the tenets of the new model of public space production pioneered by Think Playgrounds, the main objectives of the proposed forest-park were to:

- Improve environmental conditions and reduce pollution, under the motto “minimizing impact on the alluvial area with the active participation of the community;”
- Improve quality of life by developing a green and beautiful landscaped space that would provide children, youth, women and the elderly with lively activities;
- Curb garbage dumping, protect the environment, and educate children and youth about the environment;
- Contribute to support local ecological diversity and connect the site with other ecological spaces of the city.

Reflecting another distinctive feature of the innovative model forged by Think Playgrounds, the forest-park project evolved throughout its implementation process. Echoing planning-by-doing practices,⁴ the project team adjusted the project’s design and its implementation

process on a continuous basis. This highly flexible approach allowed the project to respond to emerging demands from local authorities and residents as they arose, design adjustment to cope with obstacles and feasibility constraints, and the seizing of opportunities, in terms of collaborations and funding, as they emerged.

This approach led to fluid changes in the actors, funding sources, and activities involved in the realization of the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park. Rather than describing this complex process in all details, the following highlights some of the key moments in the implementation of a project, which, at the time of this study, was still in-progress.

⁴ Also known as tactical urbanism, DIY urbanism, urban acupuncture, or urban prototyping, these approaches refer to a city, organizational, and/or citizen-led approach to neighbourhood building using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions to catalyse long-term change. See: <http://tacticalurbanismguide.com>



Phase 1

The original forest-park project, as approved by local authorities in October 2021, consisted of a multifunctional public space covering 1500 m². ECUE-For a Liveable Hanoi raised most of the funding for its realization.¹ Donors included the Embassy of Denmark in Vietnam, USAID, and Ford Vietnam. The implementation of this phase started in late November 2021 and took about two months.

The main activities and built components implemented during this period, included:

- Development of a masterplan for the new public space with community participation;
- Site clearance with the help of local authorities, including the removal of preexisting activities on the site;
- The removal of 182 tons of waste, a task performed by members of local socio-political organizations (ex: Youth Union) and by volunteers coordinated by Keep Hanoi Clean. The environmental sanitation company of Hanoi (URENCO) helped transport the waste removed to municipal landfills;
- The testing, by the CECR, of a phytological system to treat wastewater discharged on the site (ultimately replaced by a septic tank due to feasibility issues);
- The paving of a road at the top of the site at the demand of residents, with the financial support of Ford Vietnam;
- The establishing of a permaculture garden, the planting of trees, and the construction of a children's playground (using recycled material) with the help of the community;
- The creation of a pathway giving access to the new green space;
- The organization of training sessions for residents about waste management and reduction.

The new green space was officially inaugurated on January 21st 2022.

¹ Half of the budget was used for the community-based design and construction and the rest was dedicated to activities aimed at promoting the project.



Waste collection operation during phase 1
© Think Playgrounds



Playground built during phase 1
© Think Playgrounds



Permaculture garden built during phase 1
© Think Playgrounds

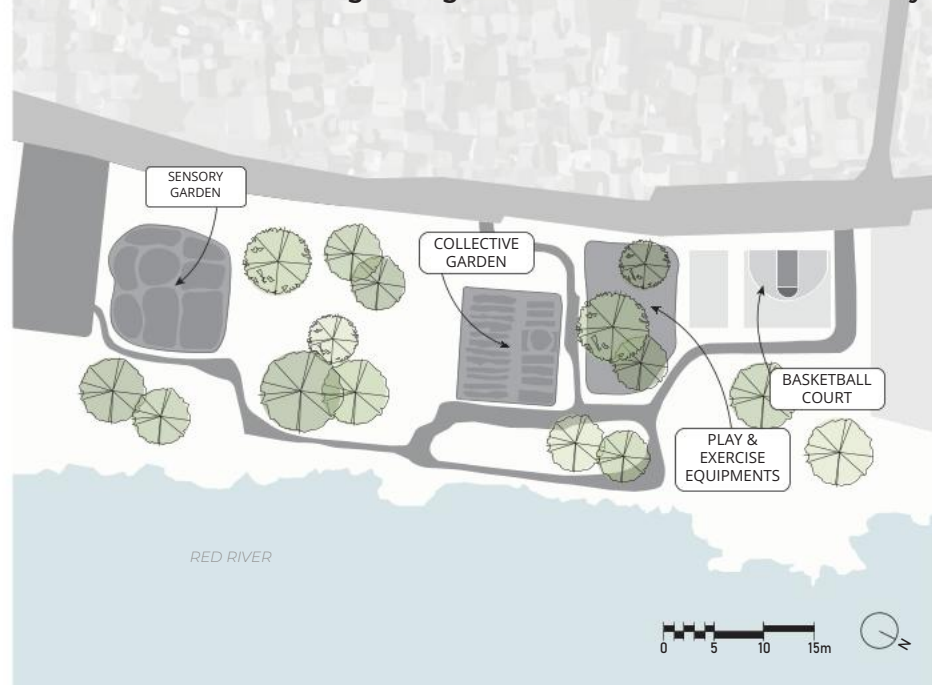


Sensory garden built during phase 2
© D. Labbé, March 2023



Basketball court built during phase 2
© D. Labbé, March 2023

Plan of the Bờ Vỡ-Chương Dương Forest-Park at the time of the study



Phase 2

The success of the project and, in particular, its positive reception by the media and among political leaders, led to the decision to expand the initial project. This second phase began in the summer of 2022. The project team was then re-centered around ECUE-For a Liveable Hanoi and Think Playgrounds² but involved new collaborations and donors (such as the Embassy of New Zealand). The second phase extended the project area to the north and to the south of the first phase to cover a total of 8000 m². Implementation began in the fall of 2022 and was still ongoing at the time of our survey.

The main activities and built components implemented during this phase, included:

- The design and construction, with the support of local community members, of a sensory garden;
- The creation of new pathways throughout the site, using recycled plastic tiles donated by the Hoa Viet Environmental Engineering Joint Stock Company;
- The installation of fitness equipment next to the original children's playground;
- The construction of a basketball court, thanks to the crowdfunding initiative of students at one of Hanoi's high-end, private high schools;
- The connection of the remaining informal pipes either to the septic tank or to an underground connector diverting the wastewater away from the site and towards the river;
- Support for the organization, by the local branch of the Women's Union, of workshops for international school students and for the production of a book aimed at children to explore and learn from the forest-park (activities led by the NGO Dream & Do with funding from US Alumni);
- The establishment of a fund, managed by Think Playgrounds, to respond to emerging needs and support the community-led maintenance of the space.

² Think Playgrounds raised half of the funding for this second phase.

From Skepticism to Community Embrace

Involving the local community in the design and construction of the forest-park proved challenging. Especially during the first phase, distrust of the intentions of the project and disbelief in its feasibility translated into the limited involvement of residents in participatory and collaborative activities organized by Think Playgrounds. For instance, none of the 60 adult users we surveyed took part in a participatory design session during phase one of the project, and only 12 were involved in the waste removal operation or in construction activities.

This dynamic began to change during the project's second phase. As the park began taking form, residents started to believe in its feasibility and to trust that it was a genuinely public endeavour. Several participants stressed that they and their neighbours only started to get involved in the project after they realized it would directly benefit them. Several participants stressed that they got involved in the project because they wanted to contribute to the creation of a beautiful space that would benefit the whole community, and, in particular, the large number of children and elderly people living in the area who had no place to socialize and exercise.

A major turning point in the engagement of local people with the project occurred in February 2023, when a female resident donated 100 million VND (approx. U\$4,100) to purchase a sandbox with children play equipment for the forest-park. Soon after, another resident organized a fundraiser among the local community to purchase several waste bins. A few weeks later, a local family-owned business bought concrete benches which were added to the public space. Around the same time, a handful of civic-minded residents formed a group on an online messaging platform to coordinate the organizing of collective chores to remove the remaining visible trash, plant flowers and trees, and clean the space.

These highly visible contributions and efforts encouraged more people to get involved in improving and maintaining the forest-park. As one of them remarked, "the more people participate, the more people join hands doing it." In line with this, several users reported that seeing other people at work in the space inspired them to give a hand too. "Coming here," an elderly woman told us, "I saw people working to improve the environment. So, I followed their lead and got to work too. I carried material, picked up trash, etc."

" We need to join hands and form a big circle because one person alone cannot do it. It takes many people. Each contributes a little bit, someone sweeps the leaves, someone cleans up, and then it will be done! "

- woman, 67 years old

Several participants acknowledged the importance of this "public work" in the forest-park's success, a realization that fueled their continuous engagement. In a virtuous circle, users report having fun helping out and feeling that it brings joy to others. "Oh my, it's so much fun!," a woman told us, "especially

on Saturdays and Sundays. Each person with a hoe and shovel digging soil and sand. It used to be a very dirty area, but now we're building up this park!"

" There is no reason not to participate when a little effort can bring about so much happiness to others. "

- man, 46 years old

These positive experiences motivate residents to continue helping. The sense of pride about what some called an "amazing achievement," keeps volunteers engaged by nurturing a growing sense of ownership and attachment to the space.



“ The most difficult thing was to clear out garbage that had accumulated for a long time. At the beginning, people did not see much of an effect, so they did not participate much. Therefore, it took a lot of time and effort to get things done. But now, local people see the positive impact of their labour and contributions. And because of that, it’s much simpler to get them involved. ”

- local community leader



Clean, Green Beautiful... but Still In-Progress : Usage and Appreciation



Children in sandbox, © D. Labbé, March 2023

From Hesitancy to Thriving Engagement

Compared to other local public spaces established by Think Playgrounds in Hanoi, the forest-park faced a slower adoption by residents. This delay can be attributed to two key factors, unique to the project's context and nature. Initially, the environmental degradation of the site and the negative associations residents had with it contributed to their reluctance. "To tell the truth," a local community leader remarked, "people were scared of this area."

"Before, there were a lot of trees around here as well as snakes and dirty needles. I was afraid to come here and tried to avoid it. Some years I never came at all."

- woman, 61 years old

In addition to the site's negative reputation, the incremental planning-by-doing approach used to develop the public space might have slowed its adoption. "At first," a female community leader recalled, "only a few swings were installed for the children to play on, made with recycled things." The area, she added, had limited equipment for adults and was still "very overgrown with bushes." During Phase 1, she further noted, efforts were primarily focused on waste removal, and as a result, "the pilot-project did not look very much like a park." An elderly man who visited after the completion of this initial phase

shared the same opinion: "It still looked like an abandoned place. They had chopped trees and bushes and cleaned the waste, but all there was in there was a children's playground built by a few residents."

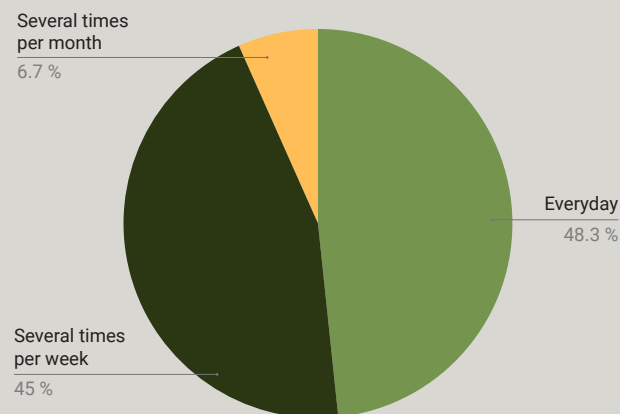
The adoption of the space occurred through a word-of-mouth process. The first users were women who helped develop the permaculture garden, and children living nearby. The latter rapidly noticed the play equipment and spread the word among their friends. Later on, when fitness equipment was installed, it attracted adults and elderly people residing directly in front of the new public space. From there, more children and adults living in the area started to visit the space, often at the suggestion of a family member, friend, or neighbour who had already started using it.

By the time we started our survey, in February 2023, the perspective of residents on the site of the forest-park had shifted. Summarizing this transformation, an elderly woman who visits the space daily told us: "In the past, this place was dense and scary. Now, I feel happy and comfortable coming here and I'm not afraid anymore." In a virtuous circle, the dramatic improvement of environmental conditions, kickstarted during Phase 1, and the gradual addition of amenities and equipment drew more and more children, adults, and elderly users.

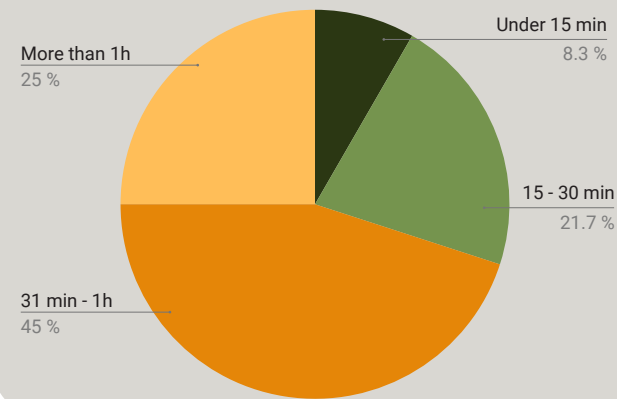
An Actively Used Space

By the time of our survey, the forest-park was actively used by a diverse group of people. Questionnaire data reveals that adult users visit the park frequently and spend a significant amount of time there. Overall, nine out of ten adults reported visiting the space every day or several times per week. Nearly half of all adults spend between 30-60 minutes there during their visits. These patterns are consistent regardless of their gender or place of origin, whether rural migrants or natives of Hanoi. However, adults aged 40 and above, as well as elderly individuals, tend to visit the forest-park more frequently and spend more time there compared to younger users. Children users similarly spend extended periods at the forest-park, with a third staying 30-60 minutes on their visits.

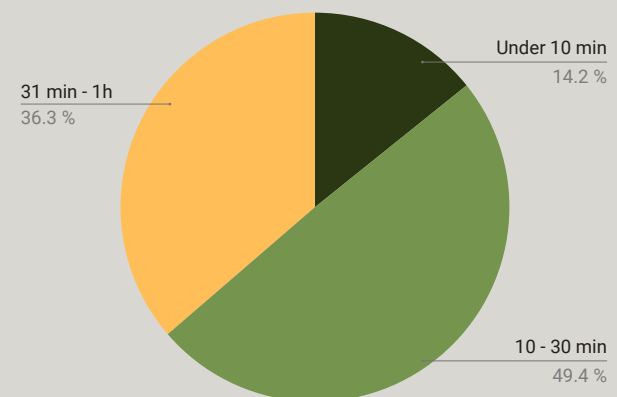
Frequency of adults' visit



Duration of adults' visits

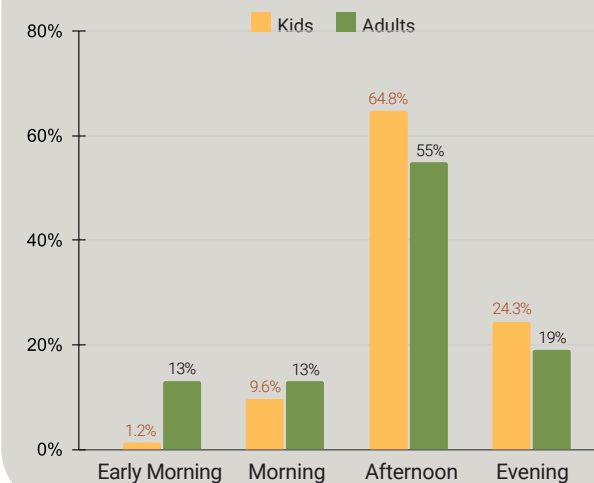


Duration of children's visits



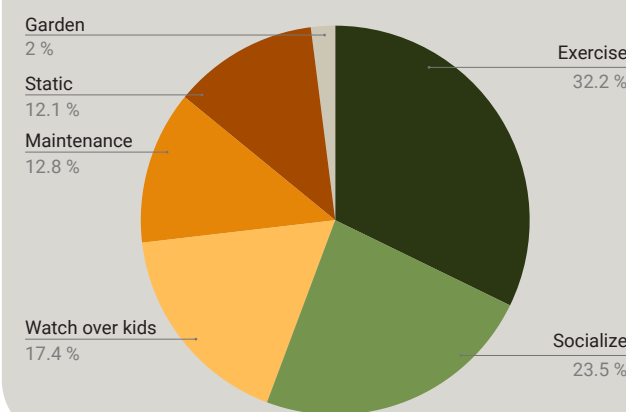
While the forest-park is used throughout the day, there is a clear usage peak in the afternoon. Over half of the adults surveyed reported using the space at that time. This is also when the number of children in the space is the highest. Unsurprisingly, adult women are less present in the park in the mornings (8 am to noon) and evenings (6 pm and later) compared to men. These are periods of the day when women are typically engaged in domestic chores. It might also reflect personal safety concerns among female users as the forest-park was not well-lit when we conducted our survey (two solar lamps have since been installed).

Time of the day visiting the space



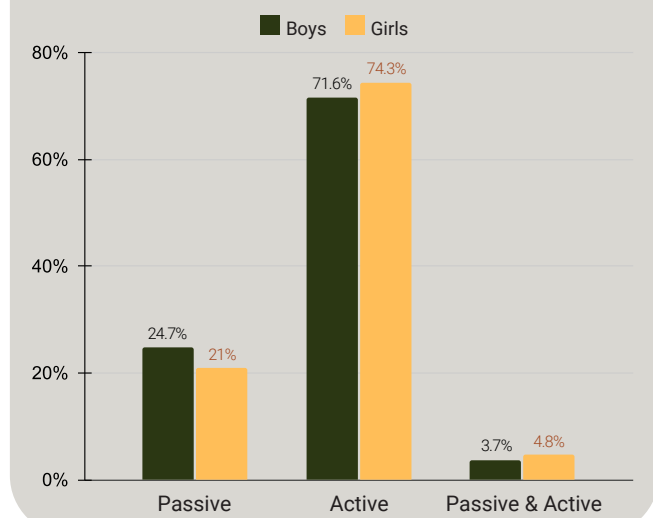
Demonstrating the success of its multifunctional programming, designed to cater to a diverse range of needs and interests, the forest-park serves as a hub for various activities, with users often engaging in multiple activities. The impact of the forest-park on the physical well-being of its users is evidenced by the significant proportion of both adults and children participating in physical activities within the space. A notable 80% of adults utilize the park for exercise, and over a third engage in active maintenance activities during their visits, such as cleaning trash or sweeping the grounds.

Activities practiced by adults



The proportion of children physically active at the forest-park is even higher than that of adults. Nearly three-quarters engage in a physical activity when they visit the space, such as playing basketball or football, enjoying the two playgrounds, or using the fitness equipment. Unlike observations in Hanoi [1] and globally showing that girls tend to be less physically active in public spaces, an almost equal percentage of boys (71,6%) and girls (74,29%) across different age groups are physically active in the forest-park. This has significant positive implications for children's health, particularly considering the growing prevalence of sedentary lifestyles and obesity among children in Hanoi.

Types of activities practiced by children



Positive Aspects and Benefits to Users

Proximity and accessibility -

Before the establishment of the forest-park, the open public spaces closest to Chương Dương were in the inner-city. To reach them, residents had to cross a busy motorway, greatly impeding accessibility in general and for pedestrian in particular. The proximity of the new public space and its accessibility have significantly benefited two groups of residents with limited mobility but a high need for open recreational and socialization spaces: elderly people and children. These factors enable them to exercise and socialize more frequently.

“Normally, we have to go far, but with a park nearby, we can go there whenever we have free time. Before, I only went to the park once a week because it was far, but now that it’s close I go there every day to exercise and chat with people.”

- man, 74 years old

The absence of an entrance fee, common in other Hanoi public spaces, further enhances the accessibility of the forest-park. This aspect of the new public space’s accessibility is especially important in the context of a lower-income neighborhood such as Chương Dương.

“There are other parks to visit, but they require money. Not everyone can afford to take their children or grandchildren out to play there, so this place brings a lot of joy.”

- woman, 52 years old

A beautiful, green, and spacious oasis - For many users, one of the most positive aspects of the forest-park is the dramatic transformation it induced; from a messy, dirty, and hazardous place that most residents avoided to a beautiful, clean and safe collective space.

“I’ve been living here for over 30 years and I tell you: it was so poor, so dirty, and there was this horrible stench. But now it’s changed a lot. It’s clean and beautiful. It’s so beautiful. Every day, I go there to admire it.”

- woman, 49 years old

Many users described the forest-park as “spacious” and “airy” with a “wide open view.” They lauded its “fresh” and “green” environment, contrasting it with the more “crowded” public spaces of the inner-city. These qualities are associated with positive feelings during visits, as reflected in our questionnaire survey where 71% reported feeling comfortable or relaxed and 65% said they feel happy or cheerful (*vui vẻ*) at the forest-park.

“I like everything about this place. It brings positive aspects to life, such as energy, joy, and laughter.”

- man, 46 years old

A healthy space benefiting everyone - Before the establishment of the forest-park, participants spend more time at home, and many of them said this negatively affected their physical and mental health. Adults and elderly people spoke of feeling “stuck” in their “stuffy homes” and of feeling “isolated,” “lonely,” and “depressed.” Others mentioned problems of domestic violence in overcrowded houses. Parents and grandparents similarly shared concerns about children being “glued to screens all day” and lacking opportunities to interact with their peers.

“Before, children would spend all day in the room, on their phones, messing around and breaking things, and their parents would get angry and get into fights with them. Allowing the children to come here and relax is very good for creating a happy family environment.”

- man, 49 years old

In the words of a male user, the forest-park addressed these problems by “providing everyone with a place to exercise, have fun, chat, and relax.” Participants pointed out that this is made possible by the spaciousness, multifunctional programming, and variety of amenities and equipment available at the public space. Adults and elderly people use the fitness equipment, walk around the space, or simply sit on benches to chat with each other or watch children play.



Adults exercising and socializing
© D. Labbé, March 2023

Engaging in these activities not only improves the physical health of users but, as many remarked, fosters positive feelings.

“Everyone is happy and excited about the new park. Now the children have a place to play and have fun. And the elderly have a place to exercise and get some fresh air. Everyone is benefiting from it.”

- woman, 49 years old

The positive reception from children underscores the importance of the active lifestyle the forest-park supports. When asked what they like the most about the space, over 70% pointed to its physical amenities (ex: play and fitness equipment and the basketball court). The other 30% stressed the activities they can practice at the space, such as walking, chatting, kicking a soccer ball, riding a bike, or playing freely under the shade of a tree.

Shortcomings

While the majority of users expressed a highly positive view about the forest-park, both adult and child users identified weaker elements and aspects that require improvement.

Unsanitary conditions -

Despite the dramatic improvement in the area’s sanitary conditions, users believe there is still room for improvement. Our questionnaire survey indicates that only 20% of users consider the space clean, pointing to remaining trash, persisting informal waste disposal by the river, loose dogs, and fowl-raising activities as factors contributing to unsanitary conditions.

Both adults and children complained about the odours emanating from the river,

particularly at high tide. Some called for the burying of the drain collecting wastewater from nearby residential areas. Users also expressed concerns about the presence of mosquitoes, and associated health risks such as dengue fever. Some advocated for the spraying of mosquito repellent. Others blamed the problem on the stagnant waters of the Red River which constitute a breeding environment for mosquitoes.

“I just wish that this place didn’t have any smell. I often have to wear a mask here. I really don’t like the smell of the Red River, it scares me.”

- man, 49 years old

An unfinished, incomplete space -

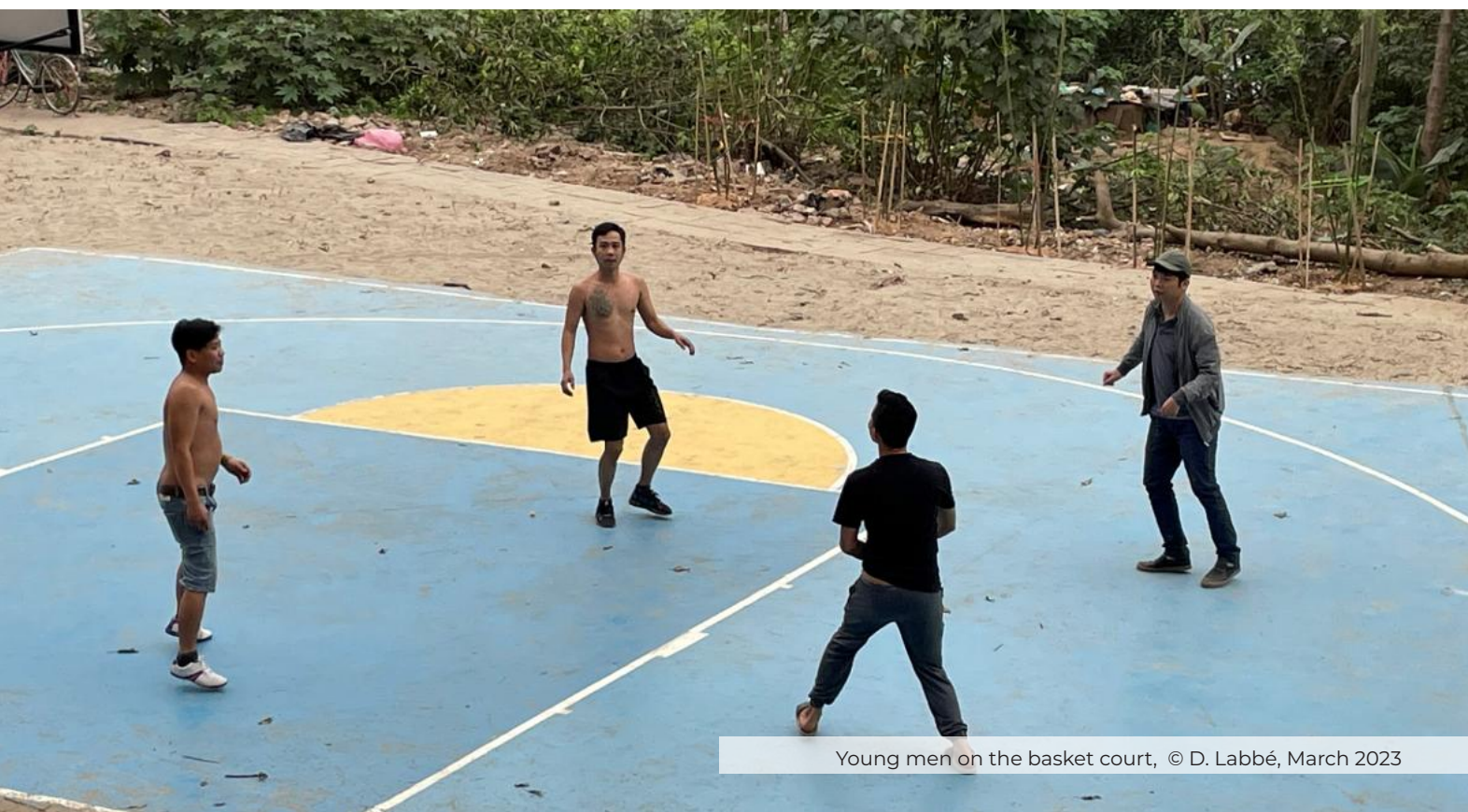
A common concern among participants is that the forest-park remains unfinished. Participants highlighted the need to complete the landscaping and to address what one participant described as “a lot of sandy soil.” Some advocated for paving the space with concrete (or tiles), citing benefits such as enhanced aesthetics, cleanliness during rainy days, prevention of damage to fitness equipment, and the accommodation of more activities. A paved surface, one participant argued, would allow children to jump rope and ride small bicycles in the space. It would also allow adults to organize activities which require a clean or flat surface.

“With a cement floor or a tiled floor, we can sit on the ground, lay a mat to do yoga, or dance comfortably. This would attract more people, adults, seniors, or young people who like to dance, and it will bring joy.”

- male, 75 years old

Too small, not enough

equipment - Despite being spacious and well-equipped by Hanoi standards, several participants expressed a desire for the forest-park to be enlarged and equipped with more facilities. A recurrent comment concerned limitations in fitness equipment availability, leading users to take turns and limiting usage time. Participants, including children, similarly called for additional play equipment, a badminton court and, a football field. These comments, gathered shortly after the forest-park’s opening, reflect its success and attractiveness. Moreover, many participants expressed ideas for redesigning the space or raising funds for new equipment, showcasing their sense of ownership and responsibility towards the new public space.



Young men on the basket court, © D. Labbé, March 2023

The Social Life of the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park



Children at the swings, © D. Labbé, March 2023

Where Strangers Become Neighbours

A significant impact of the forest-park has been to provide the local population of Chương Dương with a high-quality socialization space. Several participants stressed that prior to the establishment of the new public space, there were very few places in the area where they could engage with their local community. As an elderly woman put it: “Before this place existed, we didn’t know where to meet and who to meet.”

Some participants reported that the only people from the area they used to know were their immediate neighbors. Others indicated that, even though they encountered “familiar faces” on the street or at the market, these contexts were not conducive to start a conversation. Schools were one of the only places in the ward where residents engaged with each other.

The forest-park has begun to transform this social dynamic. Contrasting with findings in Western urban contexts [7], the new public space fosters social relations among strangers. Over 80% of the adults surveyed said that the forest-park allows them to socialize with strangers. In interviews, several users spoke with delight about the ease with which they have been able to form new bonds in this space. Pointing to another user in the forest-park a man remarked: “You see this lady over there?

I’ve seen her on the street many times before but we never talked to each other. But here, we start conversations.” Other users emphasized that they regularly meet and talk to new people at the forest-park, including people who live at some distance from their home with whom they would perhaps never have had a chance to meet. As one woman remarked, “this place has expanded my social circle. I used to know only a few ladies, but now with the park, I have a wider network and more exchanges.”

“Oh my, it’s amazing. When I first came here, I didn’t know anyone. The old ladies who come here also got to know each other here. Nobody knew each other, but suddenly they do! We didn’t talk when we met on the street, but then we met here, and now we do.”

- woman, 66 years old

In many cases, interactions start with a greeting or mundane exchange. If most relationships stay at the level of casual acquaintance, some develop into genuine friendship. As of the time of our survey, there was, for instance, a dozen elderly women gathering every morning to exercise at the forest-park. Most had met at the park, and many said it took only a few weeks before they became friends. Several interviewees emphasized that engaging with strangers was surprisingly easy and occurred

naturally at the forest-park. In the words of an elderly woman, “getting acquainted with people [at the park] is as easy as pie!”

“It is great having this place because here, I can meet a lot of strangers and break the ice, talking to them, getting to know each other. From strangers, we become friends.”

- woman, 62 years old

A Social Landscape Fostering Positive Encounters

Not all open and green urban public spaces are conducive to interactions between strangers or to the forging of social bonds—and certainly not to the level of the Bồ Vỡ-Chương Dương Forest-Park. Some participants made the same observation in the context of Hanoi, contrasting the socialization dynamic at the forest-park with that of public spaces in the inner-city they visit (ex: the Lý Thái Tổ public garden and the walkway around Hoàn Kiếm lake), which they described as much less conducive to social interactions. Three aspects of the forest-park seem to contribute to its unique ability to foster positive encounters among its users.

“Before having the forest-park, when we went to the [Hoàn Kiếm] lake, we only focused on exercising. There were no interactions. But here, we naturally greet each other.”

- man, 63 years old

01- An everyday social space

While it was developed relatively recently, the forest-park rapidly became an everyday social space in Chương Dương. As discussed in the previous section, the same people visit the space regularly. As a result, over 80% of adult users say they recognize at least some of the other people present in the park when they visit it. As research conducted in other contexts indicates [8], regular encounters between users, day after day, is a key factor encouraging interactions between strangers in public spaces. The experience of a female user supports this. “In the first one or two days,” she remarked, “you might feel a bit awkward, but afterward, because we meet each other constantly here, we start to talk.”

02- An open, welcoming and friendly space

Nearly all the users we surveyed perceive the forest-park as a genuinely open and public space. Asked to explain what gives them this feeling, participants stressed that everyone can freely use, enjoy, and participate in the space and that no one is banned from entering it for from using its facilities. Many also emphasized that the multifunctional programming of the park attracts a wide range of people, which facilitates encounters with socioeconomically different people.

“There is no discrimination here. Whether you are a rural person who works as a maid, it doesn’t matter. Everyone is allowed to come here and use the equipment or sit with others.”

- man, 75 years old

Participants further emphasized the inclusive attitude of users and the fact that it makes people with different backgrounds feel welcomed to the forest-park. As a user remarked, the new public space “gathers many generations, many social classes, and people who originate from many places.” He added that the mingling of a wide range of people at the park “makes it easier to communicate across social differences.” Further supporting social interactions between strangers is the forest-park’s friendly atmosphere. Participants stressed that when they first visited the space, they felt that other users were open and approachable. Others pointed to the low level of conflicts in the space. “I have never seen anyone arguing or raising their voice here,” a man remarked, adding: “it’s giving a positive energy.”

“When I first started to come here, I had fewer encounters. But even then, I saw that the people here were very friendly. Now that I have more interactions, the friendliness and joyfulness are multiplied many times.”

- woman, 52 years old

03 - Powerful Connectors

Specific facilities available at the forest-park encourage

interactions between strangers. Two of the most powerful social connectors are the fitness equipment and the two children’s playgrounds. Several participants told us that the fitness equipment often acts as icebreakers to start conversations with strangers. “Just standing here, working out together, waiting to take turns using the fitness equipment,” a woman user remarked, “even if you don’t know each other, you will naturally start to talk to each other.” She added, “This is interesting because I am not someone who goes out and socialize much. But when I come here, I talk and make friends with everyone.”

A similar socialization pattern occurs around the playground area. As parents and grandparents watch over small children playing, they begin conversations and get to know each other. Two thirds of the parents and grandparents whose children come to play at the forest-park reported knowing the other parents who bring their children to the space. Almost all of them met at the forest-park.

“One day I came to this park and there was this woman looking over her child playing. I asked her: ‘Is your house next to this alley?’ and she said ‘Yes.’ The conversation went on about the time of day we come to the park, and then we made plans to meet here every Saturday and Sunday. We became friends and got to know each other’s friends too.”

- woman, 46 years old

The involvement of residents in the construction, cleaning, beautifying, and maintenance of the forest-park is another powerful vector of social connections. Nearly 90% of the people who have taken part in such activities reported meeting someone new through it. “Recently,” a man in his forties remarked, “some residents got together to help clear garbage. We were not acquainted but we got to know each other that way. It was a great opportunity to meet new people from the area.”

A More United and Happier Community

The sociability which developed at the forest-park has spilled beyond its boundaries. Local community leaders and residents stressed its transformative impact on the broader social and community dynamics in Chương Dương.

“This project led to huge social changes here. Especially regarding solidarity, understanding, empathy, and closeness among residents. In the past, households only cared about themselves. They didn’t even greet each other when they met. Now, everyone is very happy and volunteers to work together. Life has changed. Exactly in the way Hanoi is worth living.”

- local community leader

Nearly all the users we surveyed (97%) said that the forest-park makes them feel they belong to a community. The collective effort to establish the new public space, and the social interactions it allows, has improved relationships between neighbours. Several participants indicated that the new public space allows them to have much more regular and positive interactions with their neighbours. As a result, they feel closer and get along with them better than they used to. Others explained that the forest-park has contributed to making its users happier and more relaxed and that this has translated into an overall sense of unity and harmony and into fewer conflicts in their neighborhoods. A woman observed a similar change among local children. “Now they hang out there a lot. At times, they might want to argue, but seeing each other every day is preventing that.”

Conclusion



Children next to the community garden, © D. Labbé, March 2023

The Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park stands as an innovative response to Hanoi’s enduring shortage of public spaces. This initiative represents a departure from the prevailing neglect of smaller, accessible public spaces in Hanoi, especially in economically disadvantaged areas like Chương Dương. This ambitious project transcends the mere creation of a new green open space in Hanoi. Instead, it embodies a paradigm shift regarding the nature and roles of public spaces in Vietnamese cities and the ways in which they can be produced. Specifically, the Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-

Park exemplifies the viability and substantial benefits of approaches grounded in social justice, environmental sustainability, and community-based collaboration principles for conceiving and developing public spaces in urban Vietnam.

Addressing the Scarcity of Public Spaces – In the last two decades, planning authorities’ focus on the establishment of large municipal parks and on the renovation of existing public gardens in Hanoi has led to a neglect of smaller, more accessible public spaces, especially in lower socioeconomic areas. This scarcity, particularly

pronounced in the riverside area of the city, like the Chương Dương ward, forced residents to travel some distance to access open public spaces, and limited children and elderly people's access to these amenities. The establishment of the forest-park reflects a departure from this trend, addressing the specific needs of local populations in lower-income areas by providing a multifunctional, accessible, and well-designed open public space.

Revitalizing the Riverside – The riverside area of Hanoi, long burdened by floods and stigmatized as a “slum,” has undergone a positive transformation in environmental and socioeconomic conditions over the past two decades. Despite these changes, “outer dike” wards, such as Chương Dương, have retained a lower socioeconomic profile and lack public amenities, with almost no open or green spaces for residents. It is in this context that a group of civil society organizations, led by ECUE-For a Livable Hanoi and Think Playgrounds, proposed repurposing a neglected segment of the Red River's alluvial plain, previously marred by informal garbage dumping and domestic wastewater discharge into a forest-park. The project adopted a unique approach to urban development, combining environmental restoration with incremental, participatory planning, and do-it-yourself construction methods. This

strategy helped overcome local residents' apprehensions tied to the site's negative reputation and to progressively earn their trust. It further enabled the project's evolution from a modest playground and permaculture garden into a spacious multifunctional park.

A Space that Benefits Everyone – Survey data indicates that less than a year and a half after it broke ground, the forest-park had already become an integral part of residents' lives, significantly altering perceptions of the alluvial plain and fostering a sense of community. The park's multifunctional programming, spanning from playgrounds, to gardens, and fitness equipment, has actively engaged residents of all age groups. Adults 40 and above, children, and elderly individuals, in particular, use the park regularly and intensively, spending substantial time on various activities. Proximity, accessibility, and the absence of entrance fees have been crucial in making the forest-park a cherished resource, especially for elderly individuals and children. Users praise the transformation of the site from a once-feared area to a clean, beautiful, and spacious oasis. The inclusion of multiple facilities caters to diverse needs, promoting physical well-being and countering sedentary lifestyles.

Community-led Transformation and Challenges – The responsive and tactical approach through

which the forest-park was developed represents a departure from rigid, pre-defined plans. Phased implementation, involving diverse actors, adapting to emerging demands, and seizing opportunities underscore the flexibility of this model. However, community engagement, especially during the initial phase, faced skepticism, with residents wary of project intentions and feasibility. Overcoming these challenges required time and visible benefits. A turning point occurred when a resident donated money to build a second children's playground in the space. This catalyzed community initiatives, creating a virtuous cycle of participation, pride, and ownership. This grassroots involvement not only transformed the forest-park physically but also testifies to the potential impact of community-led efforts in reshaping urban spaces in Hanoi.

Positive Impacts on Social Dynamics – The forest-park's influence extends beyond its physical boundaries, fostering positive social interactions and community dynamics in Chương Dương. The park serves as a social hub and fosters positive encounters between strangers, with over 80% of adults reporting increased socialization as a result of visiting the space. An everyday social space, open, welcoming, and fostering connections, the forest-park is a powerful connector, bringing together users from different generations and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The involvement of residents in collective activities further strengthens social bonds. The park's transformative impact has led to a more united and happier community, with residents reporting improved relationships among neighbors, reduced conflicts, and a greater sense of harmony in the area where they live.

The Bồ Vở-Chương Dương Forest-Park is as a beacon of hope in Hanoi's ongoing efforts to provide its growing population with accessible and high-quality public spaces. The forest-park's success in overcoming challenges, engaging the community, and transforming a neglected area underscores the potential of the innovative model of public space production pioneered by Think Playgrounds. If this model gains further traction, with the support of Vietnamese local government and planning authorities, there is a promising prospect for a more equitable distribution of public spaces in the Vietnamese capital city and beyond. The forest-park analyzed in this report stands not only as a physical testament to these ideals but also as a vibrant, community-driven space that transformed the life of the residents and community where it was established. Its story serves as a blueprint for future endeavors, illustrating the profound impact of grassroots initiatives in redefining urban spaces and enhancing community well-being.

Methodology and portrait of the participants

The data analysed in this report was generated using a mix of observational, survey questionnaire and qualitative interview methods with the aim of getting a broad portrait of the usage, appreciation, and impact of the new public space on its users as the time of data collection (see box below). This process took place in two phases:

Phase 1

From late-March to late-April 2023, we administered a survey questionnaire to 60 adult users and conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with 30 adult users of the forest-park to document their involvement and experience with the creation and maintenance of the new public space, the ways they use and perceive the space, the types of interactions they have when they visit it, and their appreciation of the new amenity. The participants to the questionnaire and interview were recruited directly in the forest-park. While the sampling did not follow strict quotas, we aimed for a variety of profiles in terms of sex, age group, and place of origin.

During that same first phase, we also conducted two interviews with representatives of the organisations behind the project (Think Playgrounds and ECUE) to understand its origins, intentions, implementation and the challenges these organisations faced. We also interviewed three local leaders active in the area where the new forest-park is located, including leaders of one of the local resident groups (*to dan pho*) and of two local branches of the socio-political organizations of the Fatherland Front. Interviews with local leaders aimed at understanding their role in the project, their perspective on its approach and results, and challenges (both actual and foreseen) related to the implementation and management of the new public space.

Phase 2

From mid-June to early July we conducted an observational survey to document the usage of the space by children (age 0-18 years old). A total of 266 observation sessions of approximately 60 minutes each were conducted, spread across different times of the day (early morning, mid-morning, afternoon, and evening) and days of the week (weekdays, Saturdays, and Sundays).

We also administered a short survey questionnaire to 60 children users, focused on their usage and appreciation of the new public space¹. We aimed for an equal number of boys and girls and of children from the three following age groups: preschoolers (0-5 years old), primary and middle-

¹ In the case of the younger children, the questionnaire was administered to an older person (ex: parent or sibling) accompanying them to the space.

school (around 6-11 years old), and high-school teenagers (12-18 years old). The adults who participated in the questionnaire and interview survey represent, to some extent, the demographic who was using the forest-park at the time of data collection.

Profile of the adult users surveyed - A slightly higher number of adult male (46) than female (44) users participated in the questionnaire and interview surveys.² The vast majority of participants (76/90) were over 40 years old or older at the time of our survey. Despite significant efforts to recruit young adult users, only two persons aged 18-25 years old participated in our questionnaire survey (none participated to the interviews). Similarly, three-quarters (69/90) of the participants are well-established residents of Chương Dương, having resided in this ward for two decades or more. Nearly all the users who participated in the questionnaire survey (54/60) live less than 500 meters from the space. These participants estimated that it takes them between one and five minutes to go to the space by foot. In terms of occupations, two-thirds of the users who participated to the questionnaire or interview surveys are either homemakers (26/90), freelance workers (20/90), or retirees (18/90). The rest includes people involved in informal activities such as street vending (9/90), employees in the public and private sector (8/90) and people who run small businesses in the area (4/90).

Profile of the children users surveyed - Thirty girls and 31 boys aged between 0-18 years old answered a short questionnaire about their usage and appreciation of the forest-park. Due to recruiting constraints a slightly higher number of children age 6-11 years old (23/61) participated in the survey compared to the teenagers (19/31) and preschoolers (19/61). The nearly equal number of the children surveyed reside in the two wards directly adjacent to the forest-park: Chuong Duong (29/61) and Phuc Tan (28/61). Compared to the adult users, only half of the children surveyed (31/61) live less than 5 minutes away from the park by foot. The other half lives slightly further away and reports having to walk or be taken by motorbike for 5-10 minutes to get to the park (28/61).

² A small number of users participated to both the questionnaire and to the interview survey.

At the time of this survey, a majority of the forest-park adult and children users resided very close to the space. This proximity and the fact that a large proportion of the adult users are middle-aged or elderly people who either stay at home, work from home or else control their work schedule (eg. the freelancers) helps to explain some of the patterns of usage discussed in this report, notably the frequency and intensity with which these people visit the space. It is likely that the service-area of the park has continued to extend since we conducted our survey, as more and more people 'discovered' its existence. And this will likely transform the patterns of usage of the space, with some users visiting the space less frequently.

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