

Capitalist Transition on Wheels

Development, Consumption and Motorised Mobility in Hanoi

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Part I

1. Introduction

‘Key to all success is judging when to make that first step [...]. What the situation calls for is a steady, ambling stroll at a constant pace. Unnerving as it may be, whatever you do – do not quicken your pace’¹

The above quote is an excerpt from one of the many online guides to how to cross the road in Hanoi. Indeed, a very common story from tourists visiting contemporary Hanoi concerns the challenges associated with getting from one side of the street to another. One of the arguably most mundane practices of urban life thus becomes extraordinary to foreigners in Vietnam’s capital. This is partly caused by the relaxed attitude of drivers to pedestrian crosswalks, but it is also due to the prevalence of motorbikes² in the streets. The first steps onto the streets of Hanoi are indeed overwhelming. Motorbikes zoom past in seemingly every direction at the same time, buzzing, honking and swirling in the crowded traffic. They are parked all over sidewalks; they are even driven on sidewalks at times, making the city a nightmare for untrained pedestrians. While the motorbikes will dodge you, however, recent developments make crossing the road even more challenging: The already highly motorised streets of Hanoi have over the last decade seen a fast and steady increase in the number of cars.

The street scenes illustrate one of the most significant changes in Hanoi since the market reforms known as *doi moi* were introduced in 1986. The consumption of motorised vehicles is the most visible manifestation of the new material affluence in Vietnam. This also reflects global trends. The global shift that Peter Dicken (2015) has been discussing since 1986 continues materialising. However, while production has been moving East for decades, a new shift is still underway in the form of consumption. While the Global North continues increasing their levels of consumption, the number of middle-class consumers in Asia has now been estimated to be close to equal that of North America and Europe (Kharas and Gertz, 2010). And the middle classes continue growing in the South, not only estimated to represent 80 percent of the global middle class by 2030, but also to account for 70 percent of the

¹ <http://www.buffalotours.com/blog/hanoi-travel-tip-how-to-cross-the-road/>

² As is common practice in Vietnam, throughout the thesis I use the term motorbike to refer to most two-wheelers, although I frequently use motorcycle when discussing industrial developments. Most motorbikes in Vietnam range between 50 and 150 CC and are relatively small in size. The fully automatic versions would elsewhere usually be known as scooters.

world's total consumption expenditure the same year (UNDP, 2013; Hansen and Wethal, 2015a)³.

From an academic point of view, going behind these numbers represents an intriguing field of inquiry. From the perspective of environmental sustainability understanding this shift becomes imperative. In a world that is already consuming the planet to excess, and where the mature capitalist countries have not managed to create the 'development space' called for by the Brundtland Commission in order to let poorer parts of the world raise their living standards (see Hansen and Wethal, 2015a), the rapid rise in levels of consumption in other parts of the world will put further strain on the environment. Consumption is indeed one of the main challenges of sustainable development (see discussion in Princen et al., 2002; Southerton et al., 2004; McNeill and Wilhite, 2015). A wide variety of goods are relevant to this discussion, but one clearly stands out due to its social and economic position and its social, economic and environmental impact: the private automobile.

Cars produce air pollution directly, and are closely linked to the fossil fuelled, high-carbon modern society. Cars furthermore demand significant space both in motion and parked, and have deeply influenced urban planning, mobility and health globally. The auto industry is considered one of the most important in the world, 'the industry of industries' (Drucker 1946, 149), vital to industrialisation processes among early and late developers. It also holds a special position in the global shift, as some of the most well-known global car brands are now Asian, and more than half of total global automobile production currently takes place in Asia (OICA, 2015b). While car consumption is by far the highest in mature capitalist countries, with the US leading the way with 790 four-wheelers per 1000 people (OICA, 2014), 'emerging' Asia is catching up. China is in the lead of this catch-up process with its 23.5 million new cars sales or registrations in 2014 alone, but many other Asian countries have also seen a sharp rise in automobile consumption (OICA, 2015a).

However, although usually not picked up by measures of private vehicle ownership, such as the 'motorisation rate' (four-wheelers per 1000 people), mobility in many East and Southeast Asian countries has been privately motorised through the car's two-wheeled little brother. The motorbike shares many similarities with the car as a predominantly private and fossil fuel-driven vehicle. At the same time it is quite different from it, requiring different skills to operate, requiring less space, less fuel and in many ways providing less safety for the

³ The numbers are retrieved from the *Human Development Report 2013*, based on numbers from the Brookings Institution (2012, in UNDP, 2013) and consider as middle class those that earn or spend between USD 10 and USD 100 a day in 2005 USD PPP terms. These estimates are of course highly uncertain, but nevertheless give a good indication of the expected future trend of the emerging middle classes.

driver. Although motorbikes exist around the world, and have played important roles in mobility and as symbols for a variety of subcultures (e.g. Arvidsson, 2001), the ‘motorbike society’ is in many ways an Asian phenomenon (although motorbike ownership in many African countries is growing rapidly), and Asia is indeed estimated to be home to more than 75 percent of the world’s motorbikes (Dimitriou and Gakenheimer, 2011).

Vietnam certainly contributes to this trend. From four million motorbikes in 1996 (MONRE 2007), motorbike ownership has increased more than ten-fold nationwide, and the country of approximately 92 million people is now home to an estimated 43 million motorbikes (Vietnam Register in Tuoi Tre News, 2015). Hanoi was home to little more than 50.000 motorbikes in the 1980s (Koh, 2006), a number which had grown to four million in 2014, and on average every Hanoian household owns more than two motorbikes (World Bank, 2014). The two-wheelers are by international standards still increasing very rapidly in numbers, but since the mid-2000s car ownership has increased much faster, more than tripling in ten years to reach an estimated 200.000 vehicles (World Bank, 2014). The immense growth in motorised vehicles has transformed Hanoi’s streets, but has received very limited academic attention. Why and how this transformation has taken place is the main focus of this thesis.

Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to explain the rapid changes in consumption of private vehicles in Hanoi following Vietnam’s economic reforms, focusing on the extraordinary consumption of motorbikes and the more recent rapid emergence of cars in the motorbike-dominated streets. The approach taken is multi-scalar, investigating macro processes of economic development and industrialisation combined with a strong grounded focus on the streetscapes of Hanoi and perspectives from people actually consuming these goods.

As is discussed below, it is well established that there are close connections between consumption and economic growth. Furthermore, history shows that there are to some extent strong correlations between income levels and vehicle ownership (see e.g. Medlock and Soligo, 2002; Nishitateno and Burke, 2014). The relationship is however far from perfect, in Southeast Asia visible through for example high-income Singapore’s motorisation rate (four-wheelers per 1000 people) of 153 and middle-income Malaysia’s 397 (OICA, 2014).

Beyond economic factors, we know less about how and why consumption of private vehicles increases in contexts of rapid development. We also know little about how motorbikes have come to dominate traffic and society to such an extent in a number of Asian countries, a development that had no precursor anywhere in the world. This thesis aims to

explain these processes in the context of Hanoi. In order to do so it analyses overall economic and political changes in Vietnam and the specific social, cultural, material and geographical factors influencing consumption and mobility in Hanoi. The dissertation has been guided by two overarching research questions, one empirical and one theoretical.

RQ1: Why and how has the consumption of cars and motorbikes increased so rapidly in Hanoi over the past decades?

In order to answer this question, on the one hand I discuss the radical economic changes following reforms in Vietnam, with a particular focus on industrialisation and regional and global economic integration. This includes an analysis of the attempts to develop a domestic automobile industry, as well as the planned and unplanned elements of the development of the domestic motorcycle industry. These changes in ‘systems of provision’ (Fine, 2002) are crucial to understand changing consumption, but are not sufficient explanations. Thus, based on empirical research I also aim to understand changing consumption from a bottom-up perspective, based on observations and interviews in Hanoi.

As is discussed throughout the thesis, research on both consumption and ‘automobilities’ have tended to focus mainly on mature capitalist societies, and holistic approaches combining the political-economic and socio-cultural factors necessary to explain consumption in the context of Vietnam’s development trajectory are found lacking. Rapid economic development involves a wide range of processes that are relevant for consumption. These depend spatially and temporally on context, and take place on different geographical scales - local, national, regional, global – all of which in different ways influence each other (as discussed in chapter 2). Understanding exactly how these processes co-shape specific consumption patterns, particularly in rapidly growing economies, is a crucial venture for research on consumption. Based on engagement with existing theoretical perspectives and the empirical material, this thesis suggests ways in which consumption research can be advanced in order to be better equipped for understanding consumption in the context of processes of rapid economic development. This ambition is reflected in the second research question:

RQ2: How can consumption theory engage with the multi-scalar processes of rapid economic development?

The empirical research question (RQ1) will mainly be answered through the articles in Part II of the dissertation, and the findings are summarised in the conclusion of Part I. The theoretical question (RQ2) will be discussed throughout the dissertation and assessed in the conclusion of Part I.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured in two main parts. Part I consists of six chapters (including this introduction), presenting the aims for the thesis, the theories guiding the research, the research context and the methods employed, as well as article summaries and conclusions of the PhD project. This part serves as an introduction to the articles in the second part of the thesis. Part II consists of four journal articles, each published or accepted for publication in different peer-reviewed academic journals.

Chapter 2 both outlines the theoretical starting points for this thesis and serves as a literature review of theories of consumption and mobility. It is structured around four main points; the symbolic dimension of consumption, consumption through everyday practices, the ‘mobilities turn’ and its theoretical linkages to consumption research, and the relationship between consumption and economic development.

Chapter 3 contextualises the thesis in the overall changes in Vietnam since *doi moi* and serves as an introduction to, and literature review of, Vietnam’s rapid economic development. Through discussing market reforms and the combination of state capitalism and Leninist political structures the chapter serves as an important part of the thesis through considering the changing conditions for consumption in Vietnam. It furthermore briefly introduces Hanoi and the transformation of the city since *doi moi*, as well as the overall changes in consumption in Vietnam and Hanoi over the last decades.

Chapter 4 presents the methods employed to collect the empirical data, and discusses ethical concerns surrounding the fieldwork. It presents the overall method as ‘motorbike ethnography’, consisting of a combination of participant observation and interviews. The chapter explains how driving in the chaotic traffic in Hanoi was a crucial part of the research, outlines the interviews conducted and the types of informants that have contributed to the empirical findings, and discusses the overall research quality of the project as well as the ethical considerations that have been made in the research process.

Chapter 5 provides summaries of the four articles of the thesis. All four articles are either published or accepted for publication in international academic journals and make up independent academic works relating to different fields of academic literature and different

academic discourses. The first three articles in different ways discuss cars and motorbikes in Vietnam and Hanoi. The fourth article is co-authored and discusses development and the consumption of cars, beauty products and air conditioners in Vietnam and India. The comparative analysis of development and changing consumption in the two Asian emerging economies is used to discuss the relationship between rapid economic development and changing consumption patterns.

Chapter 6 concludes the overall thesis by drawing upon the analytical framework and literature overview of Part I and the empirical findings and theoretical discussions of the four articles. Drawing on the findings in Hanoi, the conclusion discusses potential further theoretical developments in research on consumption in rapidly growing economies. It ends by suggesting possible future ventures for research on consumption and mobility in Hanoi and elsewhere.

Part II includes the following articles:

1. Hansen, A (in press): ‘Driving development? The problems and promises of the car in Vietnam’, accepted for publication in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. Date of acceptance: March 26, 2015.
2. Hansen, A (2015) ‘Transport in transition: *Doi moi* and the consumption of cars and motorbikes in Hanoi’, *Journal of Consumer Culture*. Published online before print August 25, 2015, doi: 10.1177/1469540515602301
3. Hansen, A (in press): ‘Hanoi on wheels: Emerging automobility in the land of the motorbike’, accepted for publication in *Mobilities*. Date of acceptance: January 6, 2016.
4. Hansen, A, Nielsen, KB and Wilhite, H (2016): ‘Staying Cool, Looking Good, Moving Around: Consumption, Sustainability and the “Rise of the South”’, *Forum for Development Studies*. Published online before print January 20, 2016, doi: 10.1080/08039410.2015.1134640

2. Theorising consumption and mobility

As Warde (2014: 281) argues, the unprecedented material abundance of the Post-World War II Long Boom sparked new academic interest in consumption beyond the study of poverty or ‘normative critique of leisure and luxury’. It was however not until the 1980s and 90s that interest in consumption as a subject of academic inquiry really started taking off (see Miller, 1995a). In geography consumption became so popular in the early 1990’s that Nicky Gregson (1995) wrote a review piece in *Progress in Human Geography* entitled ‘And now it’s all consumption?’, discussing what he described as a significant ‘turn’ towards consumption within social geography particularly. This, Gregson noted, included a significant amount of research on shopping malls and advertising, and, as will be discussed below, was strongly anchored in the ‘cultural turn’ of the social sciences.

Since the start in the late 1980s and early 1990s, geographical approaches to consumption have evolved significantly, and have involved many different fields as well as interconnections with other disciplines of the social sciences. As Mansvelt (2011: 5) argues, ‘[t]he diversity of approaches, subjects, and interdisciplinary exchanges does nevertheless make any concept of consumption geography as a bounded, unified and systematic disciplinary subdivision of human geography indefensible’. Indeed, consumption research as an overall field is multi-disciplinary, if not inter-disciplinary. There are both recognisable disciplinary fields of interest as well as overlapping themes and issues. For example, the renewed interest in social practice theory (as discussed below) cuts across disciplinary boundaries. Still, although often overlapping to significant extents, anthropologists remain interested in the socio-cultural meanings and use of goods, sociologists in the position of goods in social classes and structures, and geographers in spaces and places of consumption (see the contributions in Miller, 1995b for excellent early overviews of disciplinary approaches to consumption, including Jackson and Thrift, 1995 on geography). The focus of geographers on spatial dimensions of consumption has seen contributions on a diverse range of consumption sites, from ‘spectacular’ spaces such as malls and theme parks to more mundane spaces such as car boot sales and people’s homes, as well as on how diverse sites

and places become spatially connected through consumption (see Mansvelt, 2005). While such research remains geographically anchored, however, there are clear overlaps between the research of consumption geographers and the overall field of consumption research (for overviews of geographical takes on consumption, see for example Goodman et al. 2010; Goss, 2004; Mansvelt, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). The most significant difference in approaches to consumption is found between non-economic and mainstream economic approaches.

Conceptualising consumption

While good at picking up trends in changing demand, economic analyses are less convincing at explaining the drivers behind consumption, and have little to say about the social and cultural meanings of consumption. While neoclassical economics with its dominant methodological individualism takes the utility-maximising rational individual as a starting point for understanding consumption, non-economic approaches in general decline this assumption and see consumption as a fundamentally social and cultural phenomenon. Empirical research shows that consumption is socially patterned and that preferences are clearly not simply a function of personal choices or financial resources, but rather of group conformity and differences between social groups in what is considered desirable (Warde and Southerton, 2012a). Since '[n]o human exists except steeped in the culture of his time and place', the individual human being is not a very useful place to start for explaining societal phenomena (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979: 42). While non-economic approaches differ in a variety of ways, they thus usually have in common an insistence on consumption as more than rational individual choice. As Slater (1997: 5) states in his thorough overview of modern and post-modern approaches to consumption: 'In a word, the profoundly *social* nature of consumption is about as close to a universal presupposition as any responsible social theorist ever gets'.

Another crucial difference between orthodox economic and other approaches to consumption lies in the former's conceptualisation of consumption as purchase. Both non-economic approaches and alternative economic approaches go beyond this to include use and sometimes also the discarding of objects. This is a crucial point, since it involves going beyond consumption as exchange and instead incorporating the full 'social life' of an object (Appadurai, 1986). For Warde (2005: 137), consumption is 'a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or

not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion'. This thesis takes a broad approach to consumption as a starting point and follows Harold Wilhite (2008a: 3) in conceptualising consumption as 'the acquisition and use of things'.

There have been many attempts to develop general, grand theories of consumption. One prominent example is again neoclassical economics, with its understanding of all consumption as a function of individual preferences and rational, autonomous, choices. Others are found in non-economic approaches, such as in some theories of 'consumerism' or 'consumer society' (see Fine, 2002 for discussion).

There has however been a growing recognition of the complexity of consumption and support for the view that there is no single theory that could work for all types of consumption (see e.g. Miller, 1995a; Fine, 2002; Wilhite, 2008a). In his critique of both mainstream economic and post-modern 'cultural' readings of consumption, Ben Fine (2002) strongly argues that it is impossible to construct a horizontal theory of consumption that encapsulates all consumption practices. He argues that vertical theories are needed, where different consumption domains require distinct treatment. Similarly, Wilk (2002: 9) argues that 'a pragmatic pluralist approach must draw on whatever tools can work, recognizing that different explanations for consumption may be useful in the right circumstances'.

This thesis is informed by and indebted to many different theoretical approaches to consumption, and, in addition to development geography, draws on the field of consumption research outside strict disciplinary boundaries. More than anything, as explained in chapter 4, it takes an empirically grounded approach to consumption, supporting what Miller (2001c: 234) calls 'a quest for an empathetic enquiry into experience'. Nevertheless, seeing cars and motorbikes as private goods that are at the same time conspicuous consumer items and tools for everyday mobility, I locate two overarching approaches to theorising consumption that will be outlined in the following sections; consumption as forms of symbolic display and performance, and consumption through everyday practices. I will then turn the focus towards transport and outline recent contributions, many of them by geographers, towards theorising mobility, as well as their possible interconnections with consumption research, before discussing both mobility and consumption in relation to processes of economic development. Following these discussions I will outline more specifically how the combination of these theoretical approaches results in an analytical framework for this thesis.

Symbolic Consumption

'Since the consumption of these more excellent goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes honorific; and conversely, the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit' (Veblen, 2005 [1899]: 53).

Humans are social creatures, and that different social settings affect the way people behave is an essential insight of the social sciences. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1990 [1959]) famously characterised this social behaviour as engaging in different forms of *performances* depending on social context. While Goffman's theorisations around this phenomenon have been subject to substantial criticism, the underlying thesis that people do engage in social performances, although perhaps not as theatrical as Goffman professed, has proved resilient (see Raffel, 2013). In consumption research, the role of material goods in social performances has been one of the defining questions of the field, and indeed predates Goffman's account by half a century.

Among the earlier approaches to the performative aspects and social symbolism of consumption, economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen has had the most influential contributions. In his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (2005 [1899]) he famously introduced the term 'conspicuous consumption' to explain the purchase and display of luxury goods among the new rich in the United States after the second industrial revolution. In a context where inherited social positions were losing the monopoly on hierarchically structuring society, he argued, expensive material goods gained particular value in terms of their capacity to evidence wealth and power. Based on this, Veblen contended that the social value of objects was different from their 'rational' and intrinsic use value. A similar argument was made by another classic study. In *The Philosophy of Money* (1990 [1900]), Georg Simmel argued that things do not have absolute value, but are given value by subjects, in turn historically and culturally conditioned.

For both Veblen and Simmel, this value was used in social performance to achieve particular benefits. Veblen focused most on the consumption (and waste) among the 'leisure class' as a way to distinguish their members from the working class. Simmel, in *Fashion* (1957[1904]), also focused on differentiation, but importantly also engaged with another fundamental social logic, cohesion. People do not only consume goods to distinguish themselves from others, but also to associate themselves with others to achieve group belonging. This is still an important point in consumption research, often popularised through

notions of increasing levels of consumption as an outcome of trying to ‘keep up with the Joneses’, i.e. through social comparison and conformity.

Simmel and Veblen held, although to different extents, that the wealthy and powerful had significant defining power, and that consumption among lower classes was strongly shaped by imitation, or emulation, of the former (for discussion, see Sassatelli, 2007). Along with the term conspicuous consumption, this emulation effect is probably the most influential heritage of Veblen, and fundamentally places consumption in a context of competition and comparison. As Sassatelli (2007: 68) laments, ‘[l]argely due to Veblenesque echoes, reference to envy, imitation and status symbols has become a default explanation and indeed a straitjacket for the reading of all and every act of consumption’.

Anthropologists have throughout the history of the discipline been interested in how objects appropriate symbolic meaning in different social and cultural contexts. As put by Douglas and Isherwood (1979:38) in their classic study *The World of Goods*: ‘It is standard ethnographic practice to assume that all material possessions carry social meanings and to concentrate a main part of cultural analysis upon their use as communicators’. What Douglas and Isherwood did was to bring this approach to the context of modern consumer culture. They found that consumer goods are central components in the formation and circulation of meaning in modern societies, and that goods ‘make and maintain social relationships’ (Douglas and Isherwood 1979: 39). For them consumption is a ritual activity where goods are used in cognitive classifications, ‘to make firm and visible a particular set of judgements in the fluid processes of classifying persons and events’ (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979: 45).

Similar arguments are found in the work of Bourdieu, whose book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) has come to stand as probably the single most influential work on consumption. For Bourdieu ‘most products only derive their social value from the social use that is made of them’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 13). Fundamentally for Bourdieu, consumption involves display of ‘taste’. This taste is in turn socially structured, and class analysis represents a central part of Bourdieu’s work. Importantly, we both consume to define who we are and consume depending on how we define ourselves. For Bourdieu, distinction does not necessarily involve display of power and wealth as in Veblen, but of any kind of constructed class identification. In essence, what Bourdieu is claiming is that consumption is regulated by, at the same time as it reproduces, socially structured and class-distinguished ‘tastes’.

The apparatus of concepts that Bourdieu employed to investigate and explain this involves a combination of habitus, field and capital (Bourdieu 1977; 1984; 2005), and will be

further introduced below. The essence is that material goods are given meaning socially, and that our dispositions (*habitus*), knowledge and competences (*capital*) and the given social context (*field*), all interlinked in dialectical relationships, shape our lifestyles and tastes and thus how and what we consume. In Bourdieu's (1984: 95) formula it looks like this: [(*habitus*) (*capital*)] + *field* = practice.

While all of the above scholars in different ways focused on how goods are attributed meaning socially, the focus on meaning took on new dimensions in the 'cultural turn' in the social sciences. As Campbell (1995) discusses in more detail, with post-modernity, and prominent scholars such as Lyotard (1984) and Jameson (1991), symbols became the essence of everyday life. Consumption was given crucial importance, and the postmodern society was associated with a consumer society where consumption was mainly symbolic rather than instrumental. Influential accounts include those of Jean Baudrillard (e.g. 1998 [1970]). As summarised by Campbell (1995: 103), for Baudrillard, 'in capitalist societies, consumption should be understood as a process in which only the signs attached to goods are actually consumed, and hence that commodities are not valued for their use but understood as possessing a meaning that is determined by their position in a self-referential system of signifiers'. In this line of thinking the materiality of goods became of less importance. Zygmunt Bauman's explanation of the 'consumerist syndrome' in the age of 'liquid modernity' is a slightly different example, where consumption has become 'autotelic', a value in its own right beyond any more purely instrumental functions (interviewed in Rojek, 2004).

With the cultural turn consumption was not only divested of use value and the material world, but also from its grounding in social structures. As Gregson (1995: 139) noted in his overview of early consumption geography, '[t]he geographical literature on consumption highlights clearly the ascendance of cultural, as opposed to social, theory in social geography (and in human geography more generally)', leading to 'a particular interpretation of consumption grounded in meaning, identity, representation and ideology'. Indeed, a fundamental difference between the social approaches and the (postmodern) cultural approaches is the importance attributed to social divisions and classes. While for the former social class was fundamental to understanding consumption, for the latter lifestyles cutting across social hierarchies are key (see Trigg 2001). While the access to 'positional goods' (Hirsch, 1977) is limited, the use of goods as cultural communicators is not any more restricted to the wealthy 'leisure class'. This also led to a perceived 'liberation' of the consumer, who rather than being shaped by external structures now in the postmodern consumer society had more freedom to choose among a wide range of goods and identities.

As summarised by Warde (2014: 282), '[t]he key emergent figure was what might be termed "the expressive individual", whose activities, possessions, meanings and judgements were directed towards symbolic communication of identity by means of lifestyle'. Along with this, *consumerism* became a central trait of *consumer culture*, a culture of consumption. In the words of Featherstone (1983: 4):

The term consumer culture points to the impact of mass consumption on everyday life which has led to the gearing of social activities around the accumulation and consumption of an ever-increasing range of goods and experiences. New modes of cultural representation ensure the proliferation of images which saturate the fabric of social life with a *mêlée* of signs and messages which summon up new expressive and hedonistic definitions of the good life.

The cultural turn was highly influential, and arguably also contributed significantly to bringing consumption to the fore as a field in itself to be understood as much more than the end-point of production or the wastefulness of the elites. That symbols and the aesthetic qualities of goods are important dimensions of consumption is now well established. In the words of Slater (1997: 4):

The most private act of consumption animates public and social systems of signs, not necessarily in the sense of public display (as in ideas of 'emulation', 'conspicuous consumption' or 'status competition'), but more fundamentally through the process of cultural reproduction: in consuming we do not – *ever* – simply reproduce our physical existence but also reproduce (sustain, evolve, defend, contest, imagine, reject) culturally specific, meaningful ways of life.

The symbolism attached to certain consumer goods, such as cars, is further discussed below and in Articles 3 and 4 of the thesis.

Nevertheless, the cultural turn was bound to provoke a response. Indeed, a turn towards practices and materiality has been discernible across the social sciences, in human geography through for example non-representational theory (Thrift, 1996, 2008; Anderson and Harrison, 2010). In consumption research the critique of culturalist approaches has been diverse, and has included the common lack of empirical support for many of the postmodern theories (Campbell, 1995). Mainly, however, the critique has centred around the three, often overlapping, main themes of agency, materiality and symbolism (Warde, 2014). In the wake of this critique a new turn in consumption research has taken place, often focusing on ordinary, inconspicuous consumption and everyday practices. Theoretically, the most

influential so far has been the reintroduction of social practice approaches to studies of consumption.

Ordinary consumption and everyday practices

'How might we conceptualize inconspicuous consumption as opposed to that which is overtly wrapped up with questions of style, status and symbolic significance?' (Shove, 2003: 2).

The focus on the symbolic dimensions of consumption has received much criticism the last two decades. First of all, cultural readings of consumption often attribute significant agency to individual consumers. In post-modern society, consumers are portrayed as quite autonomous in deciding what lifestyles to adapt and hence what goods to consume and display. In a recent example, Hamilton (2009: 573) claims that in consumer society 'individuals must [...] scan the world to decide with whom or what they wish to identify'. This agency of the individual consumer is a significant step away from Bourdieu's notion of the largely tacit social production of 'taste', and is theoretically closer to orthodox economic postulations on consumption (Warde, 2014; see also Fine, 2002). Secondly, cultural theory has treated the material world as mainly meaningful through human perception. As critiqued by Reckwitz (2002a: 202):

The material world now no longer adopts the status of a structural cause or condition of culture; instead, material entities appear as objects that gain a symbolic quality within classification systems, discourses or language-based interaction. The material world *exists* only insofar as it becomes an object of interpretation within collective meaning structures.

And, thirdly, the focus on symbolism has also involved giving attention to more conspicuous aspects of consumption. If consumption is explained mainly through signs and communication, the more hidden consumption that arguably dominates our lives as consumers—such as consumption of water and electricity through different household appliances—is easily forgotten. These three points have been crucial in recent theorising on consumption.

To start with the two latter points, the 2000s saw a renewed interest in materiality as well as in more mundane forms of consumption. Jukka Gronow and Alan Warde's (2001) book *Ordinary Consumption* as well as Elizabeth Shove's (2003) *Comfort, cleanliness and convenience* have been particularly influential works in this turn. Their main points concerned how aesthetic dimensions of consumption become exaggerated, and how much of our

everyday lives involves consumption that is inconspicuous rather than conspicuous, and characterised more by routine than choice. In the words of Gronow and Warde (2001: 193) ‘A good deal of consumption is characterized less by its meaningfulness than by its taken-for-granted ordinariness’. The same insight has been behind the most influential theoretical development to emerge from the shift towards materiality and the everyday, and which fundamentally challenges the conceptualisations of agency and materiality characteristic of the cultural turn; the revival of theories of practice.

*Theories of practice*⁴

Rooted in the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Heidegger and the social theories of Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1977), the works of Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002b) have been particularly central to this revival (Halkier et al. 2011). A central point of theories of practice has been to overcome the structure-agency dualism in social sciences, towards a more holistic understanding of society, seen in Giddens’ (1984) ‘structuration’ and Bourdieu’s habitus and field. Bourdieu (1977), as one of the defining scholars of practice theory, insisted on practices, rather than sets of abstract structures, constituting the social and at the same time being fundamental to understand the social. He famously introduced the concepts of *habitus*, or ‘systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 72, emphasis in original), and *field*, or the current ‘state of play’ in a given social arena. In Bourdieu’s work ‘*field* and *habitus* constitute a dialectic through which specific practices produce and reproduce the social world that at the same time is making them’ (Thomson, 2008: 75). As famously put by Bourdieu (1984: 166): ‘The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure’. The practice approach is thus rooted in an acknowledgment of the fundamentally interlinked nature of structure and agency.

But what are practices? Reckwitz (2002b: 249) separates between practice as *praxis* and *praktik*, where the former is a way of describing ‘the whole of human action’ and the latter specific patterns of behaviour. It is mainly the latter that is subject to analysis by theories of practice, and Reckwitz (2002b: 249) defines a practice (*praktik*) as:

a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their

⁴ As there are many theories of practice, the plural form is used (see Gram-Hanssen, 2011; Reckwitz, 2002b; Warde, 2005), although I frequently refer to a singular practice approach to consumption, importantly also including different versions (Shove, 2014; Warde, 2014).

use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.

Practices are defined not by individual participation, but by shared social action. Thus, people are approached not as individual agents but as ‘carriers’ (Reckwitz, 2002b) or ‘practitioners’ (Shove, 2014) of practices. For example, by riding the metro to work I participate, or carry, the practices of commuting and commuting-by-metro. Following a rational-choice approach I decided to do so based on cognitive processes including calculations of costs and benefits. From a practice approach, this mental activity is still present, but only as part of the overall process that led to me boarding the metro. Routine (the fact that I mentally and bodily am used to doing so every day), the physical infrastructure in place, the spatial distance between my home and my office, and a wide range of social influences have played their part not only in the ‘decision’ to use the metro, but also in keeping me from using alternative modes of transport, such as a car. What makes commuting-by-metro a practice is furthermore the fact that it is a socially patterned ‘routinized type of behaviour’. As I get back to below, this perspective also involves a fundamental, and somewhat controversial, expansion of the concept of agency beyond human beings.

Practices and consumption

Although the practice approach has deep theoretical roots, its application to consumption research is a rather recent phenomenon. As Warde (2005) argues, even the two most prominent figures in modern application of practice theory, Giddens and Bourdieu, seemed to ignore their own practice approach when discussing consumption. This was particularly so for Giddens (1991), who attributed most agency to individuals and intended action in his discussion of lifestyle, but also Bourdieu (1984) focused more on habitus and capital than practice in his most famous work on consumption, *Distinction* (Warde, 2005). In consumption research, sociologists such as Alan Warde and Elizabeth Shove have played prominent roles in advocating the practice shift, but the approach is currently being applied and developed across disciplines by a range of contemporary consumption researchers (Southerton et al., 2004; Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Everts and Jackson, 2009; Gregson et al., 2009; Halkier et al., 2011; Gram-Hanssen, 2011; Wilhite, 2012; Shove et al., 2012; Shove, 2014; Warde, 2005, 2014; Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014; Bartiaux and Salmon, 2014; Foulds et al., 2015)⁵.

⁵ See also Everts et al., 2011 and Jones and Murphy, 2010 for overviews of more general geographical approaches to theories of practice.

Consumption is not itself a practice, but almost all practices involve some sort of consumption, and consumption always happens as part of, as *moments in*, a practice (Warde, 2005). In line with the overall goal of practice theory to transcend the structure-agency dichotomy, the practice approach bridges a fundamental dualism in approaches to consumption; that between ‘consumers’ as dupes or sovereign agents. Whereas economic orthodoxy (and to some extent culturalist and post-modern approaches) conceptualises the consumer as a sovereign agent which actively makes calculated and rational decisions, Marxist and other radical approaches have tended to view the individual consumer as powerless in the encounter with structural forces (whether this is capitalism or other social structures). Indeed, from the perspective of practice approaches the very concept of ‘the consumer’ disappears (Warde, 2005). As put by Warde (2005: 146):

The [practice] approach offers a distinctive perspective, attending less to individual choices and more to the collective development of modes of appropriate conduct in everyday life. The analytical focus shifts from the insatiable wants of the human animal to the instituted conventions of collective culture, from personal expression to social competence, from mildly constrained choice to disciplined participation. [...] the key focal points become the organization of the practice and the moments of consumption enjoined. Persons confront moments of consumption neither as sovereign choosers nor as dupes.

Practice theory is thus a competing approach to both the methodological individualism of economic approaches and the emphasis on cultural expressivism in cultural approaches, focusing on routine rather than action, doing rather than thinking, the material rather than the symbolic, and ‘embodied practical competence over expressive virtuosity in the fashioned presentation of self’ (Warde, 2014: 286). As already indicated above, this involves a broadening of the concept of agency, what Wilhite (2008b) conceptualises as ‘distributed agency’, including people (and bodies), social context and material context (see also Wilhite, 2009, 2012 and Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014).

Distributed agency

Sahakian and Wilhite (2014: 28) operate with three pillars of practices, all of which take on agentive capacities: ‘*the body* – including cognitive processes and physical dispositions; *the material world* – including technology and infrastructure; and *the social world* – including settings, norms, values and institutions’ (emphasis added). I will in the following briefly outline these interlinked pillars.

The body

As Wallenborn and Wilhite (2014) discuss extensively, the human body has been left out of much theorising on consumption. In mainstream approaches, the old Cartesian body-mind dualism is still very much alive, and ‘body is collapsed into mind and the demand for goods is both disembodied and decontextualized from social and material worlds’ (Wallenborn and Wilhite, 2014: 56). From a practice approach, drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, dispositions for action are cognitively and physically constructed through social and personal histories (Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014). The point is not to strip individual humans of agency. This perspective acknowledges cognitive processes and reflexivity. As put by Warde (2005), ‘[t]he dispositions of agents to act within a practice are deeply entrenched *and* embodied; there are emotional and corporeal as well as cognitive bases of behaviour’ (p. 140, emphasis in original).

In the words of Appadurai (1996: 67): ‘As a general feature of the cultural economy, consumption must and does fall into the mode of repetition, of habituation’. The renewed attention to the body in consumption also includes attention to how these processes work through habits (see the contributions in Warde and Southerton, 2012b). Wilhite (2012: 88) defines a habit as ‘a particular form for practice’, distinguished from other practices in not deploying cognition or reflexivity, and formed through the embodiment of knowledge through recurrent practices. This embodied knowledge in turn takes on agency in practices (see Wilhite, 2013), and thus represents an important acknowledgement of non-rational aspects of consumption.

The social world

That the social dimension is crucial for consumption is well established, but the way sociality is accounted for differs. In more cultural readings, expressive individuals either conform with or distinguish themselves from peers in different versions of social performance. Crucially, a practice approach does not entail a complete break with the aesthetic dimensions of consumption. It does however represent a shift away from these dimensions as the driving force of consumption. As put by Warde (2005: 136): ‘Practice theories comprehend non-instrumentalist notions of conduct, both observing the role of routine on the one hand, and emotion, embodiment and desire on the other’.

A practice approach is fundamentally ontologically and epistemologically grounded in the social. Thus, as Reckwitz (2002b: 250) points out, ‘To say that practices are “social” is indeed a tautology: A practice is social, as it is a “type” of behaving and understanding that

appears at different locales and at different points of time and is carried out by different body/minds'. The division applied in this discussion is thus mainly for analytical purposes. A practice is always social, our bodies are to certain extents socially produced, and so is our interaction with the material world.

The social dimension of practices can include social competition and comparison, which indeed played a central part in Bourdieu's theories. The performance in practices is grounded in socially constructed class systems, the position within which determines habitus which again is turned into dispositions for performance in practices. Contemporary practice approaches focus less on processes of distinction, and more on how practices are shaped by conventions and 'established understandings of what course of action are not inappropriate' (Warde, 2005: 140). Agency is thus grounded in the social setting, defined through norms and 'shared understandings of normality' (Evans et al., 2012: 116). This can be a reflexive process, but importantly from a practice perspective the accepted norms and rules of behaviour in a given society are often tacitly accepted, what Bourdieu termed *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1977; Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014). For consumption this means that from a practice perspective it is the conventions and expectations associated with a given practice that will steer behaviour, rather than individual desires or 'choices' (Warde, 2005).

As discussed above, culturalist readings of consumption are also socially grounded. But in practice approaches this grounding is more profound than accounts of emulation, expression and competition suggest. Rather consumption is grounded in the social organisation of society, and in the 'activities' people engage in as social beings. Importantly, this does not mean that aesthetic dimensions are insignificant. Rather, it is the importance assigned to this dimension along with the degree of individual agency assumed by more culturalist approaches that is questioned.

The material world

While not prevalent in all theories of practice, drawing on Reckwitz (2002b) materiality takes on a central position in the application to consumption research (Halkier et al., 2011). First of all, the acquisition of an object can lead to lock-in to further acquisition, or exclude other consumption choices. 'Past purchases preclude some options and leave gaps for new ones', as Warde and Southerton (2012a: 6) put it. More crucially, consumption of some material objects can affect the shape of the practices within which they are used, a central aspect of the concept of *material agency*. Basically, the underlying assumption is an extended understanding of agency, beyond human beings. As the literature on practices evolved, as put

by Thrift et al. (2014: 7), 'it became increasingly clear that objects could not be seen as subsidiary moments in practice'. The main contributions to material agency have come from studies of material culture (see for example Miller, 2005) and Science and Technology Studies (STS). In the latter Bruno Latour (1992) in particular has been central in theorising how the non-human world affects human acts. Material agency can take form either as scripts embedded in technologies by designers (Akrich, 1992; Latour, 1992), or as less intended mediation of the actions of the users of a technology (Verbeek, 2006). Latour's main point is that human action is in many instances co-shaped by the things that are used, that '[a]ctions are the result not only of individual intentions and the social structures in which human beings find themselves [...] but also of people's material environment' (Verbeek, 2006: 366).

This resonates well with a geographical take on consumption. Geographical studies have shown how space and place affect consumption, for example how shopping malls are materially structured to steer our behaviour towards purchasing specific goods and as much as possible (e.g. Goss, 1993, 1999). The assertion is probably most obvious, however, in relation to transport and urban infrastructure, and material agency is indeed also central to current conceptualisations of mobility (Büscher et al. 2011).

Consumption and mobility

'Human mobility is an irreducibly embodied experience' (Cresswell, 2006: 4).

'Mobilities' is a field of research rapidly increasing in popularity, to the extent that it is now common to refer to a 'mobility turn' or even a 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry, 2006; see also Cresswell 2010, 2012, 2014 for thorough overviews from a geography perspective). Although consumption research is not unfamiliar with mobility through the consumption of transport, the fields are different, although with overlapping interests. This section will briefly outline the mobilities perspective and the links to recent trends in consumption theory, focusing particularly on embodiment and materiality.

The mobility turn

To some extent, mobility has arguably always been a central part of geographical research (Cresswell, 2010; Cresswell and Merriman, 2011). But the last decade has seen a new engagement with - and a steep increase in research on - mobility. In 'the mobility turn' motion rather than sedentarism has become the starting point for academic analysis. This new turn is

in many ways interdisciplinary, linking particularly social sciences and humanities, and has become increasingly popular in human geography (Cresswell, 2010).

The focus on mobility as a starting point for academic inquiry emerged from a criticism of the social sciences for emphasising fixity and largely ignoring or trivialising ‘the importance of the systematic movements of people for work and family life, for leisure and pleasure, and for politics and protest’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 208). In geography, Cresswell (2006) argues for mobility being just as spatial and geographical as place, and thus deserving similar attention. Fields such as transport geography have always analysed movement, but mainly as physical movement from A to B. As put by Cresswell (2006: 2), the goal from a mobilities perspective is to take what happens *within* movement seriously, to ‘explore the content of the line that links A to B, to unpack it, to make sure it is not taken for granted’. In the words of Sheller and Urry (2006: 208):

Even while it has increasingly introduced spatial analysis the social sciences have still failed to examine how the spatialities of social life presuppose (and frequently involve conflict over) both the actual and the imagined movement of people from place to place, person to person, event to event.

As Cresswell (2006) contends, mobility is to movement what place is to location. While movement, as location, is conceptually devoid of history, ideology and meaning, mobility, as place, is a centre of meaning, a movement ‘imbued with meaning and power’; the ‘dynamic equivalent of *place*’ (Cresswell, 2006: 3, emphasis in original). Mobility is indeed ‘socially produced motion’ (Cresswell, 2006: 3), an agent in the production and consumption of time and space.

Sheller and Urry (2006: 210) further emphasise how the mobility turn does not involve a ‘totalising or reductive description of the contemporary world’, but rather a new approach with new questions, theories and methodologies. The turn has seen research on a diverse range of subjects, from the role of mobile phones in Swahili trading practices (Pfaff, 2010) through ash clouds (e.g. Birtchnell and Büscher, 2011) to basically any means of transportation (see Vannini, 2009). Perhaps the most popular and influential strand of research under the umbrella of mobilities has been dealing with cars and their associated system.

Theorising cars and motorbikes: Consumption, automobility, moto-mobility

'Ideas of the car shift between a transcendent object of desire and a material and ecological disaster' (Davidson, 2012: 469).

Probably no single commodity can compare to the private car in terms of economic, material and environmental impact. It is thus rather odd that it for long was subject to relatively little academic attention both in the social sciences in general (Sheller and Urry, 2000) and in consumption research (Miller, 2001b). As Sheller and Urry (2006) argue, the criticism of social sciences behind the mobility turn is particularly evident in its failure to examine the social importance of cars, 'failing to consider how the car reconfigures urban life, with novel ways of dwelling, travelling, and socialising in, and through, an automobilised time-space' (p. 209). The recent interest in mobilities has seen a change to this, and has produced rich material on the car and the 'system of automobility' (Urry, 2004), covering subjects such as the experience of driving in the city (Thrift, 2004), the emotional aspects of automobility (Sheller, 2004), accidents (Short and Pinet-Peralta, 2010), and the practices and feelings associated with riding a car as a passenger (Laurier et al., 2008) (see Butler and Hannam, 2014 for a thorough overview). Importantly, this new literature goes beyond the rather normative readings and anti-car sentiments that have been common in many previous accounts of cars, particularly from an environmental or ecological perspective (see for example Paterson, 2000, 2007; Freund and Martin, 1996). Cars obviously do represent a fundamental environmental problem, but from an academic point of view it is necessary to take the positive experiences associated with cars and automobility seriously. Shove's (2003) argument about consumption research and environmental sustainability is highly relevant for research on cars: 'Only by setting "the environment" aside as the main focus of attention will it be possible to follow and analyse processes underpinning the normalization of consumption and the escalation of demand' (p. 9).

As a powerful and highly conspicuous status symbol, a vehicle for comfortable mundane consumption and an object with particularly strong material agency, cars are among the prime consumer objects no matter what aspects of consumption are emphasised. Still, cars are often part of analyses, but seldom the main area of study in consumption research. Daniel Miller's *Car Cultures* (2001a) stands out in this regard, with contributions focusing on a range of geographically dispersed car issues, such as counter-culture and rebellion in Sweden and Norway (O'Dell, 2001; Garvey, 2001), class and race in the United States (Gilroy, 2001) and the life of a taxi in Ghana (Verrips and Meyer, 2001). Apart from these studies, cars have

particularly been subject to analysis due to their powerful position as positional goods, such as in O'Dougherty's (2002) analysis of defining power of the car for the Sao Paulo middle class in Brazil, Fischer's (2014) discussion of the same for the Malay middle-class in Malaysia, and Wilhite's (2008a) discussion of the car as 'modernity on wheels' in Kerala, India. As perhaps the most conspicuous commodity that exists, this is an important part of the social life of cars. As put by Wengenroth (2011, 2), the car's 'significance has radically transcended its utility value (mobility) to become symbolic of identity, status, and lifestyle'.

Also within the practice turn the car has been a popular example for how practices are materially and socially shaped. Warde (2005) approaches driving a car as an integrative practice entailing skills, technology, engagement and understanding, and involving appropriation of resources and the increasing inclusion of cultural consumption. In order to participate in the practice of motoring, practitioners must 'avail themselves of the requisite services, possess and command the capability to manipulate the appropriate tools, and devote a suitable level of attention to the conduct of the practice', as well as exhibit 'common understanding, know-how, and commitment to the value of the practice' (Warde, 2005: 145). Shove (2014) explores how practices of mobility are linked to material history and socio-cultural expectations of personal mobility, and, drawing on mobilities literature, focuses particularly on how cars have locked-in urban mobility practices and frequently locked-out alternative mobilities, such as bicycling.

It is clear from the above examples that consumption and mobilities approaches speak of cars in similar ways. Both acknowledge important aesthetic dimensions, and the practice turn shares with the mobility turn an interest in the material frames of automobility. As formulated by Sheller (2011: 1), mobility 'encompasses both the embodied practice of movement and the representations, ideologies and meanings attached to both movement and stillness'. While practice approaches discuss distributed (or material) agency, mobilities refer to 'hybrid people/thing assemblages' that are 'enabled and restrained by the prosthetic relations between human and world' (Cresswell, 2014: 715).

It is quite obvious that the car requires unique analytic treatment. It is not just another commodity that people buy and throw away. As a generally significant investment it is often subject to much more contemplation from a consumer perspective than other more mundane goods. But in consumption-as-use car-driving can be mundane and subject to routine and habits. The material world plays a crucial part here, both in terms of the physicality of the car that creates an 'automobile sanctuary' (Maxwell, 2001: 199) making it in many ways an extension of the privacy of home (Sheller and Urry, 2000), but also through the material

scripts set by infrastructure and the spatial organisation of society. The relationship here is dialectical; infrastructure sets frames for and is shaped by mobility practices. Infrastructure from a mobilities perspective can be seen as part of what Hannam et al. (2006) describe as ‘moorings’; the world of immobility that contributes towards enabling and configuring mobility.

Of particular relevance to this thesis is the acknowledgement of the unique use-value associated with cars, allowing for relatively convenient, flexible and safe mobility, indeed frequently associated with unique, mobile freedom (Sheller and Urry, 2000; Featherstone, 2004). Furthermore, this use value is linked with and often depends on another relevant issue to this thesis; automobility as a system. As is further discussed in Article 3 of the thesis, Urry (2004) famously conceptualises automobility as a self-expanding system whose broader social, cultural and material interlinkages fundamentally shape modern life.

While the car thus eventually has received much well-deserved attention in the social sciences, another significant private, motorised vehicle has not; the motorbike. In the mobilities literature, this is also a reflection of the US- and Eurocentrism that has dominated the field.

The neglected two-wheelers

Compared to the significant attention to cars, two-wheelers have been largely ignored in both the mobilities and consumption literature. There are some significant exceptions, like Truitt’s (2008) discussion of motorbikes in Ho Chi Minh City, Arvidsson (2001) on the Italian Vespa from counterculture to consumer culture, and Pinch and Reimer’s (2012) discussion of ‘moto-mobility’, but these rather represent anomalies in a car-dominated field (see also Hansen, 2015b). Furthermore, as Gillen (2015) points out in his discussion of doing fieldwork on a motorbike in Vietnam, ‘with respect to two-wheel motored transportation, the literature on this “alternative” mobility is overwhelmingly, and almost exclusively, focused on a handful of wealthy English-speaking countries that tend to exoticise motor-bike travels’ (p. 2). This is hardly helpful in the context of Vietnam and Hanoi, where the vast majority of all travels are made on the back of a motorbike, and where the motorbike, not the car, dominates both traffic and society.

As indicated above, the neglect of the two-wheeler points to the dominance of research on Western experiences of mobility. Somewhat surprisingly, research on urban mobility has only to a very limited extent moved beyond the mature capitalist world (although there are significant exceptions, such as Edensor, 2004; Lin, 2012; Fischer, 2014; Butler and Hannam,

2014; Nielsen and Wilhite, 2015). Southeast Asian streetscapes tell very different stories, where motorbikes have played important roles in everyday mobility. However, also in this region cars have become increasingly important, both as means of transportation and through development strategies.

Automobile development

As discussed further in Article 1 of this thesis, the auto industry has played important roles in development strategies and received significant attention in the development literature, particularly on East Asian (see Flink, 1988; Amsden, 1989; Chang, 2002; Amsden and Chu 2003; Gallagher, 2006) and Southeast Asian late development (Doner, 1991; Wad, 2009; Doner and Wad, 2014). Less attention has however been given to the broader role and meanings of cars in development processes (although see Nelson, 2000).

Apart from industrial aspirations, the car has historically occupied a central place in conceptions of modernisation and societal progress. Within modernisation theory, Walt Rostow (1991 [1960]) in his ‘anti-communist manifesto’ considered the ‘decisive element’ of modernity and the era of high mass consumption historically as ‘the cheap mass automobile with its quite revolutionary effects – social as well as economic – on the life and expectations of society’ (p. 11). In a more recent account, and from a very different perspective, Paterson (2007, 133) argues that since the early 20th century the car has been ‘a primary symbol of modernity itself’. It does indeed seem to be close to a global symbol of development. According to Freund and Martin (2000, 52), ‘[i]t is the replication of auto transport, etched in concrete and asphalt, that is the embodiment of a dream to which many in the world aspire’.

In Asia, car consumption and car cultures have in some countries—like South Korea, Japan, and Malaysia—developed as parts of national car projects, and there are strong links between automobile industrial aspirations and surging levels of car ownership in China (Gallagher, 2006; Gerth, 2016) and other prospective auto producing countries like Indonesia and Thailand, and to some extent the Philippines (Doner and Wad, 2014). Article 1 of the thesis discusses how Vietnam has had aims of joining this club of Asian car manufacturers. The position of the car in national development projects leads to an important theoretical question; how do we understand changes in consumption in relation to overall economic development processes?

Consumption and development

'[C]onsumption always depends on social arrangements, which we now denote as "economic", for managing material resources' (Slater, 1997: 5).

Consumption research has tended to focus on affluent societies, although there are some significant exceptions. The research by Wilhite (2008a) on changing consumption in India, Miller (1997) on local culture's encounter with global capitalism in Trinidad, O'Dougherty (2002) on middle-class consumption in Brazil, Sahakian (2014) on energy consumption in the Philippines and Southeast Asia, and Wilk (1995) on the television in Belize are all examples of contributions to the field of consumption research with a focus on changes in the 'South'. As for the case of Vietnam, publications such as those by Nguyen-Marshall et al. (2012) and Drummond and Thomas (2003) have explored the social and cultural sides of economic reforms partly through consumption (as further discussed below). This thesis is in different ways indebted to all of these, but at the same time aims to incorporate processes of economic development as a more integral part of the analysis of consumption than what have been the case in previous accounts. The following section will discuss some of the theoretical starting points for such an endeavour.

Development and Consumption: Theoretical starting points

First of all, this thesis conceptualises development broadly as improvements in living standards, usually depending on processes involving economic growth.⁶ The quantitative and qualitative changes in consumption following economic growth to a large extent depend on the overall development strategies of a country. One of the oldest and ongoing debates within the field of development research is to what extent individual countries should focus on developing domestic industrial capacity or rely on trade and existing comparative advantages (see Lin and Chang, 2009 for an interesting discussion). This debate is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis, but its overall implications are important for understanding how development can affect aggregate consumption.

In development research, consumption seldom enters the debate apart from as a poverty indicator (lack of consumption), as a measurement of inequality (in some versions of the GINI index) or as overall demand. In macroeconomic analysis consumption is usually

⁶ Note that this is not intended as a normative statement, and is referring to contexts outside of the mature capitalist world, where economic growth should be seen as a means to an end (delivering improved living standards), not an end in itself. In other words, I am not saying that development in already rich countries necessarily demands economic growth.

approached through its function as forming part of the overall demand in an economy (along with investment and government expenditure), and as the alternative to saving (which is seen as postponed consumption). Although there have been different interpretations of the primacy of consumption versus production, from the classical economic belief in Say's Law (production creates its own demand) to Keynes' focus on stimulating aggregate demand, there is no disagreement to the fact that consumption is a necessary part of the economy. No matter from which perspective it is approached, it is quite obvious that production requires consumption, since without it a capitalist economy ends up in a crisis of overproduction or stagnation.

Economic development consists of much more than growth, but in a capitalist economy growth is necessary in order to sustain economic development. This is often questioned from a sustainability perspective, but can hardly be questioned from a developing economy policy perspective. If growth is desired, consumption is necessary. This can rely predominantly on foreign consumption (export-led growth) or domestic consumption ('consumption-led growth'). The world economy is increasingly interconnected, and countries such as the Asian Tigers are examples of how it is possible for developing countries to take advantage of global markets through protecting and developing domestic industry for exports (Wade, 1990). This depends on the demand for their products on the world market, which of course among other things depends on purchasing power and 'tastes' of foreign consumers. However, another fundamental part of the Tiger economies was that through various distributive policies, such as land reforms, they developed potential domestic demand for their industries, so that at the initial stages of import-substitution industrialisation there was a market for their products (e.g. Kambhampati, 2004). This is central to structuralist approaches to economic development. If we follow Engel's Law in that the income elasticity is lower for agricultural goods than manufactured goods, in other words that as income increases, demand for manufactured goods will increase more than demand for agricultural goods, industrialisation towards manufacturing is necessary for sustained economic development (as famously argued by economists such as Hans Singer, 1950; Raul Prebisch, 1950, and Nicholas Kaldor, 1967). As chapter 3 describes in more detail, this thesis studies a country with a very clear goal of achieving industrialisation, and as Article 1 discusses, the auto industry has been located as a potential driver for this.

In an increasingly interconnected world it is possible to achieve high growth rates based on exports and thus foreign consumption. But in the long run this will not in itself lead to sustained development, and without domestic industries the higher incomes following

growth will lead to consumption of imported goods, often negatively affecting trade balances. In order to achieve economic development, domestic consumption must increase, which again depends on distribution of national income (see Palley, 2006; Wade, 2008). In economically turbulent times in the affluent world, many developing countries are giving more attention to developing domestic markets. Furthermore, of course, in a developing country context consumption of a range of goods and services must increase ‘simply’ to reduce poverty and raise living standards, irrespective of its impact on the overall economy.

In other words, development in different ways depends on increased consumption. This dependence is even more obvious when including in the equation that development today generally tends to be *capitalist* development (see Hansen and Wethal 2015ab). It is a rather well-established fact, at least outside some strands of ecological economics, that any conceivable variation of capitalism is dependent on continuing growth in order not to stagnate (see Wilhite and Hansen, 2015 for discussion).

The theoretical implication here is that in order to understand extensive changes in the quantity or quality of consumption patterns, processes of economic development must figure as part of the analysis. As stated in the introduction and indeed the second research question, I see such processes as multi-scalar. Importantly, I am not implying the existence of fixed structures which influence everyday life through strictly vertical causal relationships (see Jonas, 2006). Rather, I use the concept of scale as a way to capture the complexity of economic development and the ways in which conditions for and practices involving consumption are influenced by (and influence) larger spatial, economic and political processes. A wide range of processes are relevant for consumption, from integration into global and regional trade and commodity networks through national industrialisation and urbanisation processes to new employment arrangements and sources of income. These in turn contribute locally to the formation of new housing, mobility and shopping practices, in addition to often radically influencing the availability of consumer goods and the financial ability to acquire them. The particular ways that such processes associated with economic development co-shape everyday practices is a thorny yet highly important topic for academic enquiry, and one that I return to in Articles 2 and 4 and in the conclusion of Part I of the thesis.

One of the most prominent approaches to analysing political-economic structures while maintaining the overall focus on consumption is found in Ben Fine’s (2002, 2013)

‘systems of provision’⁷ (first developed in Fine and Leopold, 1993). Fine (2002) set out to shift focus from ‘internally generated demands of the individual’ to the external norms of society. In this he formulates a critique of the determinism and reductionism of neoclassical economics and of the subjectivism of many cultural approaches to consumption. Fine thus argues not for application of the *homo economicus* of neo-classical economics, but rather for accounting for the impact of political economy and economic structures on consumption. As Harvey et al. (2001: 20) argue, where the economy is taken into the picture in consumption research (in for example Bourdieu), ‘[c]apitalism is acknowledged as a system of unequal material *distribution*, but how modes of *production* might connect, constrain and regulate the possibilities for consumption receive scant attention’ (emphasis in original).

Fine (2002: 79) has defined systems of provision (SOP) as ‘the inclusive chain of activity that attaches consumption to the production that makes it possible’. Following Fine’s approach, we also need to incorporate the whole process *before* acquisition in order to understand consumption, in other words a consumer object’s backward linkages. As formulated by Fine (2013: 221), ‘The SOP approach allowed, and deliberately intended, the strengthening if not the (re)introduction of the material to the (cultural) study of consumption’. This approach has however been criticised for focusing too much on the economy. In the words of Goodman and Dupuis (2002: 7), in SOP the consumer ‘emerges only to disappear again into a production centred framework’. And this raises a theoretical conundrum; if we acknowledge that production processes and systems of provision must be included in a holistic account of consumption, how does this translate into everyday practices? In other words, how can we combine production and consumption without engaging in production-centrism? While not providing any final answers to this, the thesis deals with this question in Articles 2 and 4 as well as in the conclusion, and suggests that the conceptual framework of practice approaches may provide fertile ground for theoretical developments in this direction.

Consumption, development and mobility: The analytical framework of the thesis

To return to the statement from the beginning of this chapter, this thesis draws on different theoretical approaches to consumption, but with a primary focus on an empirically grounded understanding of social phenomena. Thus, rather than setting out to test theories, the research has been first and foremost guided by the fieldwork (as discussed in chapter 4). Nevertheless,

⁷ Other influential approaches that to some extent focus on consumption but are not dealt with in detail here include ‘circuits of culture’ (e.g. Cook and Crang, 1996) and global commodity or value chains (GCC/GVC) (see e.g. Gibbon et al 2008). See also Fine (2013) for a critique of these approaches.

the above theoretical approaches have in different ways influenced this thesis, and are applied to different extents in the four articles. First of all, a central starting point of the thesis is that goods do take on symbolic meanings, but that this meaning depends fundamentally on context. Article 3 analyses the symbolism of cars and motorbikes in Hanoi, as well as how the ‘social life’ of these products has changed as market reforms have in many ways redefined social ‘success’ and legitimised accumulation and display of wealth.

However, less conspicuous aspects are probably more important to understanding even a rather conspicuous object like the car. Articles 2, 3 and 4 are to various extents influenced by practice approaches to consumption. Thus, the thesis sets out to understand practices of everyday mobility in Hanoi through focusing on the bodily, social and material pillars shaping practices. This includes a broad understanding of agency, and Article 2 extensively discusses the dialectical role between mobility and infrastructure and how this has contributed to the particularities of contemporary Hanoian streetscapes.

This brings us to mobilities, where both the understanding of automobility as a system and the focus on the meanings of movement, as well as placing movement at the centre of academic inquiry, form part of the analytical framework of the thesis. Article 3 in particular follows a mobility perspective, but the approach has also very much influenced Article 2.

In terms of the multi-scalar processes of economic development, the thesis considers three main factors. First of all, economic growth and increasing affluence are obviously important for understanding changes in consumption, but equally important is how this wealth is distributed, since this determines who and how many in a given society can afford to buy new goods. Secondly, industrial strategies can directly affect consumption through policies concerning openness to imports, subsidies of domestic products, and taxation levels. Thirdly, Vietnam’s rapid economic development has led to significant economic and spatial reorganisations in the form of urbanisation, new forms of employment and new housing practices. Article 1 approaches cars from the perspective of industrial strategies and urban spatial and environmental challenges in Hanoi, and Articles 2 and 4 combine a focus on everyday practices with analyses of development and industrial strategies and trajectories.

Development and consumption must be understood in their temporal and spatial contexts. With the articles subject to limited space for contextual introductions the next chapter introduces economic and political developments in Vietnam since *doi moi*. It presents the significant changes in Vietnam on the national scale, before briefly zooming in on how the reforms have materialised in Hanoi. Ending with an overview of changes in consumption on

the national and urban scales, the chapter serves as a contextual backdrop for the articles, a literature review of development and consumption in Vietnam, and a part of the overall analysis of economic development and consumption.

3. Research Context: Development and transition in Vietnam⁸

We live in interesting times when a self-proclaimed socialist country is hailed by the World Bank (2013) as a ‘development success story’. But the changes Vietnam has undergone have been tremendous. After devastating encounters with French and American imperialism, and being among the poorest countries in Asia just four decades ago, Vietnam is now considered a lower-middle-income country in World Bank rankings, and frequently depicted as one of the new ‘emerging economies’.

Even though economic activities outside the command economy can be traced much further back, and steps towards reform started in the late 1970s (Fforde and de Vylder, 1996), the introduction of *doi moi* (meaning renewal or change towards something new, usually translated both inside and outside Vietnam as ‘renovation’) stands as the main turning point in Vietnam’s modern economic history. *Doi moi* was introduced at the Sixth Party Congress in December 1986, as Vietnam was facing a serious economic crisis with surging rates of inflation, severe balance of payments problems, a trade embargo by the West, and limited official development assistance (Van Arkadie and Mallon, 2003; Joint Development Partner Report [JDPR], 2012).

Although the reform process was partly driven by the need to address the problems of the domestic command economy (which e.g. led to severe food shortages), another crucial factor was the crisis in the Soviet Union, which meant the loss of economic aid and the traditional export market, as well as political and military isolation (Masina, 2006). The reforms were also highly politically driven, as a way to ensure the legitimacy and survival of the Communist Party (Vu, 2009). *Doi moi* consisted mainly of opening up for private enterprises, decollectivising agriculture, and a focus on trade liberalisation and export-led growth. The results could be seen in high and steady growth, at an average of 7.3 percent of GDP annually between 1990 and 2010, leading to almost a quintupling of per capita income

⁸ Until the part entitled “A reformed Hanoi”, this chapter is a compressed and slightly modified version of a manuscript previously published as Hansen, A (2015a). “The Best of Both Worlds? The Power and Pitfalls of Vietnam’s Development Model”, in Hansen, A. and U. Wethal (eds.). *Emerging Economies and Challenges to Sustainability: Theories, Strategies, Local Realities*, London: Routledge.

(JDPR, 2012) and what is considered among the fastest reductions of poverty in history (Gabriele, 2006).

Compared to other developing countries early growth was also fairly inclusive. The World Bank (2002: vi) reported Vietnamese development through the 1990s as ‘remarkably pro-poor’. Central factors to achieve this were policies of near universal access to healthcare and education (also pre-reform), and the early-reform ‘highly egalitarian’ land reforms during the decollectivisation of agriculture (World Bank, 2012: 1). Thus, even though benefits were unevenly spread, the majority of Vietnamese improved their living standards considerably due to the reforms (Beresford, 2008). Exactly how Vietnam achieved all these ‘successes’ is still subject to debate.

Vietnam’s development model

As Rigg (2012) emphasises, development models must be understood in their geographical and historical contexts. Geographically, Vietnam’s reforms have taken place in a region of growth, with China, Northeast and Southeast Asian states as important trading partners. Furthermore, the East Asian developmental states represented obvious role models for Vietnam, both due to their strong performances as well as the chance of reforming the economy without breaking up state control on the overall direction of reform and societal transformation (Masina, 2006). Indeed, White (1993), and more recently Beeson and Hung (2012), have characterised Vietnam as another example of an Asian developmental state. This has been seen in the widespread use of protectionist measures, import substitution for certain consumer goods, and in trying to drive development through state-owned enterprises. There are, however, clear differences between the Vietnamese model for development and the model followed by countries such as Korea and Taiwan, such as Vietnam’s lack of what Ohno (2009: 35) describes as ‘the hallmark of East Asian industrialization’; clear strategies and action plans.

Historically, Korea and Taiwan industrialised in a time of a very different international environment, shaped by cold-war geopolitics and relatively unconditional US aid (Beeson and Hung, 2012). Some decades later Vietnam has been reforming in a period dominated by the Washington and post-Washington consensus. Even though the extent to which donors have influence on Vietnam can be discussed (Tan, 2012), the influence of the developmental zeitgeist can be seen in social, economic and trade policies. Willingness to liberalise trade is one of these, and early on Vietnam signed a number of bilateral and regional free trade agreements, in addition to becoming the 150th member of the WTO in 2007 (Abbot et al.,

2009). Nevertheless, Vietnam has taken a gradual and experimental approach to reform, and to a large extent followed its own path through what Rodrik (2007) describes as heterodox reforms. This is a sharp contrast to the ‘shock therapy’ approach to reforms in other post-socialist economies (Masina, 2006, 2012).

Capitalism and socialism combined?

The official narrative of development in Vietnam is a heroic one; based on the ideals of Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese revolution, Vietnam has strategically taken advantage of the opportunities of the market economy and developed its very own development model. This model has been dubbed a ‘market economy with socialist orientation’, and is presented as a ‘creative and fundamental breakthrough’ for the Party (Nguyen Phu Trong, 2012: n.p.). Essential to this has been the ideology known as Ho Chi Minh Thought, which in the constitution forms the national ideology together with Marxism-Leninism (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2001). Indeed, Ho Chi Minh Thought is seen as an improvement of the original ideas of Marxism-Leninism, as well as a crucial adaptation to the specificities of the Vietnamese context (Vo Nguyen Giap, 2011).

At the core of Ho Chi Minh’s thinking was the independence and development of Vietnam. The legacy of ‘Uncle Ho’ has been clear in the development-oriented agenda ever since independence, meaning that Vietnam has had a government determined to develop the country actively, with the overall goals of quickly industrialising and modernising. The latest national development plan (*Vietnam’s Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2011-2020*) reaffirms the slogans from previous development plans, seeking to develop a ‘strategy to continue promoting industrialization and modernization, developing fast and sustainably; [...] building up our country to be an industrial one with socialist orientation’ (Government of Vietnam, 2011: 1), as well as to build ‘a socialist Vietnam with a strong country, rich people, democracy, equality and civilization’ (p. 5).

In this sense, the reforms are seen as strategic choices in order to achieve the overall goals of socialist modernisation, rather than as a change in economic system. In the official narrative Vietnam has thus not been transitioning towards capitalism, but rather taking advantage of a market economy as ‘an economic institution in practice, not an economic foundation of a social system’ (Mai Huu Thuc, 2001: 20). What makes this model different from capitalism in this narrative is the focus on fairness and redistribution, using the tools of the market strategically to achieve socio-economic gains within a socialist context. The state has the crucial role here, with state ownership representing collective rather than private

interests. In other words, everything goes through the state, led by the Party, which fundamentally represents the people. Private ownership of land is in theory impossible, since land is owned by the people through the state⁹ (Mai Huu Thuc, 2001), and all personal accumulation of wealth is allowed for the purpose of the development of the nation, which in turn benefits everyone.

The insistence on the model being socialist needs to be understood in the context of the history of communism in Vietnam. The Communist Party was founded as a nationalist opposition to French colonial rule. Throughout the history of the Party it has represented *chu nghĩa xa hoi*, or socialism, versus *chu nghĩa tư bản*, capitalism. Capitalism is associated with the imperial aggression particularly of France and the US, while socialism is associated with the independence and freedom of Vietnam. Indeed, Vietnamese school children have grown up learning to say '*chu nghĩa tư bản đang giãy chết*', which can be imperfectly translated as 'capitalism is dying'. Thus, being used consistently throughout history to describe what the Communist Party represents opposition to, the term capitalism is understandably avoided (see Cheshier, 2010 for a more thorough discussion), and reforms thus left a need for coming up with a narrative of a new model. This need is further reinforced by the consensus-based political system, which makes it vital to uphold definitions and strategies that everyone can agree with. As Masina (2006: 95) argues, 'there is a broad consensus within the core leadership that the reform process is irreversible, but that this should not lead to the dismantling of the core tenet of the Vietnamese revolution'. In this sense, the idea of a 'market economy with socialist orientation' is 'rich in political implications, able to coalesce a large part of the current leadership' (Masina, 2006: 95) and can be seen as yet another pragmatic solution in the Vietnamese development model. It is thus a label that can make sense in its contextualised practical implications, but it nevertheless fails to give a good description of the current socio-economic realities of Vietnam.

Of course, the Party insists that perfect socialism is a work-in-progress. The problem is that, as discussed below, there are no signs of any socialist orientation in practice, no matter how alive it is ideologically. As Beresford (2008: 240) concludes: 'socialism in Vietnam appears as far away as ever'. That being said, the authoritarian state structure based on Leninist communism is very much alive. This has made some foreign scholars, such as London (2009), label the model 'market-Leninism'. Even though this undoubtedly reflects reality more accurately than the official version, it still implies that this is a market economy

⁹ The state officially owns all land, which in turn can be rented by individuals and firms. In practice, however, land is bought and sold in a fierce market.

without capitalism, and academic observers have seemingly accepted that it is indeed something different from capitalism. At least the word capitalism is rarely used in relation to Vietnam, with Fforde (2008) and Chesier (2010) as notable exceptions (see Chesier, 2010: 91 for an overview).

I agree with London (2009, 2013) that Vietnam's political system—with its strong authoritarianism, rigid hierarchies, and the constitutionalised leading role of the vanguard party as representative of the people—qualifies as Leninist. I disagree with London (2013), however, in seeing this as something qualitatively different from capitalism¹⁰. As Fforde (2008: 2) puts it, 'It seems [...] somewhat self-evident that what we have seen in Vietnam since the emergence of a market economy [...] is some form of capitalism'. With a relatively functioning market economy (with heavy state involvement), wage labour, profit and personal gain as legitimate goals for economic activity, and a class divided society including the emergence of a (predominantly state-connected) capitalist class, Vietnam fits into the broad category of (authoritarian) state capitalism. Perhaps a modification of the official lingo, to 'state capitalism with a Leninist orientation', better captures the Vietnamese socio-economic realities and the specific political context in which these play out.

New economic development challenges

The Vietnamese approach to development has been successful thus far, but the country is now facing a new set of challenges. The last five years have been problematic, with macroeconomic turmoil and slower growth (JDPR, 2012; Tran, 2013). *Newsweek* has claimed in bold letters that Vietnam is moving from 'tiger to pussycat' (Cox, 2012), mainly because of economic mismanagement and inefficient state involvement in the economy. It is important to remember, however, that according to orthodox economics Vietnam, with its heavy state involvement in the economy, should not have achieved the growth levels it has in the first place. The country has indeed been repeatedly regarded as following flawed policies throughout its national development project, but continuously proved its critics wrong (Masina, 2012). Nevertheless, there is agreement both among domestic and international analysts and policy makers that Vietnam now is facing a serious challenge. In many ways Vietnam has more in common with other Southeast Asian countries than the East Asian

¹⁰ This of course depends on how capitalism is defined. London (2013: 29) argues that "'capitalist" suggests the supremacy of liberal economic institutions, such as private property, and the presence of a dominant capitalist class'. As I argue in this chapter, both are in practice present in Vietnam. Nevertheless, in state capitalism the state can take the role of dominant capitalists, and history has shown that capitalism can thrive in authoritarian institutions.

developmental state, and Vietnam is struggling to break what Ohno (2009) sees as the ‘glass ceiling’ of industrialisation, the crucial upgrade to more value-added manufactures. Even though the growth has been impressive, Vietnam has not managed to build a strong industrial base for further economic development, and there is a general lack of a clear industrial policy. Vietnam’s growth has so far mainly been based on exports of agricultural products (coffee, rice, rubber) and labour-intensive manufacturing (such as footwear and textiles). How far the ‘emergence’ will go is likely to depend on Vietnam’s ability to continue scaling up its industrialisation towards more value-added production.

The government is very aware of these problems, and is trying actively to achieve industrial upgrading. One of the approaches is to target core industries to drive industrialisation, in line with the strategies pursued by the East Asian developmental states. These are called priority and spearhead industries and include a wide range of industries, such as textiles, electronics and the domestic automotive industry (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2007). After many years, however, little progress has been made. The challenges of the domestic car industry in terms of developing domestic manufacturing capacity are discussed in Article 1 of this thesis. Comparable challenges can be seen in the textile industry, where most of the inputs to the manufacturing are imported from China (Pincus, 2013), and Ohno (2009) reports similar problems along the board of targeted core industries.

There are many potential reasons for these failures. It could be the limitations of trying to act as a developmental state while also liberalising trade to a significant extent. This is one of the contradictions within the Vietnamese development model. Another is the poor vertical and horizontal coordination within the one-party system (Van Arkadie and Mallon, 2003), what makes Painter (2005: 267) characterise the Vietnamese state as a ‘highly decentralised, fragmented and sometimes incoherent set of state institutions’. Ohno (2009) sees this as having led to policies being mostly reactive rather than proactive, as well as a whole political system unsuitable for staging bold reforms. Furthermore, with capitalist reforms greatly enhancing the opportunities for profits, different ministries and individuals within them pursue their own interests. This makes the Party not only fragmented but also commercialised, according to Pincus (2013: 4):

The state did not withdraw but rather commercialized itself to take advantage of the opportunities for arbitrage associated with expanding markets. And as the state commercialized it also fragmented, as vertical authority relations broke down and horizontal coordination – which was never a great strength of the system – became even more difficult.

The problems are thus closely linked to the unleashing of capitalist forces in an authoritarian and strictly hierarchical state structure with few institutions for checks and balances. While corruption and rent-seeking were common under the planned economy, capitalism has greatly increased the availability of rents, and the coherence of the Party seems to have lost to the promise of profit in the capitalist economy. It is too early to conclude what consequences this will have for the further economic development of Vietnam. The political system was once seen as central to the development success story, but a highly pertinent question is whether this system can sustain growth and economic development in the long run without significant political reforms.

With a resource intensive development model with poor environmental regulation, growth in Vietnam also takes a heavy toll on the environment (JDPR, 2011). Future development is expected to significantly worsen this. Environmental sustainability is starting to get (rather superficial) attention. For example, Vietnam's 'Green Growth Strategy' locates greener energy, recycling and (unspecified) sustainable consumption as overall goals (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2012). Nevertheless, the increasingly visible side-effects of rapid growth mean that Vietnam could risk running into a triple crisis of economic stagnation, environmental degradation, and social polarisation.

Socialism versus social polarisation

Even though the Party insists they have been reforming only the economy, not the social system, a capitalist transition involves socio-economic transformations. In terms of social development, Vietnam has a highly impressive history of reduction of absolute poverty. With the progress of reforms, however, the unequal distribution of the benefits of the new economy has become increasingly clear. To a certain extent, Vietnam was a class-divided society also during the command economy, as rations and privileges, as well as access to profitable trading outside the official economy, depended largely on your position in the communist hierarchy (e.g. Truitt, 2013). In this regard, the communist revolution represented a continuation of the strict hierarchical systems of feudal and colonial times, although the contents of the hierarchies changed dramatically. With the transition to capitalism, these communist hierarchies remained. But Vietnam now has a very different economic reality, and the available privileges have vastly increased. The economic transition within a Leninist political system has led to an extreme inequality of opportunity, where the very rigid hierarchies of the Leninist state structure have determined the access to rents and large-scale business opportunities in the new capitalist economy. Cheshier (2010) has showed how the

capitalist class emerges from within the Communist Party and how the cadres have been able to enrich themselves thanks to their positions.

A clear distinction between private and public does not really exist in Vietnam, as the two sectors intertwine in complex ways (Gainsborough, 2010). Officials in the public sector use their positions to access private business opportunities, and the private sector is often highly dependent on political connections in order to succeed. The Communist Party still presents itself as the vanguard of the working class, but its members in reality act more as both actors and gatekeepers in the capitalist economy. This mix, along with very high informal salaries, makes it hard to distinguish the classes in Vietnam. There is, however, clearly a strong upper class of capitalists and high ranking members of the Communist Party and their families. There is also a growing (predominantly urban) middle class (see Gainsborough, 2010). These two classes have widespread access to high-standard real estate, goods and services, and materially enjoy very high living standards. They are also the ones who can afford to buy and use cars. They do represent a small minority, however. The development success of Vietnam has been based on the labour of those whom the Party is meant to represent; farmers and industrial workers. But these two groups have received very small parts of the profits made, making it unclear how the ostensible 'socialist orientation' provides an alternative to the relative exploitation of capitalism.

Vietnam does have safety nets, and different policies to benefit the poor and the so-called near-poor, such as free or discounted health insurance (Gao et al., 2013). But in terms of social policies, Vietnam appears to have been inspired by neoliberal approaches. User fees on education and healthcare have placed a significant burden on poorer households. In addition, the rich and well-connected are able to buy private high quality education outside a public education system in need of reform, and are able to get past waiting lists in public hospitals, or access expensive private healthcare. Even within the public education and health systems money buys extra classes or better care. The reforms of the social service system that have been dubbed 'socialisation' in the official narrative have thus rather led to commodification of knowledge and health.

The increasingly inequitable growth also potentially threatens the sustainability of the development model at deeper levels. Low general income means a relatively small domestic market, which is negative for domestic industries such as the auto industry (see Article 1) and reinforces Vietnam's dependency on exports. Also, protests are growing in size and number (Le Hong Hiep, 2012). People in Vietnam are very aware of the stark inequalities embedded in the current system, and that the 'equality' of the official narrative has taken an Orwellian

turn where some are much more equal than others. The Party is indeed striving to keep its legitimacy in a new generation that has not experienced its victories over foreign aggressors¹¹. At the same time, the regime's response to the growing discontent has been to crack down harder on political freedoms, such as introducing repressive laws on the use of Internet and social media (not allowed to be used for discussing politics) and jailing vocal bloggers (frequently depicted as terrorists).

The impressive achievements of *doi moi* have improved living standards for most Vietnamese while making a minority very rich. The differences between rural and urban Vietnam are particularly striking, although also within cities wealth is unevenly spread. This is very much the case also in Hanoi, Vietnam's capital and home to the communist elite.

A reformed Hanoi

Zooming in from the national to the urban scale, many of the changes associated with reforms in Vietnam have been particularly intense in its largest cities. While Hanoi, which celebrated its 1000th year of existence in 2010 (the majority of the time known as Thang Long)¹², still bears visible traits from Chinese rule, various Vietnamese imperial dynasties, the American War, and Soviet-style architecture and planning (see Logan, 2000 and Horen, 2005 for overviews), *doi moi* has made significant social, economic and physical impacts on Vietnam's capital city.

With new employment opportunities, new land laws and a relaxing of the strict *ho khau* (household registration) system, Vietnam has been rapidly urbanising since the early 1990s (Nguyen Tuan Anh et al, 2012). The changes have been particularly dramatic in Hanoi, as the city's borders were expanded in 2008 to include neighbouring Ha Tay province and several districts and communes, effectively tripling the physical size of the capital and doubling its population (see Vietnam News, 2008). In 2014, Hanoi was home to 7 million people, a million less than Ho Chi Minh City (GSO, 2015), but is aspiring to become a megacity with 10 million inhabitants by 2050 (Government of Vietnam, 2011 in Yip and Tran, 2015).

Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City represent political and economic hubs in Vietnam, with significantly higher growth rates and lower poverty rates than the rest of the country (World Bank, 2011, 2012). The two largest cities are also where the vast majority of Vietnam's upper

¹¹ Different opinions exist as to the strength of the Party's legitimacy. London (2009) sees it as strong, while Le Hong Hiep (2012) sees the legitimacy as under serious threat.

¹² Archeological findings indicate human habitation of present-day Hanoi for 10,000 years (Horen, 2005).

and middle class households are found (see World Bank, 2012). Within the boundaries of Hanoi, the transformations since *doi moi* have been unevenly spread (Yip and Tran, 2015). The World Bank (2012) finds that increases in inequality in Vietnam are driven mainly by rapid increases in income inequality in rural areas, while urban income inequality remained stable between 2004 and 2010. Nevertheless, consumption inequality in Hanoi has grown increasingly evident, with sharp and highly visible differences in, for example, quality of housing (see also Gough and Tran, 2009) and, as discussed in the four articles of this thesis, in means of transportation. As is discussed in Article 3, Hanoi is interestingly also famous in Vietnam for a high appetite for luxury goods and for conspicuous display of wealth (see also Fforde, 2003). While few Hanoians are considered poor, a significant part of the population is still considered as vulnerable, particularly among rural-urban migrants (World Bank, 2012). Meanwhile, a vibrant consumer culture has emerged within Hanoi's upper and middle classes, reflecting national trends towards increased consumption of a wide range of goods.

***Doi moi* and consumption**

How the rapid development since *doi moi* has affected consumption is discussed in all four articles, but particularly Article 4 goes beyond the consumption of motorbikes and cars. Nevertheless, a few words should be said at this point. As is to be expected, consumption of a wide range of commodities has increased very rapidly since *doi moi*. This has been well documented by Vietnam's General Statistics Office (GSO) through their biannual publication of the *Household Living Standard Survey*. Table 1 shows the rapid changes in access to a range of technological appliances among Vietnamese households. It also shows that the ownership of appliances is unevenly spread between urban and rural households. While Vietnam has achieved impressive poverty reduction, still 12.5 percent of the population—about 11 million people—live on less than USD 2 a day, among which rural households, and particularly the ethnic minority population, are grossly overrepresented (see Banik and Hansen, in press).

Meanwhile, the urban middle class has been rapidly growing in number and affluence. This new affluence has been captured by a number of interesting studies. A quite early study of changing consumption patterns is found in *Consuming Urban Culture in Contemporary Vietnam*, edited by Drummond and Thomas (2003), focusing on capturing 'the impact on everyday lived experience' of the economic and political transformations (Thomas and Drummond, 2003: 1) in a country where '[f]ood rationing really only stopped being relevant in 1990-91, and in the late 1980s a bicycle had been a major purchase' (Fforde, 2003: 49-50).

While this volume included studies of popular television (Drummond, 2003), cinema (Dang Nhat Minh and Pham Thu Thuy, 2003) and sidewalk trading (Higgs, 2003), the volume deals more with the overall political, economic, social and cultural changes in Vietnam following *doi moi* than consumption *per se*. Indeed, few studies have had such a focus, although consumption figures as a prominent factor in discussions of issues such as the new middle class (Earl, 2014) and changing gender roles (Nguyen Bich Thuan and Thomas, 2004; Nguyen-vo, 2004; Drummond, 2004; Leshkowich, 2012). The contributions to *The Reinvention of Distinction: Modernity and the Middle Class in Urban Vietnam* edited by Nguyen-Marshall, Drummond and Bélanger (2012) stand out in this regard. With accounts of the middle class in colonial and contemporary Vietnam, the introductory (Belanger, Drummond and Nguyen-Marshall, 2012) and concluding (Vann, 2012) chapters in particular include excellent discussions of the changing meanings and possibilities of consumption in Vietnam which are further discussed in the articles of Part II of the thesis.

Very little has been written about urban transport and mobility in Vietnam. On the supply side, the motorcycle industry has been well researched by Fujita (2013ab). Truitt (2008) has discussed the social lives of motorbikes in Ho Chi Minh City extensively, while Earl (2014) briefly discusses driving practices for middle-class women in Ho Chi Minh City. Drummond (2012) also touches upon changing transport consumption during *doi moi* and how inhabitants in the city have moved from bicycles to motorbikes to cars in a single generation. The emerging automobility in Vietnam has however not been subject to academic analysis, although Truitt (2008) did note that cars were becoming more common in Ho Chi Minh City in the mid-2000s. This was when car sales started taking off in Vietnam, and since then car consumption has steadily been increasing also in Hanoi.

In this thesis, cars, motorbikes and mobility represent the main research focus. Furthermore, the motorbike has played a crucial role in the fieldwork, as will be extensively discussed in the following chapter.

Table 1: Number of durable goods per 100 households in Vietnam in various years.

Year	Car	Motorbike	Telephone	Refrigerator	Video player	Color TV	Stereo	Computer	AC	Washing/ drying machine	Water heater
National											
2002	0.1	32.3	10.7	10.9	22.5	52.7	5.8	2.4	1.1	3.8	3.3
2004	0.1	55.3	28.5	16.6	32.8	69.8	1.0	5.1	2.2	6.2	5.4
2006	0.2	68.6	51.4	23.0	44.5	82.0	12.8	7.7	3.7	9.3	7.6
2008	0.4	89.4	107.2	32.1	53.4	92.1	14.9	11.5	5.5	13.3	10.1
2010	1.3	96.1	128.4	39.7	54.2	85.9	12.6	17.0	9.4	17.6	13.3
2012	1.8	115.3	154.4	49.7	55.5	97.3	13.6	18.8	11.6	22.7	18.5
Urban											
2002	0.2	56.7	32.5	33.7	46.7	81.2	14.6	8.9	4.5	13.8	11.4
2004	0.3	96.4	78.2	45.8	54.9	94.9	21.6	16.5	8.0	21.2	18.0
2006	0.4	109.1	115.4	53.9	60.5	103.1	20.5	21.3	12.0	27.6	22.5
2008	1.0	129.1	176.6	64.1	63.4	108.6	20.5	28.9	17.3	36.1	26.6
2010	3.0	123.4	180.1	63.8	57.2	97.6	15.9	38.2	26.2	41.0	28.9
2012	3.6	145.9	213.3	75.7	60.5	112.0	18.5	40.9	31.4	48.5	38.2
Rural											
2002	0.0	24.5	3.7	3.6	14.7	43.6	2.9	0.4	0.1	0.6	0.7
2004	0.0	41.4	11.7	6.8	25.4	61.4	6.6	1.3	0.3	1.2	1.1
2006	0.0	53.2	27.0	11.2	38.4	74.3	9.9	2.6	0.5	2.4	2.0
2008	0.1	73.9	80.2	19.6	49.5	85.7	12.7	4.8	1.0	4.4	3.8
2010	0.5	84.1	105.6	29.2	52.8	80.7	11.1	7.6	2.1	7.4	6.5
2012	1.0	102.2	129.2	38.5	53.3	91.0	11.5	9.4	3.2	11.6	10.1

Source: Compiled by author based on numbers from Vietnam Household Survey 2002, 2010 and 2012. Numbers are rounded off.

4. Methods and data: ‘Motorbike ethnography’

‘Starting with, or privileging, the local and the everyday is important not only because it highlights the explanatory distance separating macroscopic and microscopic interpretation, but also because it forces a consideration of human agency’ (Rigg, 2007: 9).

The overall aim of the thesis, to understand changes in consumption in Vietnam’s process of reforms and rapid development, has remained constant throughout the research process. Within this overall focus area, however, the research project has been driven by the fieldwork in the iterative process that ethnographic research requires. This chapter will outline and carefully present and discuss my fieldwork and data collection, as well as the choices and changes made as the project has developed.

Ontological and epistemological starting points

The research for this thesis is based on two main and rather commonsensical (but not uncontroversial) starting points: First, that in order to understand people’s worlds and lives, you should talk with them (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). And second, that in order to understand practices you need to go beyond ‘sayings’ and also consider ‘doings’ (see Halkier and Jensen, 2011; Watson and Till, 2010). These starting points have guided my research and been decisive for the methodological decisions made.

In addition to explaining changes in consumption, the thesis aims to better understand what consumption *means* to people and understand people’s views of development and improved living standards, as well as *why* and *how* specific consumption patterns become normalised. At the same time, the approach to consumption in this study is based on the view that consumption patterns are economically, socially and culturally grounded. Thus, in order to realise the aim of the thesis, a substantive approach is required.

Rather than setting out to test the validity of predetermined theories, the approach of this thesis has been exploratory. Shaped by what Mjøset (2009) has labelled a ‘contextualist approach’, fieldwork has been the driving force of the theoretical arguments in this thesis rather than the other way around. The thesis thus to a significant extent follows the principle

of ‘substantive primacy’ (see Mjøset, 2009). Existing theories were important to provide assumptions on what would be central factors in my analysis, but these assumptions were open to change through exposure to information from the field. Theory has thus represented what Bourdieu describes as ‘*a temporary construct which takes shape for and by empirical work*’ (interviewed in Wacquant, 1989: 50, original emphasis).

This position in turn influences research design. As argued by Scott et al. (2006: 38), fieldwork requires a ‘negotiated, adaptive, and flexible approach’. This involves an approach to research design as a framework that is developing and changing over time, adapting to the challenges and opportunities that ethnographic fieldwork inevitably brings along. Thus, rather than a fixed blueprint, the thesis has operated with an open-ended approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), what Maxwell (1996) has labelled an ‘interactive model of research design’.

Fieldwork and methods

‘...driving and passengering on a motorbike are not innocent or neutral activities when undertaking field research: they are bound up in the unfolding of socio-spatial relations between researcher and respondent and between researcher and fieldsite’ (Gillen, 2015: 1).

The fieldwork for this thesis has been conducted in Hanoi over three periods in 2012 and 2013. The first period consisted of a one-month initial, preparatory fieldwork in September 2012, while the second and third periods, in 2013, both lasted three months (February to May and September to November). In addition, I have returned to Hanoi annually for shorter visits, the latest in September 2015.

Although significant amounts of planning were necessary in order to carry out this research, I will in the following resist the temptation to wrap up the fieldwork neatly with the benefit of hindsight as having followed an unproblematic linear evolution of data collection. Fieldwork is, after all, ‘mediated and messy’ (Hyndman, 2001: 265). For the sake of research quality (see discussion below), I will rather take an ‘autobiographical approach’ (see Gillen, 2015) to recounting and explaining the different steps of the research.

Getting access to the field

As social scientists are well aware, different contexts present different challenges and opportunities for conducting research, what Scott et al. (2006: 30) refer to as ‘fieldwork possibilities’. As Scott et al. (2006) furthermore explain in detail, Vietnam comes with a host of challenges for researchers, such as the lack of available information and the sometimes

dubious reliability of available published materials. These challenges are arguably even greater when conducting research on topics that are somehow considered sensitive. Urban research among the middle class, on industrial development, consumption and transport, can hardly be considered very sensitive topics in contemporary Vietnam. Thus, compared to the surveillance, difficulties and ethical dilemmas encountered by those doing research on for example ethnic minorities in the country (see Turner, 2013ab), I have not encountered major obstacles. Nevertheless, and even though I was quite familiar with Vietnam before doing my fieldwork, the cultural differences and the political context of ‘State-led everything’ (Scott et al. 2006: 32) did provide some trials.

First of all, as is common practice in most countries, I needed permission to engage in research within Vietnam’s border. In Vietnam obtaining permission usually entails cooperation with a host institution. This was turning into a challenge, and I had planned to spend my initial fieldwork period sorting out this issue when I through good contacts quite unexpectedly found an appropriate host institution eager to welcome me as a guest researcher. Entering the field is always challenging (see Leslie and Storey, 2003), but this agreement made it at least professionally a quite smooth process. The only practical obstacle I encountered in this process concerned my visa. My host institution invited me to stay for a year, but I found it hard to obtain visa for more than three months at a time. I eventually decided to turn this into an opportunity to ‘retreat from the field’ for a while to go through my data after three months and plan for the final period of fieldwork. In the end this worked out very well. It allowed me to present my initial findings to an audience of Vietnamese and Vietnam researchers (Hansen, 2013), and together with discussions with my supervisors this contributed significantly towards making my last period of fieldwork particularly productive.

Motorbike ethnography

There are widely different opinions on how best to label qualitative research, and there is considerable overlap between labels such as case study, qualitative inquiry, and ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I know from my experience in interdisciplinary research environments that the term ‘ethnography’ should be used with caution. Within particularly anthropology, combined with a strong sense of ownership of the method, there are often strict academic requirements to what can be considered a ‘proper’ ethnography. The method can also be controversial within geography. Although participant observation has been used in influential works in the discipline (see Kearns, 2010; Watson and Till, 2010 for overviews), overall Herbert (2000) finds that ethnographic approaches have been underused in

geographical research. In the end, ethnography can mean many different things, although participant observation can be seen as a fundamental principle. Instead of engaging in the discussion of what ethnography is or should be, in the following I will rather explain why I choose to call my overall research method ‘motorbike ethnography’.

Two main methods were used for the data collection for this research: interviews and participant observation, although informal talks and secondary sources ranging from academic literature through government reports to daily newspapers have also played a crucial role. I will get back to all of these below after a brief discussion of why I chose to make two- and four-wheeled mobility the centre of attention for this thesis.

Why cars and motorbikes?

When I started my preparatory fieldwork in Hanoi in 2012, the first thing I did was to visit contacts I had made previously and engage in discussions with several Vietnamese social scientists about my topic for research. I was rather surprised to see the positive reactions the topic of consumption received. I also met many different opinions on what constituted the most pressing issues related to consumption in Hanoi today. One Vietnamese anthropologist wanted me to focus on alcohol consumption, due to both its growing attention as a social problem in Vietnam (see Thanh Nien News, 2014), as well as the strong symbolic meanings of alcohol consumption in the new economy. Another option he suggested was religion, due to the interesting new dimensions of conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption of religious artefacts and the integration of capitalist symbols to ancestor worship. One male political economist immediately talked of the many new and modern supermarkets and malls that have rapidly been appearing in Hanoi, and how these are part of affecting the consumption patterns of young middle class people in Hanoi away from the traditional wet markets (although see Wertheim-Heck, 2015). We made many visits to these new supermarkets together, all the time driving in this researcher’s car, and it was striking how low the average age of the customers of this rather new consumption phenomenon was. Himself a bachelor, he told me that for especially men the new supermarkets made grocery shopping much easier, since men often find it uncomfortable to negotiate prices in traditional wet markets (also discussed by Avieli, 2013).

But it was the streets that really caught my attention, as they indeed had from my very first visit to the city in 2010. I was already somewhat familiar with the almost inconceivable number of motorbikes, but walking around the streets of Hanoi, cars started getting my attention. My first question was why someone would choose to drive a car in the narrow

streets of central Hanoi, when the motorbike had to be much faster for getting around town. This was around the time that I first learned of Vietnam's aim to develop the domestic automobile industry, which further corresponded with my reading of the World Bank's (2011) *Vietnam Urbanization Review*, where the Bank strongly argues that the transition towards cars in Hanoi is directly unsustainable. And of course, I kept hearing about - and breathing in - the at times poisonous air in Hanoi. More than anything, however, I experienced how hard it was to be a pedestrian in today's Hanoi (as is further discussed in Articles 1, 2 and 3).

Together these factors added up to make me decide to place cars at the centre of my study. Among my contacts in Hanoi the choice was in general positively received. Traffic is a topic that is much discussed in local media and around the tables of cafés, and a topic where many Hanoians have strong opinions. However, while I discovered that cars represented the new big consumer object in Hanoi, I also soon realised that its two-wheeled little brother, the motorbike, had to be central to a study of consumption and mobility in Hanoi. It was also the motorbike that became the key to 'open up' the at first overwhelming city.

Fieldwork on two wheels

Although initially not part of a larger plan, I decided at an early stage to rent a motorbike for my fieldwork. I was accustomed to driving one, particularly from the time I had spent working in Vietnam prior to my work on this thesis, but I had never even dreamed of driving one in the frenzied streets of Hanoi. As aptly described by Gillen (2015: 3): 'The senses seem to be overstimulated on a motorbike in Vietnam: there are the deafening sounds of honking to go with the heavy plumes of exhaust that operate in unison with the constant braking and accelerating needed to avert accidents and proceed smoothly'. Nowhere in Vietnam does this hold more truth than in central Hanoi. Nevertheless, when I decided to get my own motorbike a week or so into my preparatory fieldwork, I started realising how important this would be to my research. In what may sound like an exaggeration, the city in many ways changed character and opened up. First of all, I could easily cover large geographical areas, the motorbike allowing me to go wherever I wanted to go whenever I wanted to. I spent hours just driving in the complex networks of Hanoi's streets, marked by a conspicuous lack of any indications of directions to different parts and places of the city, and with a practice of street

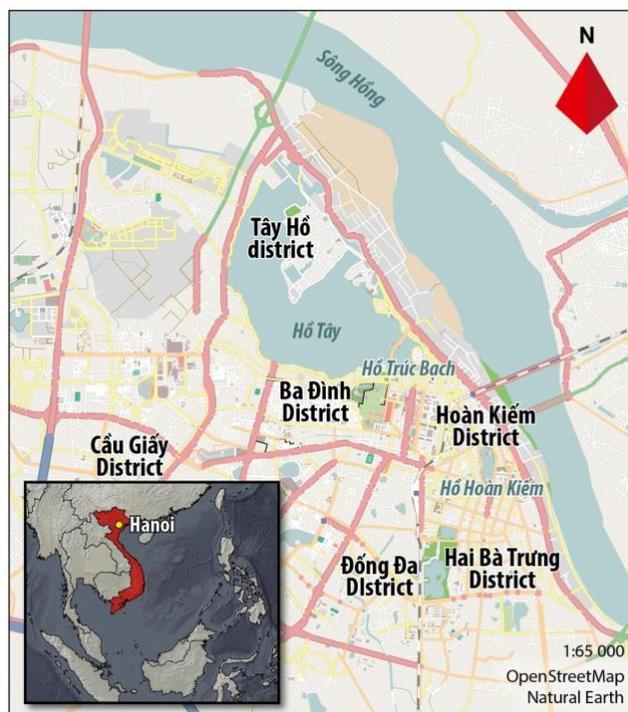
names that at first was, mildly put, confusing.¹³ After having driven out of the boundaries of my small map several times, I bought a large tourist map and started extending the spatial reach of my journeys. This was done partly out of pure curiosity, and partly due to the more practical concern of finding a suitable neighbourhood where I could live during my main fieldwork. In the process I discovered a world apart from central Hanoi, a world where the sight of a *ngươi nuoc ngoai* (foreigner) could provoke the giggles I associated with remote rural towns. The fact that this particularly large foreigner was also driving a *xe máy* (motorbike), further strengthened the element of surprise on the part of local residents. The motorbike thus in many ways expanded my spatial and social knowledge of the city.

Approaching the changes in Hanoi from a motorbike turned out to be appropriate in a variety of ways. As Jones (2005: 826) writes about using a bicycle for fieldwork: ‘The bicycle is a fine tool for undertaking geographical fieldwork in that it enables the rider to cover relatively large distances in a day, while retaining an intimacy with the surroundings that is lost from behind the windscreen of a motorized vehicle’. While in my case using a bicycle to do fieldwork could have been useful, I argue that the motorbike is a better starting point for approaching contemporary Hanoi. In a city that used to be dominated by bicycles, covering long distances on a bicycle today is unfortunately a daunting task (as discussed in Article 2). And with interviews spread out over a large geographical area, and temperatures at times making it a challenge just being outdoors, this would be less convenient. Another logical option would be to use a car in order to better understand the many particularities of being a car owner and driver in Hanoi today. Although I compensated by riding around with colleagues and friends who owned cars, I still hold that the motorbike is a more appropriate vehicle for exploring and understanding Hanoi, as well as understanding the impact the increasing number of cars has on the majority of Hanoi’s citizens (who are, after all, driving motorbikes). More importantly, the motorbike captures the essence of contemporary Hanoi. It has, together with the bicycle before it, shaped urban geography and social and economic life, and is what keeps Hanoi going and what enables Hanoians to carry out their everyday lives. The motorbike has thus been crucial to all my fieldwork, also where it concerns cars, and I have used a motorbike, first a Yamaha Nuovo, but mostly a 125cc ‘semi-automatic’ Honda Future Neo, for practically all purposes of my fieldwork.

¹³ For example, a *ngo* is a narrow alley springing out of a larger street (*pho*), often still keeping the name of the main street. A *ngách* (often called *hem* in the south of Vietnam) in turn springs out of a *ngo* and is usually even narrower, still keeping the name of the main street. I should add that the system makes perfect sense once accustomed to it.

Hence, there is a reason why I call my approach *motorbike* ethnography rather than merely ethnography. The label is intended to capture the important role played by my use of this vehicle in shaping my understanding of the field and of the performance of everyday mobility. Driving in traffic provides a good example of the often shifting realities of places. Traffic is fundamentally spatially bound but (almost) always on the move. Temporally, it tends to have similar characteristics over time, yet is never the same. My ethnographic approach thus in a sense becomes simultaneously single- and multi-sited; it takes place within the spatial boundaries of one city, but it is characterised by constantly moving (or sometimes being stuck) between places within this boundary.

Figure 1: Map of central Hanoi



Note: Map created by Haakon McGarrigle Olsvold and Torstein S. Throndsen/the GIS club at the University of Oslo

The motorbike became the main vehicle for immersion into the field. Although I clearly stood out in the crowd as a close to two metres tall white, bearded man, I felt I was engaging in the everyday life of Hanoi to a much larger extent than I had before. This feeling was further strengthened when I returned to do my main fieldwork and found an apartment outside of the main tourist area of *Hoan Kiem* (see figure 1). I admittedly ended up in an area much closer to the popular expatriate area north of *Ho Tay* (West Lake) than originally

planned¹⁴, but my small neighbourhood around *Ho Truc Bach* turned out to be interesting in its own sense, and highly convenient as a ‘field base’.

The motorbike became part of my everyday life, and this was further strengthened when I got an office at my host institution. The office was situated towards the south of (central) Hanoi, in *Dong Da District* (see figure 1) but the distance from my new apartment was manageable. I soon learned, however, that I was still unfamiliar with the early morning rush traffic in some of the main arteries of Hanoi. This made my trips to the office long and tedious, with the feeling of having inhaled the exhaust of a medium-sized factory before reaching my destination. When in a hurry, I suddenly found myself taking more chances than I normally would, driving through ‘almost-red’ light and even mimicking the popular practice of driving on sidewalks. In other words, in the practice of commuting I adopted the performances of (some of) my fellow drivers, and the context of Hanoi traffic quickly shaped me into ways of behaving that I would not have engaged in outside ‘the field’. The experiences with traffic jams also eventually convinced me to acquire a facemask, something I had never considered in the past. Finally, however, I was able to find detours to larger and less crowded streets that made my daily commute more pleasurable.

Fieldwork can be much more than observing and interviewing people. When not conducting interviews or driving around, I spent most of my time learning the Vietnamese language, reading Vietnamese novels and newspapers, watching Vietnamese movies and TV-shows, exploring the famous street food scene of Hanoi and generally hanging out with Vietnamese (and expatriate) friends, drinking *ca phe* or *bia hoi*¹⁵, sipping *tra da* (ice tea) while watching couples dance in public squares, going to concerts with local bands or enjoying a meal in the streets. To me this is what ethnography is all about, trying to get ‘under the skin’ of a society and culture and its social spaces to a more profound extent than what is obtained by ‘merely’ interviewing people. I also subscribed to the national English language newspaper *Vietnam News*. The paper was delivered (by motorbike) to my apartment every morning in time for my early morning walk in the neighbourhood to participate in the less motorised morning version of Hanoi (as discussed in Article 3) as well as to have breakfast at one of the *pho* stalls at or around my local wet market (*Cho Chau Long*) and have *ca phe nau da* (ice coffee with sweetened milk) by *Ho Truc Bach*. Indeed, the use of national, English-

¹⁴ I also to my amusement discovered that my apartment complex was named *Nha Tay*, or ‘Western House’.

¹⁵ *Bia hoi* refers to ‘fresh beer’, but now often simply means draft beer. ‘Going *bia hoi*’ is a social institution in Hanoi (but not so much in the rest of the country), particularly for men, and usually includes drinks and some food at a designated *bia hoi* stall or restaurant.

language newspapers in print and online has been an important additional data source for my research.

Language

Although ready to defend my approach as ethnographic research, there was one major weakness of my ethnography: my failure, despite many attempts, to develop comprehensive Vietnamese language skills. While spending much time learning the language before and during the fieldwork, I was unable to get confident beyond a rather coarse survival level (food, drink, directions, small talk, personal introductions). I will not try to excuse this with the fact that Vietnamese is a very hard language to learn, nor by the fact that many middle-class Vietnamese now speak at least some English. I fully acknowledge the limitation of my rather weak language skills. Nevertheless, I do consider my fieldwork as successful, and the use of translators saved the many interviews where English could not deliver a satisfactory result. As is discussed below, my combined translators and research assistants proved to be an invaluable asset for my fieldwork and interviews beyond translating what was being said. I also benefited much from the language skills I had developed, helping me properly to relate myself socially to other people (a complicated skill in Vietnamese), and understand phrases and words during interviews and transcription to help me better grasp what was being said.

Mobile and sedentary methods

The motorbike ethnography approach to some extent fits under the broad umbrella of ‘mobile methods’ (see Büscher et al., 2011 for an extensive overview), as a form of what Sheller and Urry (2006: 217) refer to as ‘mobile ethnography’ involving ‘participation in patterns of movement while conducting ethnographic research’. However, I did not carry out my interviews in motion, as is the case in walking interviews (Evans and Jones, 2011). Nor was my main goal to observe specific informants, as is done in methods such as ‘walk alongs’ and ‘ride alongs’ (Kusenbach, 2003) or ‘shadowing’ (Jirón, 2011). The mobile elements of my fieldwork were used to capture the flows of traffic and the commute, the life along the streets and indeed the entire streetscapes of Hanoi, all from the back of the most popular means of transportation. The motorbike was used to pick up the full, multi-sensory experience of the streets in ways that would be hard without a certain use of mobile methods, although this has proved a significant challenge to convert into words (see particularly Article 2 and 3 of the thesis for attempts to do this). My more direct face-to-face engagement with informants took place through more traditional ‘sedentary’ interviews.

Interviews

While the participant observation played a vital role in shaping my understanding of the city and the everyday mobility practices of Hanoians, interviews represented an essential part of my data collection. Interviews were mainly semi-structured where I had prepared different general scripts for different types of informants, and used them as starting points, although of course taking care to let the conversation guide the interview. When some topics or questions turned out not to work very well, or interesting topics surfaced in interviews, the interview guide would be slightly modified to account for this.

I conducted 62 interviews with car owners, motorbike owners, car retailers and marketers, auto company representatives, motorbike company representatives, academics and transport experts, and government officials (see table 2). 61 of these were conducted as face-to-face semi-structured interviews while one (with a motorbike company representative) was done by email.

Table 2: Overview of informants

	Car owners	Motorbike owners	Car retailers/marketers	Car manufacturer reps.*	Motorbike manufacturer reps.	Government officials	Academics & experts	Other**
Male	22	8	4	1	1	1	3	1
Female	8	8	-	3	1	1	-	-
Total	30	16	4	4	2	2	3	1
Recorded	28	16	3	-	1	-	1	1

*Including an interview with Vietnam Automobile Manufacturers Association (VAMA)

**This category refers to a very wealthy businessman, interviewed as a car owner, but who turned out to not own a car but only use taxis or company cars with drivers

In addition to these interviews I also engaged in a large number of conversations with people I consider to be ‘key informants’ in different respects, but that I did not formally interview. Many of these conversations would be more informal in character, at universities, over a coffee or over *bia hoi*. Furthermore, innumerable informal discussions about traffic, cars, motorbikes and development over the five years I have worked and done research in Hanoi and Vietnam have informed my research.

Interviews were conducted at different sites depending on the preference of the informants. Many of them took place at their offices or at cafés and restaurants, and a few of them at my Hanoi office. Where appropriate and accepted by the informants, interviews were

recorded (see table 2). These were later transcribed verbatim and coded using NVivo software. With the exception of two interviews where a research assistant helped me, I did all the transcribing myself. All interviews were carried out together with a research assistant, who also served as translator where necessary.

Sampling and informants

The informants were chosen through different sampling strategies. Although overall characterised by ‘purposeful sampling’ (Overton and van Diermen, 2003) where I made clear judgments concerning what kind of informants I wanted to interview, probably the most important technique was ‘snowball sampling’ where I used research assistants and other informants to establish new contacts. Some of this would border to what Patton (2002) refers to as ‘opportunistic sampling’, where the researcher is flexible and follows new leads during fieldwork (in Bradshaw and Stratford, 2010). In other words, sampling strategies have been worked out and changed in the progress of research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Through ‘desk studies’ I spent much time preparing interview guides and background research before starting my main fieldwork. I thus started out my main fieldwork knowing that I wanted to talk to middle class car owners and motorbike owners, as well as relevant government officials, car retailers and representatives of automobile companies. As indicated above I first thought car owners would represent my most interesting group of informants, but with time I realised that motorbike owners were equally important. In the last period of my main fieldwork I thus expanded the number of motorbike owners I talked to, as well as including representatives of motorbike companies.

Finding car owners willing to talk to me was a relatively easy task. Colleagues and particularly research assistants helped me to locate different car owners. I aimed at getting informants from different age groups and occupations, the latter divided mainly between the people working in the private and the public sector. I also made sure to find informants who lived in different parts of the city. My informants varied in age from 20 to 70, and occupations varied from businessmen through employees of international organisations to military and government officials. The majority of car owners were men, reflecting the fact that men are overrepresented as car owners in Hanoi. Most of the women I interviewed also reported that their husbands had paid for their cars. Since they had full autonomy over the use of the car, for the purpose of analysis I counted them as car owners and treated their transport practices accordingly. Overall, maybe due to car ownership still being relatively rare, the car being an important positional good, and the rather restrictive policies towards car ownership being

unpopular among the well off, most were more than happy to discuss cars and transport as well as to direct me towards other car owners.

As for motorbike owners, the situation was slightly different. While car ownership due to high prices indicates membership in the middle class in Hanoi, motorbike ownership is so widespread that I had to make clear choices. Since the focus was on middle class consumers, I decided to mainly look for people who were considered relatively well-off, in other words potential car owners, who owned a motorbike and not a car. Here, my sample in the end consisted of many young (25-30) informants, although I did interview informants as young as 21 and as old as 61. After the first interview, with a man working in the public sector in addition to private business, I realised he spent much time defending why he did not have a car. I thus had to revise my interview guide and interview approach in order to make clearer that I was interested in motorbike consumption *per se*, not only as an absence of car ownership.

All my car- and motorbike-owning informants can be lumped together as belonging to the Vietnamese middle class. Middle class is a highly elusive category in general, and even more so in Vietnam (see Gainsborough, 2010, Huong Le Thu, 2015). Huong Le Thu (2015) discusses how there is not really a concept of the middle class in the Vietnamese language, nor is there supposed to be one in the ostensibly classless society of nominally socialist Vietnam. Since a thorough discussion of the concept of middle class lies outside the focus of this thesis, I here quite simply refer to middle class as those who neither belong to the elite nor the poor. In other words, they can afford to consume beyond subsistence, but are not necessarily very wealthy. My informants' incomes ranged from average to very high, and while none could be considered poor, a few were clearly bordering the upper class.

Among my other informants, auto retailers and marketers were generally welcoming and relatively easy to approach, again due to the networks of my research assistants. Some of the auto companies proved a bit harder to get in touch with, but due particularly to the work by one of my assistants they were in the end all seemingly happy to welcome me and voice their opinions on the car market and on operating a car business in Hanoi and Vietnam.

Obtaining interviews with government officials was more difficult, and this was a point where my expectations had to be seriously renegotiated in the encounter with 'the field'. I knew Vietnam quite well already, and I knew that in an authoritarian country a researcher cannot just contact a ministry and expect to get an interview. I nevertheless had expectations of being able to talk to some relevant high-ranking officials about my topics. I quickly learned from my host institution, however, that this would be very difficult. I thus had to rethink my

approach, and managed to get interviews with less senior officials in two highly relevant ministries. The two crucial interviews I managed to get in the end, at the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Transportation, were made possible by contacts at my host institution.

The hardest part somewhat surprisingly turned out to be multilateral development organisations. Apart from the Asian Development Bank, where I managed to get personal contacts (although none of the information they provided is used in the thesis), none of the organisations I contacted responded to my outreach. Since this was not considered an essential part of my research, I finally decided to abandon the attempts.

Research assistants

As already indicated above, my access to informants has depended significantly on my research assistants. I used a total of five different Vietnamese research assistants (four female, one male). These were all higher educated young professionals, but lived in different parts of the city and were part of different social networks. Three of them were young researchers or research assistants by occupation, and all of them had experience with academic work. Without doubt I am heavily indebted to my assistants, without whom my research would have been extremely difficult (see discussion on the importance of research assistants in Leslie and Storey, 2003; Scott et al. 2006).

As Borchgrevink (2003) discusses, the use of translators is an often ignored topic in ethnographic literature, probably silenced due to ideals of fluency in local languages. As my Vietnamese language skills were not good enough to perform interviews (as discussed above), my assistants also served as translators where necessary. Some of them also helped me to translate documents from Vietnamese to English. The use of translators overall worked very well, although some cautions had to be taken. As discussed by Leslie and Storey (2003), you run the risk of the translator omitting or changing information presented by the informant. I thus spent time before starting the interviews carefully explaining what I wanted to do and what kind of information I was interested in. I also explained that I wanted direct translations of everything stated during the interviews. I was always the one actually conducting the interview, although my assistants would chip in on some occasions to ask for more information. In a couple of cases I also had my assistant help me transcribe the interviews, in this sense double-checking the translation.

Field notes

I took field notes throughout the fieldwork. These ranged from small notes to longer texts, depending on the events of the day and the time I had to write. Upon returning from fieldwork the notes were typed and saved electronically, and have been used to recount events and try to get back to the ‘feelings’ of the Hanoian streetscape when trying to write while being temporally and spatially separated from ‘the field’. As is discussed below, ethical considerations had to be taken when writing the notes in the specificities of my research context.

Ethical concerns

As Gillen (2015) discusses more in detail, there are quite practical ethical concerns relevant for using a motorbike for fieldwork. In my ‘motorbike ethnography’ I have in theory constantly represented a potential danger to myself and others being in or along traffic in Hanoi. Frequently a research assistant would ‘ride pillion’ with me to interviews, often in the most heavily trafficked parts of Hanoi. As a fairly skilled motorbike driver, and in the context of close to complete normalisation of moto-mobility, I did not reflect much on this until after fieldwork, although I was involved in several near-accidents. Of other ethical concerns I will in the following focus on positionality, informed consent and informant confidentiality.

Positionality

Social research cannot be conducted in an ‘autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the biography of the researcher’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 15). A research project such as this thesis places much responsibility on a single person. I have been the one to decide my topic, read and interpret the literature, seek informants, conduct interviews and write up the results. Still, this has taken place through interaction with a wide range of other people. In the words of Watson and Till (2010: 9): ‘[...] ethnographers do not simply “collect” forms of visual and material culture or conduct interviews; they participate with others in the creation of knowledge and meaning through social interactions.’ From an ontological position where reality cannot necessarily be measured, but where the world we study is shaped by the research and the researcher (see Elwood, 2010), my positionality must be placed under closer scrutiny. This chapter on methods and data can thus overall be seen as an exercise in ‘reflexive objectivity’, i.e. in striving for ‘objectivity about subjectivity’ (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009: 242). As is discussed below, this exercise is important for validity and reliability in qualitative research.

My position as researcher involves a great deal of power (Dowling, 2010). As a white, highly educated male I furthermore fit into many of the stereotypes of the researcher ‘going South’ to study other societies and cultures. The power is strengthened in a context of Confucian hierarchical structures, where through my high education I become something of an authority figure in some contexts (in other contexts, such as in interviews with government officials, the opposite is the case). There is not much I can do about this other than to reflect critically on these matters and try to act on the reflections. As DeLyser (2010: 4) puts it: ‘[...] qualitative research is done through the embodied qualitative researcher who must come to terms with her or his own situatedness, as well as the partiality of the research itself’. Nevertheless, all that I write is necessarily in the end to a significant extent based on my own interpretations of ‘reality’ in a context highly different from my own background.

As Scott et al. (2006) convincingly argue, the positionality of research assistants should also be given serious attention, although this is usually not the case in academic writing. My use of mostly female research assistants was initially not a conscious decision. Nevertheless, this worked in my favour. My male informants did not seem particularly influenced by this (the use of female assistants is a very common phenomenon in Vietnam), but it is highly doubtful that my female informants would have met with me in a café without a female assistant. Thus, although to some extent reinforcing the stereotype of the male researcher and the female assistant, this turned out to be important for the type of data I could collect. Furthermore, the assistant’s social class can be crucial for establishing rapport (see Scott et al. 2006 for highly interesting discussions on the Vietnamese case). This was something I considered, but as I focused on middle-class informants, and all my assistants arguably belonged to the middle class and were highly educated, this did not turn into a problem.

Informed consent and research assistant networks

Informed consent is one of the most fundamental ethical principles of social research. I orally asked all my informants for consent before starting the interview, and also took care to explain my topic and how I planned to use my results. This was necessary, as some informants initially thought I conducted market research for car or motorbike companies. I did not use written forms for consent. This was an intended strategy, based on the assumption that asking someone to sign a document in the context of a society known for high levels of surveillance would cause unnecessary concern among informants and thus in turn potentially negatively affect rapport.

Nevertheless, fully informed consent is often not possible in ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). While I did ask for consent in all my interviews, it would not be feasible to do so in my participant observation of mobility nor in my many informal discussions about traffic and transport while in the field.

As explained above I depended much on the social networks of my research assistants. There are some potential problematic ethical concerns here that I have reflected upon in retrospect. There is a chance that some of my informants felt somewhat obliged to talk to me due to the contacts of my assistants or my assistants' families. I frankly do not know to what extent this was the case, and I did not reflect upon it while doing my fieldwork.

Informant confidentiality

Informant confidentiality is always important in research, but doing research in an authoritarian regime where people are frequently jailed for their political opinions demands particular attention to this point. As stated above, my topic is not a very sensitive one, and few would feel threatened by discussing cars and motorbikes. But everything is politically relevant to some extent, and transport policies and industrial policies are of course highly political topics. There would thus be cases where my informants would express opinions that could be considered as critical to the government. This was particularly the case for (Vietnamese) representatives of foreign companies, who would often be quite vocal about the difficult policy environment created by the government. I have thus taken great care to keep the identities of all informants confidential.¹⁶

All my informants have been completely anonymised, also in my research notes, and there is no mention of names in notes or transcripts. Only my assistants and I know the respective identities of my contacts. Even when discussing with friends and key informants, I would refrain from mentioning names in my notes. I furthermore took all notes in Norwegian, to at least demand much more effort to understand if somehow ending up in the wrong hands.

A related ethical responsibility is to make sure that our interpretations and presentations can be evaluated, which brings the discussion to research quality.

¹⁶ Of all my interviews, only one informant, a young businessman who owned a very expensive BMW, seemed to doubt my intentions. At least he was very careful in his answers, did not want me to use a recorder, and made sure to include some compliments to the government. No matter the reasons behind, good rapport was not established, and the interview turned into a rather brief and formal session.

Research quality

How best to achieve and account for research quality in qualitative research is a disputed topic. Many qualitative researchers prefer to use terms that are different than those that are often associated with quantitative research. For example, Bradshaw and Shaw (2010) use ‘rigour’ and ‘trustworthiness’, while Maxwell (1996) prefers ‘credibility’. While sympathetic to the claim of needing different assessment tools in qualitative than in quantitative research, I will here stick to more qualitative conceptualisations of the traditional concepts of reliability and validity (for support of this position, see e.g. Kvale and Brinkman, 2009; Tjora, 2010). Since the challenges and strategies for dealing with reliability (or trustworthiness) and validity (or cogency) of methods and data in qualitative research are overlapping, they will be treated together.

Validity and reliability

The most crucial point of both validity and reliability is to what extent the methods employed are suitable to capture the social phenomena studied, and whether the findings presented accurately represent these phenomena. A qualitative study cannot reach reliability in the strict understanding of the term frequently used in quantitative research, since it is impossible for other researchers to replicate exactly the study (Mjøset, 2009). Nevertheless, as Kvale and Brinkman (2009) argue, validation of findings is relevant throughout the research process. In ethnographic approaches, the researcher directly affects all stages of the research. Interpretation is a central point here, as the empirical data is subject to interpretation all the way from being (or not being) gathered to being (or not being) presented.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009: 255) furthermore discuss ‘communicative validity’, which is sought through engagement with ‘participants in a community of validation’. This can involve informants or a larger research community, the latter both through engaging actively with theories and literature and through presenting work at conferences and in peer-reviewed journals (Tjora, 2010). The strategy employed for this thesis has been to discuss my findings with key informants in Hanoi and Vietnam. In addition to the peer-review processes of the journal articles in this thesis (as well as most of chapter 3 of Part I), I have presented my main initial findings to my host institution in Hanoi and different parts of my research at a variety of international conferences (e.g. Hansen, 2013, 2014, 2015cd; Hansen and Andenes, 2015) with the purpose of getting reactions from fellow researchers that in turn enabled me to refine my approach.

In terms of research quality, the main tools of a qualitative researcher are transparency and reflexivity. Sufficient space needs to be given in the presentation of the material to describe the research process and the researcher's position, milieu and interpretations. The researcher should in a sense interpret her own interpretations. Thus, the detailed account of my fieldwork and methods in this chapter is provided in order to establish trustworthiness as well as to open my analysis as much as possible to external scrutiny (Bradshaw and Stratford, 2010). In addition, every researcher enters the field with a set of values and perspectives, influenced by factors such as gender, theoretical background, ideology and personal characteristics. All of these factors influence how a researcher understands the field, and creates a form of 'researcher bias' (Maxwell, 1996). In order to improve validity, a reflexive approach to these factors is necessary. Empirical data are never simply reflections of reality; they are always subject to interpretation. This requires the type of space I have dedicated in this chapter to explaining why and how I have done what I have done, and what I have left out of the research. This could never be a complete description, but at least it is possible to give the 'interpretive community' the chance to consider the rigour of research (Bradshaw and Stratford, 2010).

Another issue closely connected to questions of validity and reliability, is consequential presence, or reactivity (Maxwell, 1996). How much does the presence of me as a researcher influence the behaviour and answers of my informants? In my observations, I was just another person in traffic, and thus my consequential presence was minimal. In interviews, there is always the risk of informants (or translators) telling you what they think you want to hear. This is arguably the case in all social research involving real humans, and is tricky to get around. Trust must here be placed in the craftsmanship of the interviewer, along with different validating techniques and method triangulation. My main strategy for ensuring reliability of my data has been to combine observation of 'doings' with 'sayings' (although usually not of the same informants) as well as to combine information from informants with other informants, official documents, media and academic literature.

Transferability

Lack of generalisability is a common critique of qualitative, and particularly ethnographic, research, and the discussion of how best to treat this topic and what kind of terms to use is voluminous (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The findings presented in this thesis are first and foremost relevant to Hanoi, and in the most extreme sense to my informants and my perceptions in the particular time-spaces I was doing fieldwork. But statistical generalisability

is anyways rarely the purpose of qualitative inquiry. The goal should rather be transferability or analytical or theoretical generalisability (e.g. Baxter, 2010). As is clear from the research questions and the articles, the aim is also to draw on these findings to theorise about consumption more broadly. Indeed, theorising is inherent to the process of validating research and findings (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). The aim is not in any way to develop a universal theory of consumption, but rather to contribute towards the development of consumption research, particularly in a context of rapid economic development, by suggesting theoretical advancements and ways forward based on the empirical material in engagement with existing literature. The theoretical approach to consumption and development developed in this project will hopefully contribute to the emerging field of academic research on these topics.

5. Summaries of the articles

The four articles of Part II of the thesis all in different ways discuss consumption and development, although with different areas of focus (table 3 summarises the articles schematically). The first three articles discuss cars and motorbikes in Hanoi and Vietnam. The first article focuses on the provision side and considers Vietnam's attempts to develop a domestic automobile industry. In addition, it considers the allure of car ownership among the Hanoian middle class as well as the many urban development challenges associated with increasing car ownership. The second article studies the consumption of cars and motorbikes in Hanoi through a practice approach, analysing both systems of provision and everyday practices. The third article takes the streets of Hanoi as a starting point, and combines mobility and consumption perspectives in analysing the important role played by motorbikes as well as how cars are emerging in Hanoi's motorbike-dominated streets. The fourth article stands out from the rest. It keeps the focus on consumption and development, but extends the analysis to consider consumption of transport in a larger context of development and consumption, as well as comparing Vietnam's development with that of another Asian emerging economy, India. It focuses on how consumption changes along with practices related to beauty, comfort and mobility.

The four articles have been published or accepted for publication in four peer-reviewed academic journals with different scholarly focus, ranging from regional development (*Journal of Contemporary Asia*), to consumption research (*Journal of Consumer Culture*), mobilities research (*Mobilities*), and general development research (*Forum for Development Studies*). This chapter outlines the main findings, arguments and theoretical positions of the four articles.

Table 3: Schematic overview of the four articles

Article title and journal	Empirical focus	Theoretical approach	Main arguments
1. 'Driving development? The problems and promises of the car in Vietnam', <i>Journal of Contemporary Asia</i> .	Attempts to develop the automobile industry in Vietnam. Promises of automobile development and development challenges associated with increasing car ownership.	Late-development; automobile industry globally and regionally; Vietnam's development strategies.	The rather contradictory policies of Vietnamese authorities towards cars make sense from different perspectives. From an industrial viewpoint: increase car ownership. From environmental and urban mobility viewpoint: limit car ownership.
2. 'Transport in transition: <i>Doi moi</i> and the consumption of cars and motorbikes in Hanoi', <i>Journal of Consumer Culture</i> .	The motorbike revolution, emergence of cars in the streets, connection between everyday practices and processes of economic development.	Consumption; social practice theory; systems of provision.	Rapidly increasing consumption of motorbikes can be understood through two-wheel-friendly infrastructure, everyday practices and changes in systems of provision. Cars break with traditional mobility practices in Hanoi, but offer a range of benefits.
3. 'Hanoi on wheels: Emerging automobility in the land of the motorbike', <i>Mobilities</i>	Driving, traffic and everyday life in Hanoi. The symbolic value of cars and motorbikes in 'new' Vietnam.	Mobilities: System of automobility, moto-mobility. Consumption: Everyday practices; symbolic meaning of goods.	Research on motorised mobility has ignored motorbikes; Hanoi's motorbike-dominated society can be conceptualised as a 'system of moto-mobility'; cars in Hanoi often represent a form of 'mobile distinction'; automobility is being normalised.
4. 'Staying Cool, Looking Good, Moving Around: Consumption, Sustainability and the 'Rise of the South'', <i>Forum for Development Studies</i>	Consumption and development in Vietnam and India through air-conditioners, beauty products and cars.	Development; globalisation; consumption; social practice theory; symbolic meaning of goods.	Concerns for global sustainability call for deeper academic engagement with consumption among emerging middle classes. This should include top-down processes of economic development while being grounded in bottom-up approaches to everyday practices

Article 1: Driving development? The problems and promises of the car in Vietnam

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The private car occupies a double role as development challenge and driver of development. Cars and the system of automobility are at the very core of the environmental unsustainability of ‘modernity’. At the same time, cars are associated with societal progress, and the automobile industry has been and is a crucial driver of industrialisation due to its strong backward and forward linkages with other industries. The first article of the thesis approaches cars in Vietnam with the double position of the car as a starting point.

The article introduces the development of mobility since *doi moi*, including overviews of sales and production statistics for cars and motorbikes. The main focus is, however, on the car as a potential driver of development and as a development challenge. The Vietnamese government has located the auto industry as a ‘pillar industry’, i.e. one of the industries that is to take a leading role in the industrialisation and modernisation of the country. The article discusses how the attempts to develop a domestic auto industry have failed, and that although cars are being manufactured in the country, it is mostly done by foreign companies using imported parts. The attempts to develop Vietnamese supporting industries have been particularly disappointing.

The findings of the article are based on interviews with policy makers and industry representatives, as well as official documents. The article claims that the main reasons for the failure of the auto industry can be found in lack of industrial policies and an overall instable and inconsistent policy regime. Different ministries disagree on policies towards cars, and the government is somewhat paradoxically restricting the only major market for the industry (the domestic market). The paper goes on to argue that the rather contradictory policies of Vietnamese authorities make sense from different perspectives. From the perspective of industrialisation, the Ministry of Industry and Trade are surely right to suggest taxes should be reduced and the domestic market expanded. From the perspective of urban mobility, the Ministry of Transportation is right in wanting to restrict car consumption. We thus see a classic example of the many dilemmas or trade-offs of development. The article concludes with the expectation, again based on interviews, that the government will be going for cars and industrial development, but that this may be too late due to the free trade agreement (AFTA) with other countries in the region with much more advanced automobile manufacturing capacities.

This article contributes with new knowledge to an understudied part of Vietnam's development strategies, but also contributes to the gradually growing literature on Vietnam's overall development strategies and development challenges. Since the article was accepted, recent developments show that while the future of the auto industry remains uncertain, the expectation that the government would decide in favour of car ownership may be materialising with the government planning to significantly reduce tariffs and luxury taxes on cars (Minh Hung, 2015).

Article 2: Transport in transition: *Doi moi* and the consumption of cars and motorbikes in Hanoi

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The rapid developments in Vietnam since *doi moi* have transformed urban mobility in Hanoi. With a ten-fold increase in the number of motorbikes nationwide in less than 20 years, and now a rapid growth in car-ownership, the previously bicycle-dominated capital city is close to fully motorised.

This paper approaches this transformation from a practice perspective. While theories of practice have brought along a vital focus on the mundane, on materiality and sociality, they have had less to say when it comes to the impact of production and systems of provision. This article argues that there is room for this, and combines a systems of provision approach with an everyday consumption approach to explain the dramatic changes in transport consumption.

The paper argues that Vietnam's 'motorbike revolution' cannot be explained without a consideration of changes in systems of provision through industrialisation and new (but selective) trade openness. The potential market for motorbikes in an already two-wheeled city drew the attention of East Asian motorbike manufacturers in the 1990s. However, it was not until the 'China shock' around the turn of the Millennium that motorbike ownership came within reach of large proportion of the population. This saw cheap copies of established Japanese and Taiwanese motorbike models cross the border, often in the shape of knockdown kits to circumvent import regulations.

However, provisioning cannot alone explain consumption. The paper approaches the changes in systems of provision as part of the material conditions for practices, which along with the dialectical relationship between two-wheelers and two-wheeled infrastructure, the previous dominance of bicycles and the promises of effortless mobility has shaped practices

in Hanoi. The car breaks with the two-wheeled practices, and has not been as easily available as motorbikes. It thus requires slightly different explanations. The paper argues that the material characteristics of the car enable practices of mobility to be carried out in a safer, more comfortable, and even ‘healthier’, manner.

The paper argues that consumption should be understood through the material, social and bodily pillars of practices, and that provision should be included as part of the former, particularly when studying changing consumption in contexts of rapid development. By studying consumption and mobility in the interplay between large-scale processes of economic development and everyday life, the paper thus makes direct contributions to consumption theory.

Article 3: Hanoi on wheels: Emerging automobility in the land of the motorbike

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Since the ‘mobility turn’ in the social sciences, significant attention has been given to cars and the ‘system of automobility’. So far, however, little focus has been placed on motorised mobility outside mature capitalist countries.

This paper argues that we need to take seriously the particularities of streetscapes and mobility trajectories in different countries and different parts of the world. While car ownership is indeed spreading rapidly, and the private car may be seen as something of a ‘global blueprint of modernity’, the ways that—and the degrees to which—societies become car-driven differ substantially.

The paper analyses the emergence of cars in Hanoi’s motorbike-dominated society. In doing so it takes the streets of Hanoi as a starting point, and argues that Hanoi rather than a system of automobility is dominated by a system of ‘moto-mobility’. Combining mobilities and consumption perspectives, the article discusses the social position of motorbikes as well as the allure of the private automobile in contemporary Hanoi.

The article finds that while the allure of cars extends far beyond symbolic value, cars in Hanoi do work as ‘mobile distinction’ through the powerful messages of ‘success’ that they communicate. At the same time the car is a symbol of Vietnam’s capitalist transition, and the strong symbolic value attached to cars today as ‘success on wheels’ is embedded in the socio-political changes in the country following *doi moi* that have created a new acceptance of the display of private wealth. Also, materially speaking, cars represent ‘global capitalism on wheels’ in the streets of the capital city of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The paper furthermore finds that while the car remains a powerful positional good, there are already signs that car ownership is becoming normalised among Hanoi's upper echelons. Along with the fact that automobility is now being built into the visions of future urbanity in Hanoi, the social position of cars may well signal a new era and the beginning of a break with the dominance of two-wheeled transport. The paper contributes to taking mobilities research 'South', examining the particularities of Hanoi's streetscapes. It also represents a beginning of theorisation of moto-mobility, arguing that in Hanoi it takes on systemic qualities.

Article 4: Staying Cool, Looking Good, Moving Around: Consumption, Sustainability and the 'Rise of the South'

Co-authored with Kenneth Bo Nielsen and Harold Wilhite. Published in *Forum for Development Studies*. Published online before print January 20, 2016, doi: 10.1080/08039410.2015.1134640

The global economy is shifting South and East, and a number of 'emerging economies' are moving beyond their role as factories of the world towards becoming large consumer markets. The emerging high-consuming middle-classes of the South may represent a profound challenge to global sustainability, particularly as mature capitalist countries are still expanding their overall consumption levels.

Development research and consumption research have had little direct interaction in the past. This paper continues the integrative approach of Article 2 of this thesis, and analyses consumption in the context of rapid development. However, it extends the analysis by comparing Vietnam and India, as well as by considering the consumption of beauty products and air-conditioners in addition to cars. The paper compares and contrasts reform processes and recent development trends between the two emerging economies, and finds that while they differ in a range of ways, there are many similarities between the two countries in terms of developmental progress and overall changes in consumption patterns. Importantly, in both countries, new urban middle classes have emerged with an affluence that was unheard of just two generations ago. And as the transition to capitalism has introduced new commodities, lubricated markets and opened for new forms of social performance through the ownership and use of goods, former social ideals of frugality are rapidly declining in importance.

The paper finds that the often inconspicuous consumption of air-conditioners develops and strengthens new expectations of comfort, and in turn becomes embedded in building practices to the extent that it creates a material dependency on air-conditioned comfort.

Conceptions of beauty are more conspicuous, but often based on deep cultural traits and gender relations. In the encounter with foreign beauty ideals and foreign brands, hybrid ideas of beauty emerge. In Vietnam and India particularly the desirability of fair skin is central, which in turn creates a lucrative market for beauty products with ‘whitening formulas’. Cars bring the two other together, as they provide mobile air-conditioning and allow the middle class to stay fresh, pale and clean in often heavily polluted streetscapes.

The overall aim of the paper is to outline the importance of engaging in research on consumption patterns in the ‘South’, as well as to suggest tools for doing so. Importantly, this should include both top-down processes of economic development while being grounded in bottom-up approaches to everyday practices.

6. Conclusions

This thesis has analysed how and why the consumption of cars and motorbikes in Hanoi has increased so rapidly over the past decades. This section will first draw some overall conclusions based on the empirical material of the thesis. I will then attend to the theoretical research question asked in the introduction, and consider how the theoretical approach of this thesis can be developed further. Towards the end I suggest possible future directions of research emerging from the findings of this thesis.

Capitalist transition on wheels: From bicycles to motorbikes to cars

The transformation of Hanoi's streetscapes is explored from different angles in the four articles of the thesis. The analysis has mainly been guided by the first research question presented in the introduction: *Why and how has the consumption of cars and motorbikes increased so rapidly in Hanoi over the past decades?*

The motorbike revolution

The story of Vietnam's 'motorbike revolution' really started with the bicycle. Imported during French colonial times, the bicycle later played a central role in the fight for liberation from the French and later against US forces. In post-colonial Vietnam the picture of a Vietnamese school girl donning a white *ao dai* on a bicycle became a national symbol. As Nha Xuat Ban Thong Tan (2007: 28) conclude in their photo collection of pedalled vehicles in Vietnam: 'It is fair to say that bicycles have penetrated all aspects of the Vietnamese people's life [sic]'. The fact that Hanoi used to be a city of bicycles is key to understanding the later popularity of motorbikes. The bicycles made sure the scripts for two-wheeled mobility were in place, embedded in infrastructure and consumption geography and embodied as part of everyday practices. Motorbikes represented a convenient 'next step', allowing for the same practices to be performed with less effort while also allowing for new practices and longer travel, demanding significantly less physical effort. The continuation of two-wheeled practices further entrenched scripts for two-wheeled mobility in the material and social fabric of Hanoi, as articles 2 and 3 discuss in detail. Vietnam and Hanoi's motorbike revolution can thus to an extent be understood as a form of path-dependent changes in consumption, where the

acquisition and use of one material object co-shapes further consumption. As the vehicles and physical infrastructure together have played such influential roles in these changes (and continuations), the transport transition in Hanoi also represents a strong case for acknowledging the importance of material agency in shaping consumption patterns. The dominance of two-wheeled transport has furthermore been strengthened by the failure of local authorities to deliver convenient public transport options.

At the same time, these developments could not have taken place without macro-economic changes in Vietnam. *Doi moi* and integration into regional trade networks was crucial. This not only led to greater availability of goods, but also to the establishment of Japanese and Taiwanese motorbike manufacturers in Vietnam. These manufacturers could start tapping into the growing demand for moto-mobility, in turn increasing the popularity of the two-wheelers further. Together with the bicycle, infrastructure and everyday practices, this established motorbike consumption as increasingly normal. Socially, as Wilhite (2008a: 125) finds in Kerala, consumption often increases ‘with the tempo of the push to get ahead and the pull to keep up’, and normalisation of a good is probably the strongest social force in consumption (Shove, 2003). But the full normalisation of moto-mobility in Hanoi and Vietnam only started after the ‘China shock’, where cheap copies of Japanese and Taiwanese motorbikes became available on the market. This often took place through circumventing import laws, so the argument that motorbikes represent trade liberalisation in Vietnam (Truitt, 2008) does not give us the full picture. Nevertheless, the motorbikes in Vietnam can be seen as a material manifestation of a more open and, crucially, more affluent society. Following the Japanese and Taiwanese manufacturers’ responses to the Chinese competition, Vietnam developed a large domestic – although mostly foreign owned – motorbike industry, with Italian Piaggio as the latest member. The establishment of East Asian manufacturers in Vietnam lowered prices and further increased access to quality motorbikes, while the entry of Piaggio is a reaction to the large market for ‘high-end’ motorbikes in Vietnam. The latter is in turn due to high prices on cars, practices of mobile distinction, and the powerful position of motorbikes as a means of mobility in the country.

Together, the changes and continuations of mobility practices and consumption and retail geographies on the local scale, together with the national and regional-scale changes in trade networks have co-created what I have termed the ‘system of moto-mobility’. Influenced by Urry’s (2004) ‘system of automobility’ this term catches consumption of motorbikes as much more than the collection of individual decisions or ‘needs’. The larger material, social and symbolic frames in place contribute towards the continuation and strengthening of

particular patterns of human behaviour and human-technology interactions. In other words, moto-mobility is manifested and reinforced through socio-material aspects ranging from regional and global trade networks to corner repair shops and wet markets in narrow alleyways. Within this system, moto-mobility creates a sense of 'lock-in' for consumers, as many of my informants did not see other options than riding a motorbike. The system of moto-mobility is not necessarily a new phenomenon *per se*, but is rather a quite different version of what research on automobiles has analysed concerning the role of the car in mature capitalist countries. The dynamics of the motorbike are different, but related to those of cars; the motorbike is still a predominantly private means of performing practices of mobility, of getting from A to B, of connecting the different socialities of everyday life. At the same time, the social and material allure of cars, along with their spatial and environmental impacts, effectively separate the two means of mobility.

Emerging automobility

In support of Fine's (2002) insistence on treating different commodities separately rather than lumped together in general theories of consumption, cars in Hanoi cannot be understood in the same ways as motorbikes, although there are many similarities. In Hanoi, cars represent a break with moto-mobile practices and infrastructure. Furthermore, while I expected that the government's targeting of the domestic auto industry as a 'spearhead industry' would lead to incentives towards private car consumption, the government has instead worked against its own industrial strategies through providing economic disincentives for car ownership through very high taxes and fees. Thus, in contrast to motorbikes, cars have so far represented a new and unique form of mobility in Hanoi.

As a relatively exclusive and highly expensive commodity, the car currently sits at the top of the status hierarchy of goods in Hanoi, while most types of motorbikes have become ordinary. Thus, as for example Nielsen and Wilhite (2015) find in India and Fischer (2014) finds in Malaysia, among Hanoi's upper echelons car ownership is the ultimate positional good, even more so than housing. Entrepreneurs use their choice of car as a part of their business strategy, in which the car's symbolic value serves as proof of success in the new market economy to potential and actual partners. Driving a car can result in better service at restaurants and can be used to display urban success when returning to rural hometowns.

'Mobile distinction' notwithstanding, social status or conspicuous consumption cannot alone explain the growing popularity of cars. Rather, symbolic concerns represent one dimension of the allure of cars. In many ways this study confirms Shove's (2003) assertion

that mundane categories such as comfort, convenience and cleanliness are more important in understanding the escalation of demand of particular goods. Likewise, the study provides another reminder of the importance of family for understanding consumption patterns (e.g. Wilhite, 2008a), as one of the most frequent reasons my informants gave for acquiring a car was related to family concerns. These concerns in turn ranged from taking the family for weekend trips to protecting children against the dangers of traffic and air pollution in Hanoi's streets. The latter point shows that we should add 'health' to the mundane categories influencing car consumption in Hanoi.

As is the case with consumption in general, cars are frequently normatively assessed as negative, particularly in environmentally-oriented accounts (see discussion in Hansen and Nielsen, 2014). In such accounts cars are often seen as inherently bad and car-driving as a social evil. In Hanoi, the car indeed has very negative side-effects through congestion and a worsening of air pollution. Be that as it may, this study serves as a reminder that this is not how cars are generally experienced by their owners. Cars are harbingers of modernity, of more comfortable lifestyles, of new opportunities for travel and leisure. This is also a central challenge for policies aiming to reduce car ownership. In the case of Vietnam, the extent to which the authoritarian regime would risk further limiting access to a good towards which so many of its citizens currently aspire is highly uncertain.

The system of automobility is materialising rapidly in Hanoi, through more cars, bigger petrol stations and more auto repair shops. It is materially embedded in the larger car parking areas and broader roads of Hanoi's New Urban Areas. Combined with changes in regional systems of provision, where the Vietnamese government is preparing to remove tariffs on imports from other Southeast Asian countries with large automobile industries, this appears to be paving the way for the automobile age in Hanoi.

Development, transition and consumption

Neither the motorbike revolution nor the emergence of automobility could be understood without considering the changing conditions for consumption in Vietnam brought about by market reforms. From this study it is clear that in the case of Vietnam three overall dimensions must be factored in, all closely related to *doi moi*: (1) general economic development, (2) systems of provision and (3) socio-political changes away from socialism in practice.

To start with economic development, the mobility transitions in Hanoi and Vietnam have depended on rising affluence, which in turn is an outcome of Vietnam's overall

development success. In the past, motorbikes represented a significant investment, and were financially out of reach for most Vietnamese until the turn of the millennium. In this sense, the motorbike revolution is a material manifestation of Vietnam's success in 'delivering development' to large parts of the population, although for many a motorbike is still very expensive. Now that Hanoians have started to buy cars, this in turn shows that Vietnam has grown increasingly prosperous, although also increasingly unequal.

Secondly, as discussed above, systems of provision of cars and motorbikes have changed radically in tandem with Vietnam's overall development process. From manufacturers and trade to an explosion in motorbike dealers and now car dealers, the access to goods and the lowering of prices (for motorbikes) have represented vital factors in the rapid increase in consumption of private vehicles.

Thirdly, market reforms have involved more than strictly economic measures, no matter what Vietnamese state rhetoric tries to assure us (as discussed in chapter 3). Although there has been no political transition in Vietnam, the socio-political changes in terms of relative economic freedoms and the official position towards commodities have been radical (as Vann, 2012 discusses more in detail). With reforms, widespread ownership of goods beyond strict necessities had to be accepted, and in time even the consumption of luxury goods appears to be considered as beneficial for the road to socialism in Vietnam. The rapid increase in car ownership would be impossible without these changes.

Together, the empirical findings of this thesis show the material, social and political embeddedness of consumption. They have also shown the importance of temporal and spatial contexts for understanding changes in consumption. Trying to explain for example car consumption in Hanoi as an expression of 'consumerism' or 'Westernisation' would be unhelpful. Goods surely cross borders physically and so do at least parts of the socio-cultural meanings attached to them. But such generalising and woolly concepts obscure more than they explain. Rather, changes in consumption must be contextually grounded, and particularly contexts of rapid economic development call for a broad and multi-scalar theoretical approach.

Consumption and development

The empirical conclusions show that the findings of this study depended on analyses of both changing macro structures and everyday practices. How can these findings inform further studies? This was the focus of the second research question: *How can consumption theory engage with the multi-scalar processes of rapid economic development?* While not pretending to have the full answer to such a broad question, and indeed recognising that different

commodities may require distinct theoretical lenses, I below outline some overall suggestions for the further development of consumption research in ‘the rising South’.

The state as an agent

In development research, the role of the state frequently represents the starting point for academic inquiry. In consumption research, however, the state is rarely given a prominent position (see also Sanne, 2002). The state is crucial for processes of economic development on arguably all scales. In a globalising (and regionalising) world economy states are ‘containers’ of distinct institutions and practices, as well as international competitors and collaborators (Dicken, 2015). Nationally, state policies to various extents influence everything from the functioning of the economy to everyday life. The state’s influences on consumption could thus be approached in a variety of ways. Government policies are crucial for achieving developmental success as well as for distributing the gains from development. The level of welfare provided by the state furthermore strongly influences the capacity of its citizens to consume beyond subsistence. This thesis has shown the important role played by the state in providing frames and conditions for consumption through development strategies and transport policies.

The state can in many ways be considered as what Myrvang (2009) has called ‘consumption agents’. In capitalism, the overall national economy benefits from, and indeed depends on, increasing levels of consumption. The capitalist state can aim policies towards shifting consumption (e.g. away from tobacco or alcohol), but will rarely, if ever, aim to reduce overall levels of consumption, since this would negatively affect the national economy through declining aggregate demand. This is a fundamental difference between an economy based on delivering ‘enough’ goods to the population (such as Vietnam before *doi moi*) and one where the expansion of production and consumption is fundamental to the ‘health’ of the economy.

In the case of transport in Hanoi, this dissertation has shown that state policies have been absolutely vital to the transport transition, and have also rather unintentionally favoured motorbike consumption through placing high taxes on cars and failing to deliver good public transport options or bicycle infrastructure. The Vietnamese government has however now started reducing taxes on cars while aiming to limit motorbike ownership. While the latter may prove a challenging task, it again shows the role of the state in framing consumption patterns.

In a sense, the Vietnam case might be somewhat extreme, with an in many ways strong state embarking on a process of not only rapid development but also capitalist transition, in turn resulting in a particular mix of political Leninism and state capitalism. Nevertheless, the point of taking the many roles of the state seriously is valid in consumption research in general, and particularly in contexts of rapid economic development.¹⁷ However, such a focus should complement rather than compete with research on everyday practices.

Systems of provision and everyday practices

Research on consumption boils down to fundamental questions related to why humans behave as they do. The fact that there seems to be no end-point of escalating ‘desires’ for consumer goods has intrigued social scientists. Even the old modernisation theorists did not expect this development, with Walt Rostow (1991 [1960]) for example assuming that at some point people would become so wealthy that increasing income would lose its charm and the pursuit of material goods would no longer dominate people’s lives. Cultural readings of consumer society have often explained the tendency to consume more and more through rather mystical psychological-cultural concepts such as ‘consumerism’. Economists, on the other hand, expect people to spend most of their money and save some of it, and increasing income in turn results in increasing aggregate demand. However, both economists discussing demand and cultural accounts of ‘consumerism’ have little to tell us about where the propensity to consume particular commodities really emanates from. As Appadurai (1986) has noted, demand is frequently treated as an outcome of some infinite and transcultural *desire* and fixed *needs*. However, he points out, demand ‘emerges as a function of a variety of social practices and classifications, rather than a mysterious emanation of human needs, a mechanical response to social manipulation [...], or the narrowing down of a universal and voracious desire for objects to whatever happens to be available’ (Appadurai, 1986: 29). The point that I am trying to make here is that these social practices are grounded in material structures and conditions, and can indeed change in response to changes in these.

The theoretical framework emerging through practice approaches is indeed promising, although it is quite possible to study consumption through a practice approach without

¹⁷ It does however also demand caution, as ‘the state’ can be an elusive category. This study has shown the importance of different state actors, such as different ministries, for understanding particular policies.

considering larger political and economic structures. The main starting point of practice approaches is the importance of ‘doings’, to study what and how people perform everyday routines. Still, from a theoretical perspective, practice theory opens for a consideration of a wide range of factors that influence practices, and shifts the main focus from individual acts to social processes. It furthermore acknowledges that material, social and bodily factors can co-shape practices. What I am suggesting from my study is that for certain consumer goods, if not all, it is important to include larger-scale political structures and systems of provision in the analysis.

Approaching consumption in contexts of rapid economic development entails particular theoretical challenges. I agree with Wilk (2002: 9) in looking for a ‘heterodox *multigenic* theory, which accepts that there are multiple determinants of consumption, operating at different conceptual and analytical levels’ (emphasis in original). I also agree with Wilk that a useful starting point for analysing such ‘multiple determinants’ can be found in theories of practice. I am thus not suggesting a brand new approach to consumption, rather a slight expansion of focus by combining the bottom-up study of everyday practices with accounts of macro-level political and economic structures. This involves acknowledging and studying state policies and systems of provision as agents of change without ‘economising’ consumption. In this thesis excluding any of the scales analysed would lead to an incomplete account of consumption. My suggestion thus boils down to a theory where consumption is approached through social practices, which in turn are analysed through their bodily, social and material pillars (as in Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014). This builds on the re-emergence of practice theories, but suggests that these pillars should be analysed through macro-scale systems of provision and political-economic frames and conditions for practices. This is ambitious, yet necessary in order to capture the complexity of changing consumption in contexts of rapid economic development. Geography, with its tradition of scalar analysis and its ‘cross-disciplinary inclinations’ (Haarstad, 2014: 88) should be well-positioned to take the lead in a broader approach to consumption and development.

This is not any final answer to compound questions of agency (and structures) in understanding changes in consumption. Rather it is a call for the integration of different scales in studying the escalation of consumption. A development approach, with its focus on state strategies and policies related to processes of systemic change, as well as on the economic geographies and regional and global contexts of these, has much to contribute to understanding the conditions for consumption. But without an empirical grounding in the actual doings of the people consuming, in the everyday practices consumption takes place in,

macro-level approaches would provide a shallow reading, stripped of the ability to understand the multifaceted meanings and drivers of consumption.

Limitations and future research on consumption and mobility

Much work remains to be done on such a theoretical approach. Although I have given attention to different scales and levels in this thesis, I have to a lesser extent looked in detail at how these interlink and affect each other. Another aspect that I have merely touched upon is how means of transportation affect other consumption practices. A third factor that is missing in this thesis is going beyond regional systems of provision to consider social and cultural influences across borders, in other words how or whether French (from colonial times) and regional practices of moto-mobility have influenced Hanoian practices. Furthermore, although locating the bicycle as central to understanding later moto-mobility, and locating its origin in French colonialism, more research is needed to understand how bicycles came to be so important in Vietnam in the first place. I believe the theoretical framework adopted in this thesis would be useful for understanding this history. Together, the findings of the study point towards many different areas of possible future research.

Future research

The coming years will provide interesting changes in the political-economic conditions for consumption of cars and motorbikes in Vietnam. Continued research on urban mobilities in Hanoi and other major cities of Vietnam, such as Ho Chi Minh City and Danang, could provide interesting findings relevant for crucial issues related to consumption, mobility and sustainable urbanisation. A possible continuation of the research conducted in this thesis would be to expand the analysis beyond the middle class, to analyse how the urban working class and the urban poor perform and experience everyday practices of mobility. Another interesting venture would be to consider alternative mobilities in Vietnam, particularly electric scooters, and their potential and limitations for more sustainable futures. But also studying more conventional vehicles such as bicycles, along with their more recent companion electric bicycles, would contribute significantly to expanding the knowledge of urban mobilities in Hanoi and Vietnam. At the level of macro-economic development, the future of the domestic automobile industry in Vietnam remains uncertain. Whether this industry survives, as well as how the government will respond to further increases in car ownership, will be important topics the coming years. Similarly, to what extent the Vietnamese government carries out its plans to limit motorbike ownership, and how the

domestic motorbike industry responds to this, will provide grounds for future studies of the many agents of Hanoian mobility.

As stated above, this study has not considered regional factors affecting moto-mobility beyond systems of provision. However, this study has shown the importance of moto-mobility in the everyday lives of a large number of people. The rapidly expanding field of mobilities research, perhaps in combination with consumption research, should acknowledge the significance of motorbikes. More case studies are needed on the role of the motorbike in other countries and cities, in order to provide empirically grounded discussions on the roles and potentials of two-wheeled motorised mobility. This could also lead to regional studies of moto-mobility, trying to understand why it has been so important in Northeast and Southeast Asia, and how this has spread to different countries. Beyond Asia, another highly interesting area of study would involve considering the role of Asian motorbike manufacturers in the current rapid increase of moto-mobility in several African countries. Likewise, the already rich literature on automobility in mature capitalist countries should be complimented by more case studies on emerging automobility in other countries.

Beyond mobility, the Hanoian and Vietnamese middle classes are growing rapidly, and the Vietnamese consumer society is materialising and changing. Hanoi and Vietnam will provide rich material for understanding changing consumption of a range of commodities in the coming years. The same is the case in other 'emerging economies', with emerging middle classes and consumer societies increasingly challenging traditional divisions between 'North' and 'South'. I remain rather surprised that there is still no discernible field on 'development and consumption' or 'consumption and development'. I believe such a field is needed, and that we in general need much more research on consumption outside mature capitalist countries. In addition to being theoretically important, this is becoming an environmental imperative as the middle classes in emerging economies will soon be consuming the majority of the earth's resources. What drives rapid escalation of consumption, how consumption can become more sustainable, and relatedly, how consumption of particularly environmentally degrading goods, such as private automobiles, can be limited should be placed at the frontier of the field. This endeavour, I argue, is best undertaken by a broad approach to consumption, grounded in everyday practices while integrating large-scale processes of economic development in the analysis.

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