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# The threat of political reform as a means to development in Vietnam

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## A Case Study of INGO- Government Interaction in New Political Spaces



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Note on participant and organization identities

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All participants referenced have been given pseudonyms and INGOs in question are referred to only as INGO “A” and INGO “B”.

## Abbreviations

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CSO	Civil Society Organization
GoV	Government of Vietnam
INGO	International Non- Governmental Organization
NGO	Non- Governmental Organization
VCP	Vietnam Communist Party
VNGO	Vietnamese Non- Governmental Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

## Abstract

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Vietnam has undergone unprecedented changes in its recent history, and has become increasingly exposed to global processes due to its deepened integration into the international economy and the large scale investment by the international community in its development process. Remarkable progress has been made over the past twenty five years, however new challenges have emerged and the solutions to these developmental issues are more complex than ever. This I contest is because the solutions lie in the political sphere, which is closely guarded from reform by the Vietnamese Communist Party. Political spaces in Vietnam have however expanded as a result of the infiltration of transnational processes and specifically the presence of INGOs at the grassroots. I argue that future development in Vietnam will occur as a result of the reconfiguration of political spaces in which the state and society interact and seek to achieve their objectives. I further contest that INGOs are particularly influential actors in terms of political reform in Vietnam, and pose the greatest threat to the stability of the Vietnamese Communist regime.

Keywords: *Vietnam, Globalization, INGOs, new political spaces, threat, development*

## 1. Introduction- Specification of the problem

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Vietnam has been hailed as “one of the greatest development successes of our time” (World Bank, 2011: 20), having turned a crisis situation in the late 1980s into a period of remarkable growth. Alongside the rapid changes that occurred in Vietnam, in terms of economic growth, during the ‘Đổi Mới’ (Renovation) reform period, beginning in 1986, as Vietnam opened to the world, foreign donors, government aid agencies and INGOs rushed in to assist Vietnam, seeking to apply their own models of development (Thayer, 2009: 4). There has been a huge amount of investment in development efforts in Vietnam from International NGOs and donors over the past 25 years, and great advances have been made as Vietnam transformed from an extremely poor to a low-middle income country in this short period, lifting 30 million out of poverty since 1986 (Irish Aid, 2011: 5). Despite this progress however, huge problems remain as inequality continues to grow and poverty is becoming increasingly concentrated among ethnic minorities living in upland areas, accounting for 10 million out of a total population of 86 million (ibid). The kind of development required in Vietnam has thus shifted towards the need to eliminate inequalities and developmental solutions have become more complex. Donor strategies, particularly those of INGOs increasingly focus on civil and political rights and the promotion of ‘good governance’, indicating a more politicised approach to solving the complex challenges of future development in Vietnam.

Vietnam’s integration into the global economy has deepened significantly over time, bringing an increased exposure to processes of globalization and a vulnerability to the threat of ‘peaceful evolution’, this has contributed to great changes in Vietnamese society and the simultaneous emergence of a new set of political challenges for Vietnamese state as state-society relations continue to evolve (Thayer, 2009: 4) due to the creation and expansion of new political, ‘transnational’, spaces in Vietnam, which are important sites of contestation. Alongside these processes, Vietnam is perceived from an outside perspective ‘on paper’ to have implemented political reform and made progress towards democracy, however in reality, from the Government’s perspective, these measures are little more than an attempt to preserve their power, address a threat, and prevent future challenges to its monopoly. Nonetheless, despite these efforts to contain the threat of pressure for political reform, these measures, initiated following the unrest in Thai Binh in 1997 have also genuinely opened up new political spaces (Wells-Dang, 2010: 107). It is in these new political spaces that the VCP must protect its all-important legitimacy, and in which INGOs are consistently pushing for change. The change that is being sought, I contest, is in the political sphere

and is focused on political reform, which is viewed by the GoV as its biggest threat. I intend to argue that INGOs operating in Vietnam pose the most significant threat to the powerful Communist regime, being at the same time an exogenous force, carrying with them Western ideals of democratization, and an internal force actively working at the grassroots.

Authoritarian states tend to regard a modern civil society as a threat, and thus make attempts to control NGOs in civil society. Permission to operate is usually granted to INGOs based on their ability and willingness to carry out “vital technical and other tasks that the state is unable to perform” (Jönsson et al, 2012: 103). However, given the fact that a number of INGOs are engaged in governance reform programmes, they are being permitted to engage in the sensitive field of political reform. I believe that the emergence of these kinds of programmes thus signify and contribute to important changes in state society dynamics in Vietnam.

### 1.1. The research objective and delimitations

The purpose of this research is to explain the complex interactions between the Vietnamese state and International NGOs in Vietnam, and how these dynamic interactions in ‘new political spaces’ can lead to future progress in terms of socio-political development in Vietnam. I intend to argue in line with Joachim (2003, 2009), that INGOs, as transnational actors, wield great power in terms of redefining political context. I want to assess how INGOs deal with the particular context in Vietnam, whether they merely reflect the political culture and context or whether they are redefining it. I will investigate this by focusing on the many specific constraints presented by the non-democratic political context, and on how INGOs approach these barriers, actively or reactively, in their strategies, decisions and actions, in order to better understand how political development is constructed in the Vietnamese context. Political context, which I will define according to Fisher (1998) as “type of regime, political culture, degree of state capacity to implement policy, and degree of political stability” is a central focus in my thesis, as political context strongly conditions and “helps define the initial political boundaries within which governments and NGOs interact” (Fisher, 1998:54), and policies towards NGOs develop within particular contexts. The interactive process of power creation and dispersion among NGOs and governmental actors is indicative of political development (ibid: 135), while political context conditions the initial relationship, “the relationship itself can evolve and reshape political context” (ibid: 159). It is this interactive process and evolution of political context that I will focus on.

In this thesis I am focusing exclusively on INGOs and their engagement in ‘governance’ work in Vietnam. I am not discussing the approach to development in any detail, but rather focusing on how INGOs approach to the political context in Vietnam, and how this influences their strategic approach. Vietnam’s progress in terms of economic development has been impressive and subject to much attention, however I am focusing on socio- political development and will thus, for the purposes of delimitation, not discuss the course of economic development. There are also many issues of concern apparent in Vietnam’s development trajectory, such as widespread corruption and economic mismanagement however due to the limited scope of this thesis I will not deal with these specific issues. This thesis deals with the idea of political reform, however I will not discuss indigenous social movements in Vietnam to any extent as these kinds of domestic events have also been subject to some focus, and the effect of these types of movements, democratic or otherwise are of a different nature to the kind of development I am concerned with in this case study. I am investigating only INGOs as actors in this thesis due to space limitations, but also because they have particular characteristics that I am interested in, being at once external and domestic actors and also as they are non- governmental. Finally I am not dealing here with whether democracy is a likely or necessary outcome for development in Vietnam, I am looking rather at the significance of the idea of the democracy in this context, and how this concept influences the interaction of INGOs and the GoV.

## 1.2. Research Questions

My research questions helped to organize my design conceptually and assist the process of moving towards an understanding and explanation of the phenomenon (Stake, 1995: 15). They also helped to structure my observations, interviews and document review. My overarching research questions are explanatory as I am seeking to explain patterns related to the phenomenon:

- *How do INGOs interact with the political context in Vietnam?*
- *How does the political context in Vietnam influence INGO governance strategies?*

In order to break down the central research questions into subtopics for examination and to advance the procedural steps in the research process (Creswell, 2007: 109), I formulated a number of preliminary sub questions, including both issue-oriented and topical sub questions. Conducting fieldwork has taken my research in unexpected directions, thus I could not commit in advance to a specific research question (Stake, 1995: 28). My questions evolved from etic issues brought to the

field by myself as the researcher, and subsequently during my field work emic issues emerged, which reflect the issues of actors on the inside who belong to the case (ibid: 20). My issue- oriented research questions assisted me to build the conceptual structure for organizing my case, directing attention to the major concerns and perplexities to be resolved (Creswell, 2007: 28) and include the following: *How is governance development work understood by local INGO staff in Vietnam? How are political spaces perceived by INGOs in Vietnam? How do INGOs in Vietnam understand their relationship with the Vietnamese State?* To add to this I have formulated a number of topical sub-questions in order to cover the anticipated need for information: *What are the development goals of INGOs in Vietnam? What local governance development work do INGOs engage in, in Vietnam? What are the most prominent constraints faced by INGOs in their work in Vietnam?*

### 1.3. Justifying the Relevance of the Study

In this study I hope to first and foremost contribute to a greater understanding of the political-developmental context in Vietnam, by presenting an insider perspective of the interaction between the state and INGOs, that is not highly visible from an outside perspective. The kind of soft power at work in the interaction between these actors operates “below the radar screens of international observers” (Levinsky et al, 2006: 385). To add to this, the overall developmental progress of Vietnam is not clear from the outside, it appears that Vietnam has implemented political reform and made progress towards democracy (Wells- Dang, 2010: 107), however this is not necessarily the case. I will thus look at the less visible and less formal politics at play in this context.

Secondly I find that this kind of study is necessary at the present time for a number of reasons. Vietnam has progressed to an unprecedented degree in terms of its development in a remarkable short period of time, I thus believe that it is important to reflect on this trajectory in a systematic way and to look specifically at the present state of its development process. Vietnam was recently classified as a low-middle income country, which has a significant impact on the strategies of international donors in this context and will thus have a great impact on the future of development as donors are beginning to scale down and exit. This is thus a crucial time of transition for development in Vietnam, it is at a cross-road and the sustainability of its progress to date is of great concern. During this period Vietnam has also become increasingly integrated into the global system and exposed to the processes of globalization. While the state has until now successfully held its ground in the face of “powerful external forces” (Gainsborough, 2010: 111), there is a need to reconsider the

state's ability to protect its hold on power in the face of the constant creation and expansion of 'new transnational social and political spaces', as a result of globalization processes. These new political spaces must be explored in light of the extensive and rapid changes that have occurred within them over a short period of time in Vietnam's recent history. By focusing on these spaces, I am focusing on the interactions between actors, both state and non- state in the development process in a systemic manner, without focusing on a specific, sectoral element in the process, as much of the discussion on development in Vietnam has tended to do, I will thus shed light on the "complex and poorly understood interactions among these many different sectoral elements that collectively shape development trends" (Hardy in Luong, 2003: 143).

Finally I intend to bridge a number of gaps I have found in various strands of literature. Firstly, I will attempt to provide a "more profound organizational and political analysis of the relationship between theory, rhetoric and practice" (Jönsson et al, 2012: 118) regarding development in Vietnam. Secondly, while there is an abundance of literature on NGOs, not much space has been dedicated to the analysis of their action and of what they have achieved. I also contest that the role of NGOs, and particularly transnational INGOs needs to be reasserted following a shift in the 2000s, in light of the Millennium Development Goals, which saw aid being channeled once again through states instead of NGOs (ibid: 130). I argue that INGOs are highly influential and important actors, especially in the unique political context of Vietnam. Finally, in terms of the literature on democratization, despite a widespread support for the integration of domestic and external factors, there is a "relative lack of systemic studies" (Elgström et al, 2002: 174). There is a lack also of systemic studies bridging structural approaches and the role of actors as driving forces for regime transition (ibid: 198). Another aspect of democratic transitions that is underdeveloped in the literature is the "role of institutions as mediating factors" (ibid: 197). I have attempted to address all of these deficiencies in my analysis by taking a broad systemic approach in my study.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

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### 2.1. Globalization and Governance

The concept of globalization functions as a means to illustrate changing circumstances in the global political world which are relevant to my thesis. Globalization is a highly contested and broad

concept, however I will conceptualize the concept to fit the purpose of my study and contextualize it within my case. I have adopted a ‘transnational approach’ (Rossi, 2007) to globalization, defining the concept, according to Scholte (2005) as “a process of respatialization of social life” (2005: 84). Thinking of globalization in this way, I am focusing on a particular dynamic of this ‘global process’ that manifests itself in the creation and expansion of “transnational social spaces” (Rossi, 2007: 96), or “new jurisdictions or sites of power” (Gainsborough, 2010: 115). The logic behind this conceptualization is that globalization processes bring an increase in transnational actors, which creates a new challenge for nation-states as they are “no longer the only authority in the land” (Gainsborough, 2010: 115). According to this definition, globalization can be understood as a process in parallel with the move toward ‘global governance’. Whitman (2009) suggests that global governance should be seen as “a new perspective that helps us describe, understand, and explain a political world that is itself undergoing profound change” (Whitman, 2009: 41). I understand the emergence of ‘global governance’ simply, in line with James Rosenau (1995) as a multiplication of spheres of authority beyond the state. The concept is defined more precisely however as “the complex of formal and informal institutions, mechanisms, relationships and processes between and among states, markets, citizens, and organizations, both inter and nongovernmental, through which collective interests on the global plane are articulated, rights and obligations are established, and differences are mediated” (ibid: 70). Global governance theories are concerned with both transnational and subnational mechanisms of control of public spaces in which both government and non- government actors interact and take decisions (Jönsson et al, 2012: 54; Whitman, 2009: 69). Taken together, the concepts of globalization and governance have a significant impact on the development process, as they capture the great changes in society and politics, particularly the opening up of new political spaces for action, and the increasingly complex structures of power and decision making among state and non- state actors. Discussions of global governance processes have consequently become more prominent in the field of development (Jönsson et al, 2012: 55).

## 2.2. A Political- Discursive Institutional theory

I find it useful to think about the interactions between the state and INGOs in Vietnam in terms of the institutions guiding these actors, particularly as the institutional perspective has become more important and relative in the development discourse, in the context of an increasingly globalizing

world where ideas and institutions are spreading at a more rapid pace than ever (Jönsson et al, 2012: 60). Conceptions of development have progressed over time “from being the equivalence of modernization, to being concerned with overcoming social inequalities and on to providing opportunities for individuals in the marketplace and institutional improvements in the name of ‘good governance’” (Elgström et al, 2002: 2). Institutions can be defined broadly as “widely known, established and predictable principles that regulate human conduct throughout society” (ibid: 56). Neo- institutionalist theories emphasize the importance of institutional structures and examine how these influence social behavior (ibid: 57), in this sense the institutional perspective differs fundamentally from other theories of politics, in terms of its emphasis on the causal role of higher order factors, particularly the state and political context as impacting upon “political identities, interests, preferences and strategies of groups” (Amenta et al in Leicht et al, 2010: 28). Institutionalism also emphasizes the fact that people “move within the frameworks of different structures and ideas, norms and rules” (Jönsson et al, 2012: 59). Institutionalism has been criticized on two main points; firstly, as being “structurally biased” and secondly as typically having trouble explaining social and political change (Amenta et al in Leicht et al, 2010: 15). I counteract these two criticisms however by recognizing that institutions are not static structures, but are constantly being recreated by dynamic processes of interaction among actors (Jönsson et al, 2012: 59). And institutionalism’s weakness in capturing subtle political changes can be overcome by a cross-fertilization of research methods and approaches (ibid: 56; Amenta et al in Leicht et al, 2010: 34). To achieve this I am using a triangulated mix of three research methods and drawing on two different strands of neo-institutionalist theory.

Political institutionalists define institutions as “formal or informal procedures, routines, norms, and conventions in the organizational structure of the polity or the political economy” (Amenta et al in Leicht et al, 2010: 15). I find it useful to draw on this theory, which argues that “national-level political institutions mediate the influence of domestic organized political actors and global processes” (ibid: 16). I will apply this theoretical approach in a broad sense in order to investigate how “higher order” factors structure action, constrain or constitute the interests and political participation of actors (ibid). In my thesis these higher order factors include the national political context in Vietnam, and the conventions and norms upheld by the greater international community, specifically regarding international development. I combine this perspective with Discursive Institutionalism, a relatively new approach, accentuating the significance not only of ideas but also of values and ideologies, it also highlights the communication and interaction between structures and

actors in politics (Jönsson et al, 2012: 58). This approach is related to constructivism in its contention that “reality is dependent on individuals’ inter- subjective perceptions of the social context in which they find themselves” (ibid), in this sense both state and non- state actors can recreate or transform existing structures and institutions. It is highlighted by Jönsson et al (2012) that foreign institutions, in new contexts are likely to be interpreted by actors in relation to existing and historically embedded institutions (2012: 59). This is particularly relevant to my thesis as there are clear differences in the institutions constructed by the Vietnamese state, and those of the international development community, of which INGOs are a part.

These neo-institutionalist perspectives, taken together, are appropriate for the analysis of the role of institutions in the development process, considering the growing recognition of less formal institutions that accompanied the proliferation of NGOs as international development actors. Institutions in development theory now include “regularised patterns of behaviour between individuals and groups, structured by norms and ‘unwritten codes’ that have widespread use in society as much as formal rules of law” (Potter et al, 2008: 268). This broader conception of development as a process of interaction between different institutions and different levels of society highlights the importance of seeing the state as but one of many spheres of activity within society, with other spheres being encompassed by arenas of civil society (ibid: 305). The state and society are not separate entities, and I agree with Green (2008) who claims that “in the interaction between states and citizens lie the seeds of developmental success and failure” (2008: 21). I will combine these two perspectives to form a framework to understand the role institutions play in shaping and influencing the interactions among actors within the political context of Vietnam.

## 2.3. Development, Democracy and NGOs

### 2.3.1. *The democratic agenda in the Post- Cold War context*

Since the end of the Cold War, the development-democracy nexus has been central to development discourse, with democratization quickly being prioritized as a dominant concern on Western foreign policy agendas. This prioritization stemmed from the fall of the Soviet Union, bringing the demise of Communism as an alternative ideology and opening up ideological space for democracy. While this

pursuit was initiated by Western governments, a transnational infrastructure of organizations and networks emerged at this time that was committed to the promotion of democracy and human rights in developing countries. They included “international organizations, party foundations, election monitoring agencies, and a burgeoning community of nongovernmental organizations” (Levitsky et al, 2006: 381). Despite many counter arguments that have since emerged against this ‘Western’ model of development, and the controversial nature of the debate on the relationship between democracy and development, “democracy has established itself as the last ‘great political narrative’ that has been able to convey meaning and identity across nations and continents” (Steffek et al, 2010: 29). Within the huge body of literature concerning democratization and regime transition, considerable attention has been drawn to this “international dimension” (Levitsky et al, 2006: 379), accounting for diverse forms of external influence including “diffusion, promotion of western democracy, multilateral conditionality, and the spread of new communication technologies and transnational human rights networks” (ibid). However, the most widely studied forms of international influence such as conditionality and democracy assistance programs do not appear to have had a consistent democratizing impact, and their effects are inconsistent across different regions (ibid). This may be due to the tendency towards a minimalist approach to the introduction of democracy that focuses on specific aspects such as electoral processes, as they are the least complicated measures for the international community to deal with (Jönsson et al, 2012: 92).

### *2.3.2. Approaches to democracy promotion*

Carothers (2009) conceptualized democracy assistance as taking one of two forms; political or developmental. The ‘minimalist approach’ mentioned above could be understood as a political approach which “proceeds from a relatively narrow conception of democracy- focused, above all, on elections and political liberties” (Carothers, 2009: 5), and focuses aid on political processes and institutions. This approach leaves aside “more comprehensive political, economic and social questions” (Jönsson et al, 2012: 93) in the expectation that greater issues in society will automatically be resolved after the holding of an election, for example. There is a risk, in this approach that “both external pressures and the importance of local structures for the political landscape” (ibid) will be underestimated. There is a need to contextualize approaches to democracy assistance to fit with the norms, institutions and practices within the context of a given political system. The developmental approach on the other hand rests on “a broader notion of democracy, one that encompasses concerns about equality and justice and the concept of democratization as a slow,

iterative process of change involving an interrelated set of political and socioeconomic developments” (Carothers, 2009: 5). This approach deals with a wide range of political and socioeconomic questions and tends to emphasise governance and the building of a well- functioning state as key. It sees the value of democracy as in terms of its contribution to larger processes of development, and rests on a belief that basic features of democratic governance such as transparency, accountability and responsiveness contribute to “more equitable socioeconomic development overall” (ibid: 8). The focus is on good governance as opposed to the promotion of overt contestation and openness, emphasises the need to work in partnership with the host government and “steers clear of activities that might be seen as politically confrontational or even “too political” “ (ibid). The focus thus tends to be on grassroots initiatives rather than national- level political advocacy, which may be seen as ‘too political’. I will discuss the approach taken by INGOs in the Vietnamese context within this framework.

### *2.3.3. NGOs and democratic ideals*

The promotion of democracy continues to be an explicit and central target for the majority of aid donors (Jönsson et al, 2012: 92), relatedly, civil society has attracted increasing attention in the development field in recent years, due in part to it being seen as “the bearer of democratic ideals and as an alternative to state- led development” (ibid: 102). In terms of international development efforts, NGOs are at the centre of this democratically oriented ideal. NGOs can be broadly defined as “private organizations established to meet some social objective, operating on a non-profit basis” (Gray in Kerkvliet et al, 2003:111), regarding the promotion of sociopolitical development however, they have tended to be described specifically in relation to “the importance of a strong civil society in fostering accountability and democratic governance” (ibid: 110). It is a widely held idea that they have made international society “more conducive to the spread of democracy and the protection of human rights than ever was true in the past” (Thomas, 2001:395). NGOs have also been explicitly classified, by political consensus as “effective agents for democratic change” (Veltmeyer, 2005:90). It is assumed that their influence will make a positive contribution to democratic international governance (Heggli in Steffek et al, 2010:223). NGOs have thus been used to channel aid and “circumvent corrupt and inefficient governments” (Jönsson et al, 2012: 102). I am focusing specifically on transnational civil society, the spaces in which INGOs, operate in Vietnam, as I argue that future development in Vietnam is likely to occur in light of the expansion of transnational civil society. Transnational INGOs are particularly powerful due to their ability to set agendas and

standards, deciding “which and whose concerns they are advocating” (Steffek et al, 2010: 5). The influence of transnational INGOs is particularly relevant in my thesis, as they have been considered as an important force in determining the success or failure of moves away from authoritarianism (Gainsborough, 2010: 19).

#### *2.3.4. Linkage- A framework for democratic transition*

Despite the attention received by the relationship between the post-Cold War international environment and regime outcomes, it remains poorly understood (Levitsky et al, 2006: 379). I find Levitsky et al’s (2006) framework for analyzing these patterns particularly useful for the analysis of the relationship between the single party Communist regime in Vietnam and the international environment. This framework is based on two dimensions: “(1) Western leverage, or the degree to which governments are vulnerable to external democratizing pressure, and (2) linkage to the West, or the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social and organizational) and cross- border flows (of trade and investment, people, and communication) between particular countries and the United States, the European Union (EU), and western- led multilateral institutions” (ibid). In the literature on regime transition, most explanations draw upon three main approaches: modernization theory, historical sociology (structuralism) and transition theory (agency theory) (Grugel, 2002: 46). These theories are not particularly suitable for the purposes of my thesis however, firstly as I intend to bridge the gap between structural and agency oriented approaches, and secondly as I am focusing exclusively on the international influence affecting the prospect of democratic transitions. For the purposes of my case study the ‘linkage’ dimension of this framework is the most relevant, as it explicitly concerns “transnational civil society linkage” including ties to Western- based NGO organisations.

Linkage generates a number of sources of antiauthoritarian pressure. Firstly, heavy penetration of media and NGOs in transnational advocacy networks, increases the probability that autocratic abuse will be reported as news and generate unwanted attention in the West. Secondly, linkage increases the likelihood that Western governments will take action on any abuses, in response to media coverage and lobbying by non-governmental actors. Thirdly, linkage “shifts domestic preferences in a prodemocratic direction by expanding the number of domestic actors with a stake in their country’s international standing” (Levinsky et al, 2006: 385). Linkage may also reshape domestic balances of power under authoritarian regimes, enhance domestic support for democratic forces and strengthen

reformist tendencies within autocratic parties. Unlike leverage, linkage generates soft power, the ability to shape preferences and get others to do what you want. It influences a range of nonstate actors “generating decentralized forms of pressure that frequently operate below the radar screens of international observers” (ibid). Linkage then, to a significant extent “blurs international and domestic politics, transforming international expectations into domestic demands” (ibid: 386). The relationship between linkage and leverage is important in terms of the extent to which democratizing pressure will have an impact on a particular context. I classify Vietnam as a context in which linkage is high but leverage is relatively low. Leverage is low as the GoV has shown remarkable strength in resisting external pressure for democratization until now. Linkage on the other hand is high due to the density of INGOs, as well as the huge amount of foreign investment in Vietnam. Also, in the context of ever-accelerating globalization and increased internet access in particular, cross-border flows of information and communication further heightens Vietnam’s linkage to the West. In a situation of high linkage and low leverage “external democratizing pressure will be diffuse, indirect, and slow-moving, but it may nevertheless be substantial” (ibid: 387). I will look into the kind of pressure INGOs are placing on the Communist regime in Vietnam in light of this idea of linkage.

## 2.4. Globalization of the State and Society

Transnational processes and actors operate in three different spheres according to Rossi (2007); the economic sphere, the political sphere and the cultural sphere (2007: 97). I am focusing on the political sphere, as Vietnam, being a single-party Communist state, resembles most closely Rossi’s ideal type of ‘political society’, with politics as the dominant principle of societal organization, which according to her hypothesis determines the type of globalization processes that occur in a particular context (ibid: 30). With the creation of new sites of power, the state becomes a new site of struggle, as transnational actors, in this case INGOs, enter this space and seek to achieve their own objectives. In the case of Vietnam this perspective is highly relevant as “the main arena of struggle in Vietnam remains closely focused in and around the state” (Gainsborough, 2010: 22). There has been a lot of debate regarding the role of the state in the context of increasing globalization and on the impact these ‘global processes’ have had on the state. Despite early propositions, during the 1990s, that state power was under threat in light of the “rise of transnational forms of governance” (Gainsborough, 2010: 90), it became apparent that this was not necessarily the case, particularly in Vietnam where the state appears to be “holding its ground in the face of powerful external forces, notwithstanding a certain amount of adaptation” (ibid: 111). In a specific body of literature on

globalization and the state, arguments tend to look at globalization processes as either strengthening or weakening the state, however I intend to approach this debate from the third perspective proposing that the state is instead being “re-configured” (ibid: 113) as a result of globalization processes. This perspective is useful as I am investigating this “re-configured” space of the state in Vietnam, re-configured partly as a result of the increase of transnational actors that have entered this ‘site of struggle’, in which both state and non-state actors seek to forward their own objectives.

The state itself can be defined according to many different logics and classifications, in this thesis the state is defined firstly, in line with Finnemore (1996) as a social construction, making it “contingent on other social actors, with blurry or fuzzy boundaries between state and society, and relations that can be mutually transforming” (Wells- Dang, 2010: 96). Secondly, the state is defined according to Jessop (1990) and Hay’s (1995) ‘strategic relational approach’ as “an ensemble of power centres and capacities that offer unequal chances to different forces within and outside the state and that cannot, qua institutional ensemble, exercise power” (Jessop in Leicht et al, 2010: 45). State power, from this perspective is defined as “a contingent product of a changing balance of political forces located within and beyond the state” (Jessop in Leicht et al, 2010: 46), this balance is additionally conditioned by “the specific institutional structures and procedures of the state apparatus as embedded within the wider political system and envioning social relations” (ibid). This theoretical approach to the state and state power recognizes the causal role of the state as impacting upon other actors and explicitly focuses attention on the relationship between state and non- state forces. According to this theory the powers of the state are actualized depending on the “action, reaction, and interaction of specific social forces located within and beyond this complex ensemble” (ibid: 45). This approach is compatible with the institutionalist perspective I have adopted in terms of the focus on a causal role of the state.

An important idea behind this theory is that the state cannot be understood adequately without positioning it within a wider concept of society, it must be located in its ‘strategic relational’ context. In other words, “the state’s structural powers and capacities cannot be understood by focusing on the state alone” (ibid: 47). Gainsborough (2010) echoes this idea by cautioning against “focusing directly on the state” (2010: 3). This is crucial in studying the Vietnamese context as the distinction between state and society is hard to clarify (Kerkvliet in Luong, 2003: 28). This idea that the state is contingent on other social actors, and that boundaries between state and society are difficult to establish clearly, calls for a redefinition of the state- society relationship according to a constructivist

understanding. This type of redefinition, according to Wells- Dang (2010) is “essential for understanding the dynamics of plural and intertwined political spaces where the state has historically been strong” (2010: 96).

## 2.5. Summary of theoretical framework

This theoretical framework highlights the interaction of globalization processes, ideas and state-society relations in the non- democratic context of Vietnam. The theoretical concepts of both globalization and governance are taken together to illustrate and explain changing circumstances in the global political world. They also provide a framework for understanding the challenge posed to the nation state by a particular dynamic of these global processes that is manifested in the creation and expansion of transnational social or political spaces, bringing an increase in transnational actors, which has led to a multiplication of spheres of authority beyond the state. In order to understand the interaction and communication between these structures and actors, I have employed an institutionalist perspective which will assist in understanding how the different frameworks of ideas, norms and rules shape and influence the interactions between the GoV and INGOs in the Vietnamese context. The frameworks of ideas in which these two actors operate are different, and the distance between the two normative constructions significantly concerns the idea of democracy. I have discussed the role of the idea of democracy within development and how it is promoted by the international community, specifically INGOs in national contexts. I will position the approach of INGOs in Vietnam within this framework, considering their role as effective agents for democratic change. I will discuss these various concepts within the framework of leverage- linkage in order to understand the relationship between the international environment and the domestic context in Vietnam and to explain what kind of pressure INGOs are placing on the GoV. This theoretical framework concludes with a conceptualization of the state and society in the context of these processes of globalization, illustrating how the space of the state in Vietnam is being reconfigured by the infiltration of transnational actors, in order to understand the dynamics of plural and intertwined political spaces.

### 3. Research Strategy

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#### 3.1. Constructivism and the Case Study methodology

As I am investigating a process, or a phenomenon that is not highly visible from an outside perspective, my case can be “better captured through understanding the perceptions and experiences of those who live through them” (Wells- Dang, 2010: 109). Constructivism is based on the reality that “no aspects of knowledge are purely of the external world, devoid of human construction” (Stake, 1995: 100), and the emphasis in this approach is on providing a “thick description” based on the interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case (ibid: 102). It is important for me to interpret the understandings of insiders as they are directly involved in the phenomenon I am investigating and have a particular awareness of the opportunities and obstacles associated with the political context in Vietnam. I will thus rely heavily on participants’ views and lived experiences within ‘political spaces’ in Vietnam. The idea of context is highly significant in my study, therefore, focusing on this specific context in which the phenomenon occurs allows me to understand how the participants have developed subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2007:21). The constructivist approach is also appropriate to my study due to the belief inherent in this paradigm that ideas affect decision- making. According to Elgström *et al* (2002) “constructivists are convinced that ideas have an autonomous impact on political decisions. Several constructivist scholars have demonstrated how non-state actors in world politics have successfully acted as norm entrepreneurs, spreading the norms they cherish to states and international organizations” (2002: 198). This logic is in line with my contestation that ideas, particularly those of INGOs related to democracy can affect the political context in Vietnam and challenge the ideas upheld by the GoV.

What is expected to be presented in a case study is “thick description”, “experiential understanding” and “multiple realities” (Stake, 1995: 43), this methodology is thus in line with the emphasis of the adopted constructivist approach. Aside from this, I have chosen to conduct a case study for two primary reasons; Firstly, as I am seeking to understand a complex social phenomenon, namely the dynamic interactions between INGOs and the GoV in ‘new political spaces’, and secondly, as I will investigate a contemporary situation in which relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2009:11). I have chosen to conduct a single, qualitative intrinsic case study, in which the focus is progressive and the aim is to thoroughly understand the case (Stake, 1995: 8). My focus is on the pre- selected case of new political spaces in Vietnam, as the political context in Vietnam, in which

these spaces exist, presents both a unique and unusual situation (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2007). I have also chosen an embedded design, as opposed to a holistic one as I believe this will focus my inquiry by using sub-units of analysis (Yin, 2009: 52). These subunits will include: political context in Vietnam; development goals and governance strategies of INGOs in Vietnam; government policies and laws relating to INGOs in Vietnam. Data collection in a Case Study research is typically extensive and may come from a number of different sources (Yin, 2009: 98). The data collection procedures I have chosen for this study are: participant observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. I have chosen to use these methods in combination as I believe that in this way I will ‘capitalize on the respective strengths of these methods’ (Gubrium *et al*, 2001: 806), counteracting the perceived limitations of each. I have paid close attention to context in my data collection, as context is crucial in an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995: 64) and particularly for my case, as context is a central concept in my thesis.

## 3.2. Data Collection Procedures

### 3.2.1. *Participant- observation*

As my primary data collection method, I conducted a six-month participant observation at a large INGO in Hanoi, Vietnam from 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012- 25<sup>th</sup> January 2013. During this time I assumed the role of ‘Governance Programme Intern’. I gained access to the field through an international donor agency and my eventual sponsor was a Governance Programme Officer who introduced me to all aspects of the organization and their work. My sponsor was appropriate according to DeWalt and DeWalt’s (2011) suggested criteria as “someone who is in a respected but relatively neutral position in the community, and with whom a relationship of mutual trust can be developed” (2011: 46). In the context of this study, my sponsor held an important position in the organization but was not in a director position, which allowed me to learn from her extensive knowledge and experience, without difficulty of access. The opportunities presented by participant observation included an enhanced ability to gain access to ‘events or groups that are otherwise inaccessible to a study’ (Yin, 2009: 112), and to perceive reality from an ‘inside’ perspective (*ibid*). On the other hand, problems with conducting data collection in this manner included the potential for production of biases and the amount of time dedicated to the participant role relative to my role as an observer (*ibid*: 113). I do not consider these associated problems as having been a risk in my data collection, in fact, an

advantage of my position as an intern reflects the greatest strength of the method, which is attempting to gain the point of view of the participant. I achieved this by working as part of a team, incorporating the concerns and goals of my colleagues (ibid: 53). Another potential risk with using this method is a language barrier. As the majority of my colleagues were Vietnamese, this was the primary language used in the office. However, my colleagues spoke excellent English and made a great effort to include me in conversations and translate. Also, as this was an INGO, English was spoken during many events and to facilitate international colleagues, and the majority of all documents were produced in English. I thus did not find that my ability as a researcher was compromised to any significant extent.

Participant observation encourages continual reassessment of ideas (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 15), in line with the idea of progressive focusing, which can enhance the quality of data obtained during field research, its interpretation, and is particularly useful in formulating new research questions (ibid: 16). Data collection began as soon as I entered the field and became acquainted with my case, and was based initially on early impressions that have since been refined or replaced (Stake, 1995: 49). During my participant observation I kept a record of events in order to be able to provide a description that I would further analyze at a later date (ibid: 62). My observation moved through a process of becoming increasingly concrete and concentrated on the aspects that are essential for the research questions (Flick, 2009: 227). Observations were conducted following Spradley's (1980) phases; beginning with a descriptive observation to grasp the complexity of the organizational structures, moving on then to a more focused observation and finally to selective observation, where I focused upon the most relevant practices for my research (ibid). I discovered over time how governance work is understood by local staff working for an INGO in Vietnam. I used an observational protocol to assist me in recording data obtained from my participant observation (Creswell, 2007: 137), my notes included descriptive notes, reflective notes and demographic information (ibid: 182); acting as a 'textual space for the recording of our emotions and personal experiences' (May, 2001: 158). The ultimate goal of my participant observation was to "develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 110), including maximizing the validity of data collected and presenting a "fair and objective analysis and interpretation of them" (ibid). (For a detailed record of key events see Appendix 1).

### 3.2.2. *Semi- Structured Interviews*

The purpose of interviewing for my study was, as proposed by Spradley, “to make ‘cultural inferences’, thick descriptions of a given social world analyzed for cultural patterns and themes” (Gubrium et al, 2001: 85). Using this method in combination with participant observation allowed me to ‘fill in’ the meaning of observed interactions (ibid). I conducted semi-structured interviews with INGO staff working on governance in Vietnam (see Appendix 1), as a secondary but important form of data collection, as interviews ‘yield rich insights into people’s biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings’ (May, 2001: 131). The open-ended character of these interviews allowed my preconceptions as a researcher to be challenged as well as allowing the interviewee to ‘answer questions from their own frame of reference’, providing qualitative depth (ibid: 136). This form of interviewing fits with the constructivist paradigm, as it ‘allows the meanings that individuals attribute to events and relationships to be understood on their own terms’ (May, 2001:124), I was thus able to get an insight into the unique viewpoints of local INGO staff regarding how they understand the phenomena in question. As a researcher I listened carefully so as to “hear the meaning” of what is being conveyed by the respondent (Gubrium et al, 2001: 85). I also remained flexible and attentive to “the variety of meanings that may emerge” (ibid: 87) over the course of the interviews. Respondents were chosen based on a theoretical sampling strategy. I chose respondents who seemed “likely to epitomize the analytic criteria” (Gubrium et al, 2001: 87) in which I am interested. In this case the selection criterion was based on experience working on governance projects and development more broadly in Vietnam, as these respondents would have a great depth of lived experience of the opportunities and constraints that exist in ‘new political spaces’ in Vietnam. In order to record my data from the interviews I used a pre-designed interview protocol (see Appendix 2) which helped me to organize my thoughts and allow me to easily take notes during the interview (Creswell, 2007: 135).

### 3.2.3. *Document Analysis*

I chose document analysis as my third research method as it assists me to understand further how reality is constructed by the various actors I am concerned with in my case. As Prior (2003) contests, the analysis of documents is worthwhile because “every document is packed tight with assumptions

and concepts and ideas that reflect on the agents who produced the document, and its intended recipients, as much as upon the people and events reported upon” (Prior, 2003: 48), this method will thus help me to further understand the context I am dealing with in my study. Prior (2003) stresses the importance of studying documents, particularly their function, within their situated social context, an emphasis that is usefully applicable to my study as the specificity and uniqueness of the Vietnamese political and cultural context is highly significant for my case. She suggests following a document through its “social trajectory (2003: 10), examining both how it is produced and consumed within a specific social context. Focusing on the production of a document, it is important to bear in mind the complex system of “rules, conventions, organization strategies and conceptual schemes” (ibid: 31) which are applied by the author of the document, as this gives us an insight into how meaning is constructed by the producer. The function of documents in relation to interaction is an important area of focus in my analysis, in the sense that they can “both mediate and structure episodes of social interaction” (ibid: 67).

### 3.3. Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis, according to Stephens (2009) is “the search for meaning in relation to the research purpose or question” (2009: 98), the search for meaning is in turn, the search for patterns and consistency or correspondence in the data (ibid: 78), which is found “within the triangular relationship between theory, the data generated, and context or setting” (ibid: 98). In case study research new meanings are reached through two strategies: (1) direct interpretation of the individual instance and (2) through aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class (Stake, 1995:74). In intrinsic case studies, the aim is to understand the case itself, the meaning we are seeking through analysis is to contribute to this aim. In qualitative analysis, the focus is concentrated on the instance, it is dismantled and reassembled meaningfully so that it can later be interpreted (ibid: 75). In line with Stephens’ (2009) discussion of analysis, I first constructed meaning in relation to theory with a discussion of how my central concepts are understood within the context of my case and theoretical framework. I then sought to find meaning in relation to data generated. This is a crucial part of my analysis as the “richness of the voices and data generated in the field” (Stephens, 2009: 99) should be given prominence. Finally the data was analyzed in relation to the cultural, social and political context in Vietnam, from which it is extracted, as it was important for me to situate my analysis in this highly specific setting (ibid). By context, here, I mean the “structured and meaningful system of social relations that exist at micro and macro levels” (ibid: 107). The analytic

process is described by Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994a) in Stephens (2009) and DeWalt & DeWalt (2011) as being composed of four stages: (1) reading the data, in relation to the units of analysis in which it is embedded and other units of analysis in the broader field of research, (2) data reduction, described as “the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 180), at this point the data is coded or sorted into identified themes that have emerged from data collected, (3) presenting the data and (4) interpreting and verifying the data, referring to the development of ideas about the meaning of the data (Stephens, 2009: 100; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 180-3).

As a researcher I must try to achieve objectivity in my research. To do this I recognized the need to be not only accurate in measuring things but also to be “logical in interpreting the meaning of those measurements” (Stake, 1995: 108). I am also obliged to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding, in order to ensure the validity of my research, validity is “a quality of any type of observation that has to do with the extent to which the results of observations correspond to the presumed underlying reality” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 122). I must also ensure reliability, this concept refers to “the extent to which results can be reproduced using the same approach over time and under different circumstances” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 112). Triangulation protocols were used in order to “gain the needed confirmation, to increase credence in the interpretation, to demonstrate commonality of an assertion” (Stake, 1995: 112). I deliberately triangulated important data and claims that are central to making my case. I chose to use methodological triangulation, using multiple research methods which is likely to “illuminate or nullify some extraneous influences” (Stake, 1995: 114).

### 3.4. Role of the Researcher

“An ongoing interpretive role of the researcher is prominent in qualitative case study” (Stake, 1995: 43) in my study however, this was my primary role. I sought to recognize and substantiate new meaning, recognize problems and find connections in order to make the phenomena comprehensible to the reader (ibid: 97). As interpreter, I also maintained the principle of relativity, recognizing variation in interpretations, including my own unique interpretation and those of the participants in my study (ibid: 103). Being aware of who I am as a researcher means upholding the principle of reflexivity, I had to be actively reflexive in relation to the combination of methods I have chosen, recognizing that I am a part of the social events and processes I observe and help to narrate through

interviewing and participant observation (Gubrium et al, 2001: 812, DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 111). Stating my role as a researcher is particularly important as I am adopting a constructivist approach to case study research, because in this methodology “the interpretations of the researcher are likely to be emphasized more than the interpretations of those people studied” (Stake, 1995: 12). I must however seek to preserve the multiple realities that are apparent in my study.

Who I am as a researcher is also significant as I have conducted a participant observation in which I am, as an observer, the primary research tool (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 111). Qualitative research is largely based on the interaction of researcher and phenomena (Stake, 1995: 95), it is thus important to recognize that my background, personal values and biases may shape the interpretation of my research (Creswell, 2009: 177), and how I interact with the phenomena I am studying. I should therefore highlight that my approach to this research and my interpretation of data collected will be affected by my academic background in Sociology and Political Science, within this I have a particular interest in state- society relations in developing countries. This background led me to be drawn to the topic I am investigating, and has likely affected my selection of what I consider to be important data for analysis. Secondly, and perhaps most significantly considering the fact that I am conducting a cross- cultural study, the Western culture I come from has an impact on my meaning-making processes and particularly on how I collect and interpret data. This could have presented a number of difficulties during the data collection process, however I have taken measures to minimize these risks. Coming from a very different cultural background from my respondents means that there was an added pressure on me as a researcher to grasp the reality, as it is understood by the interviewee, as closely as possible (Gubrium et al, 2001: 336). I was acutely aware of the communicative challenges that would be evident as I am conducting a cross-cultural interview; in an interview situation I was likely to face both ‘nonverbal and verbal challenges’ (ibid: 337). The risk associated with this however was minimized by my immersion in the culture of the respondents for a period of six months, allowing me to gain a significant understanding of the context in which respondents’ reality was constructed. A second risk, particularly relevant to the interview process, is associated with a language barrier as my respondents were interviewed in English and not in their native Vietnamese. This risk was also minimized however by my selection of highly educated respondents who have a very good grasp of the English language and conduct a significant percentage of their work through English.

### 3.5. Ethical considerations

As participant observation tends to raise a great number of ethical questions regarding informed consent and the right of people to choose to participate in research (DeWalt et al, 2011: 214), I had a great responsibility as a researcher to assess and minimize potential risks. The main risks identified by DeWalt & DeWalt (2011) are: “(1) stress related to discussion of difficult or sensitive topics, (2) failure to protect confidentiality with respect to sensitive information, (3) disclosure of illegal activity or sensitive information to authorities, and (4) unanticipated results of publication” (2011: 217). I have resolved this issue however by being open from the beginning of my fieldwork about my intentions and my background. I also received adequate permissions to use the data I collected and have submitted a draft of my analysis to participants for pre-approval. Regarding the interviewing method I employed, I maintained an awareness of the emotional costs involved for participants as my interviews were relatively open ended, asking participants to share their personal experiences may have caused some stress (Gubrium et al, 2001: 85). I ensured that the human subjects involved in all of my research methods were protected by the maintenance of confidentiality during my research and anonymity in my reporting. I also did not raise topics during the interview process that may have caused my participants distress, or made them feel uncomfortable in any way (Gubrium et al, 2001: 89). All of my participants gave informed consent, indicating that they understood the intent of my research and were willing to participate.

Due to restraints on freedom of speech under the Communist regime in Vietnam, doing research on any issue related to the government or democracy in this context is sensitive by nature. I don't believe that this has been a significant problem however, as I did not ask any highly sensitive questions during my interviews, and my intention is not to criticize the GoV, or was it to encourage any of my participants to do so. Secondly, as I conducted a case study, which deals with “a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context” (Yin, 2009:73), I ensured that I took measures to protect the human subjects in my research, primarily by not disclosing the identity of my participants, their organizations, or any sensitive details about their work or personal lives.

## 4. Developing the Case: New Political Spaces in Vietnam

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### 4.1. Vietnamese Political System

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a one-party state, a regime made up of four formal structures including: the VCP, in which power is concentrated in the Party's Central Committee; the People's Armed Forces, a key political institution, constitutionally responsible not only for national defense but for the maintenance of the party's monopoly of power (Abuza, 2001: 18); the state bureaucracy, comprising central and local government (Thayer, 2010:424). The National Assembly is the highest representative body of government, however, it has functioned traditionally as nothing more than a "rubber stamp" for party decision. Since Đổi Mới, a government 'renovation' and reform process initiated in 1986, the assembly has expanded its role and autonomy and has become progressively more assertive, commanding more power (Abuza, 2001: 19). Legal reforms since this point have brought a stronger role for the assembly in debating and passing laws (Wells- Dang 2010: 107); and finally the Vietnam Fatherland Front, the overarching association for mass organizations "helping to generate support for the state and to channel citizens' concerns and criticisms in a nonthreatening manner to the leaders" (Kerkvliet in Luong, 2003: 33). The organizations under this umbrella are supposed to represent various sectors of Vietnamese society, they include the Peasants' Association for Agricultural Producers, the General Confederation for Labour, the Women's Association and the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth League.

Each of these national level structures penetrate down through provincial, district, commune and village levels, with each government unit having a party component, these interlocking directorates characterize the Vietnamese system (Abuza, 2001: 18). There has also historically been a high degree of overlap between the party, the state apparatus, mass organizations and armed forces, with many elite members holding leadership positions in two or more organizations. This feature of embedded leadership structure is a key element in the general characterization of the Vietnamese political system as "mono-organizational socialism" (Thayer, 2010: 424). This issue of overlapping and "often chaotic structures of party and state" (ibid) is just one of many reforms being undertaken in Vietnam's long process of transition since 1986. The state has however, been characterized in many ways by analysts in terms of how it operates. Three prominent characterizations are (1) "a top down system dominated by a centralized Communist Party- run state with no room for societal influences and political activity", (2) "an authoritarian system that is largely a Communist Party- run

state but allows some citizen participation through its official ‘mass organisations’, or (3) “a system with considerable dialogue and negotiation between components of a somewhat decentralized state and various interests in society, including those not in the official organisations” (Kerkvliet, 2010: 36). I find it useful however, for the purposes of my thesis to characterize the state in Vietnam, simply, according to Kerkvliet’s characterization as ‘responsive- repressive’, a term that provides an insight into how the state acts and “captures relations between authorities and citizens” (ibid: 35). The state in Vietnam is reactive as opposed to being proactive and looking to the future. It is concerned with maintaining the status quo and especially with preserving its power, legitimacy and political stability in the face of external threat. Its reactions can be categorized according to the above two actions. In being ‘responsive’, the state takes action to “significantly accommodate or make concessions to concerns, criticisms or demands coming from individuals, groups or sectors of society” (ibid: 36), in their ‘repressiveness’ on the other hand they “put down, quell, forbid- through force or other methods- individuals, groups or sectors saying or doing things objectionable to authorities” (ibid).

#### 4.2. Economic reform and global integration: 1986 and 2006

The VCP has ruled throughout Vietnam since May 1975. During its reign it has “tolerated no dissent, monopolizing all political power and decision-making” (Abuza, 2001: 1), and has shown strength and resilience, surviving the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. While this government did embark on a programme of economic reform, it has been highly opposed to any kind of political reform. In 1986 an economic reform programme entitled *Đổi Mới* (‘Renovation’) was initiated in Hanoi. This programme included a number of reform measures including; agricultural reforms, price and currency reform, and importantly, a shift in growth strategy towards “an outwardly oriented economy based on foreign trade, foreign investment, bi- and multilateral borrowing, and economic interdependence” (ibid: 3). This transformation from a centrally planned to a market-led economy was one of the hallmarks of the reform process, integrating Vietnam into the global economy (Thayer, 2007: 381). While reforms were quite limited, the programme generated huge growth, with the economy growing 7 to 8 percent annually in the first ten years (Abuza, 2001: 3). These reforms were initiated as an attempt by the government to bring about economic prosperity which they believed would diminish any demand for political reform, which is perceived by the state in Vietnam as a threat to stability. This was an attempt to raise the standard of living in Vietnam in order for it to regain its tarnished legitimacy (ibid: 1). The focus of this process was largely

economic, however the goals of this process were described by the GoV as “a rich people, a strong nation and a just, democratic and civilised society” (Wells- Dang, 2010: 107), this thus implied political elements, despite the regime’s persistent fear of political reform, and has indeed been portrayed in this way by international observers, as including both economic *and* political elements (ibid).

Vietnam’s economy has grown rapidly since its transition to a market economy in 1986. More recently, between 2003 and 2008 its economy more than doubled from \$40 billion to \$90 billion, and its exports grew from \$20 billion to \$63 billion (World Bank, 2011: 16). During this period, triggered by Vietnam’s accession to the WTO in November 2006, remarkable improvements were witnessed in Vietnam’s economic performance (Thanh et al, 2009: 115). Looking beyond the impressive scale of this growth however, the quality of growth was questionable, as the contribution of productivity to growth declined, macroeconomic instability increased and inflation soared. Most significantly, for the purposes of my thesis however, Vietnam’s accession to the WTO heightened its “vulnerability to negative external shocks” (ibid), development became fragmented and the “inability of public institutions to keep pace with a rapidly globalizing economy” (World Bank, 2011: 16) became apparent. How this more recent economic development affects Vietnam depends largely on how the government responds to this deepened integration in the global economy and the challenges it presents. In order for Vietnam to benefit from its WTO membership it must commit to its processes and undertake domestic reforms (Thanh et al, 2009: 117), which will allow its institutions to deal with a fast growing economy that is highly exposed and vulnerable to external shocks. While Vietnam did make institutional preparations prior to its WTO accession, and some improvements “institutional capacity remains a key bottleneck for Vietnam’s sustainable development” (ibid: 131). Despite embracing a market economy, Vietnam has thus far neglected to strengthen its political institutions to support its economic policies. This is a difficult but necessary task as “the old forms of control are weakening and new activities are emerging that the system is not accustomed to or effective at regulating are rapidly emerging” (World Bank, 2011: 20). To make the necessary political, institutional reforms, transparency and accountability issues need to be addressed, and information needs to be communicated to the public so that the financial system can be adequately supervised and public confidence and consensus can emerge (Thanh et al, 2009: 132).

### 4.3. Political legitimacy and the perception of threat

At this point the concept of political legitimacy should be explained in the Vietnamese context, as the preservation of the regime is largely based on the maintenance of legitimacy, and the concept of political legitimacy in the Vietnamese sense, is in turn based on the very notion of protection against threat. The concept was based traditionally on the imperial Chinese concept of the “mandate of heaven”, and also the Vietnamese concepts of *duc* and *the*, referring respectively to personal morality and charisma, and the ability to master circumstances and control the external environment to become a developed, superior and powerful state in the region (Abuza, 2001: 21). Building primarily on the latter concept, the political legitimacy of the state in Vietnam has rested, from its foundation, on the guarding of the role of the VCP, and its success in “mobilizing national resistance against foreign domination on the basis of appeals to patriotism and nationalism” (Thayer, 2010: 425). From 1954 to 1986 the party’s claim to this legitimacy was based on its success in defeating foreign aggressors, and also being able to modernize and develop as a nation within the framework of its socialist ideology (ibid: 427). Following this from 1986 to the present, the basis of legitimacy has shifted towards performance legitimacy that is based on “the successful management of economic development and growth, and the maintenance of political stability against the threat of peaceful evolution” (ibid). The political legitimacy of the VCP has been continually challenged during this period. Initially challenges came from within the party itself and mounted during a serious socioeconomic crisis in the mid-1980s. These challenges were focused on ideology, the economy and the political system (ibid: 438). The nature and source of these challenges have shifted significantly however in recent years, notably since 2006. Non-party political activists have begun to make concerted efforts to promote “democracy, human rights, religious freedom, and workers’ rights” (ibid: 436). In the face of challenges to its political legitimacy, the default position of the Vietnamese state is repression (ibid: 439).

The Vietnamese state is overwhelmingly orientated toward diminishing or seeking to eradicate any perceived threat to the stability, power and legitimacy of the VCP. The regime has tailored its political institutions to be able to tackle identified threats and this preoccupation plays a significant role in shaping the government’s course of action, or more appropriately- reaction. As noted by Abuza (2001) the Vietnamese government “tends to be very reactive to problems” (2001: 22), responding to threats rather than governing with foresight. The system is also primarily focused on maintaining the status quo rather than moving forward. There are a number of strong beliefs within

the regime, regarding this perception on threat; firstly there is the idea that the international system is “hostile and threatens its monopoly of power” (ibid: 4), this perception is largely shaped by a long history of anticolonial struggle and ten years of conflict with neighbouring China and Cambodia. Secondly, there is a perception among Vietnamese political leaders, of politics as a ‘zero-sum’ game, in which compromise is equated with weakness (ibid). Finally, there is a strong belief that any liberalization of the political system will lead to a loss of its monopoly of power and great instability that would jeopardize national sovereignty (ibid: 5).

Two distinct threats have been identified. The first is an ongoing threat to Vietnam’s territorial integrity from China, along a shared border and in contested sea territory in the Gulf of Tonkin and in the South China Sea. It is the second threat, labeled the “peaceful evolution” however, that is of concern in this thesis. This threat refers to a combination of less easily identifiable threats stemming from “the growth of democratization, human rights, and other Western values” (Abuza, 2001: 22), that it is feared will diminish the monopoly of power held by the VCP and the Marxist- Leninist- Ho Chi Minh ideology it upholds (ibid). This threat is seen as a menacing “intrusion by means of culture and ideology” (ibid: 23) with the purpose of destabilizing and replacing the current political and social system in Vietnam. According to Thayer (2010) political reforms generally, were seen by party conservatives as part of this plot and priority is given to maintaining political stability against this threat (2010: 438). It is political reform however that has been predominantly demanded by critics of the Vietnamese government, who argued that “the main cause of Vietnam’s crisis lay in the nature of the one-party system itself which had been corrupted by power and had begun to degenerate” (ibid: 439). In the face of dissent and growing demands for political reform however, the Communist Party failed to come up with any innovative solutions and continued to stubbornly cling onto power, punishing all dissenters in an attempt to placate the threat of instability (Abuza, 2001: 3). Indeed the VCP has showed a great capacity and will to maintain its power this through coercive force. Pressure however, has continued to mount.

#### 4.4. External threat- globalization and democracy

External threats to the Vietnamese regime are multiple and varied, in order for the regime to endure it must respond to these pressures. The Vietnamese regime “is vulnerable to foreign pressure and does respond” according to Abuza (2001: 212). Vietnam is “too small and vulnerable, too dependent on foreign development assistance and direct investment to shut out the international community”

(ibid: 231). Vietnam firstly has international commitments as a signatory to various treaties, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the government however approaches these commitments with caution, selectively absorbing its contents in order not to compromise the integrity of the regime's ideology, which is equated by the regime to the national culture and ideology (ibid: 226). According to Abuza (2001) "the most significant pressure that can be brought to bear on the Vietnamese government comes from bilateral sources" (ibid: 227), however Vietnam pays more attention to international NGOs. I intend to argue that international NGOs pose the most significant threat to the GoV. The government is aware that it is held accountable by these agents representing the international community (ibid: 229). There are other exogenous forces putting pressure on the GoV (ibid), particularly the internet which "offers a new space for public discussion and criticism that is less restricted than the print or broadcast media" (Wells-Dang, 2010: 94). However, despite a huge amount of external pressure, it is argued (Abuza, 2001; Wells- Dang, 2010) that pressure for political reform, and indeed change must come from within. I agree with this argument as Vietnam has proven great strength in the face of external pressure, however I believe that INGOs are 'within', and at the same time an exogenous force, making them a powerful force. Much of the threat posed by these global, international forces concern the idea of democracy, it is thus important to elaborate on this concept in terms of its effect on the Vietnamese Communist Regime

#### *4.4.1. Regional and global democratic transitions*

It must be explained why Vietnam has not experienced any transition to democracy as other countries in the South-East Asian region have. The Asian economic crisis, beginning in the summer of 1997 lead to a revelation of flaws in the political systems of the region, and caused a reevaluation of these systems (Abuza, 2001: 10). Democracy began to take hold in South-East Asia. The democratization of this region is viewed differently in various strands of literature. Abuza (2001) for example claims that this occurrence demonstrates that there is "little validity to the notion that democracy is anathema to Asia and at odds with "Asian Values" (ibid). While Gainsborough (2010) claims that this experience in Asia would seem to suggest, in terms the future of Vietnam, that "Western- style liberal democracy is one of the least likely conclusions" (Gainsborough, 2010: 12). Democratization processes in the region, in short, have not had a great impact on altering the political system in Vietnam for a number of reasons. Firstly, in all of these cases of transition, the force for political change came from strong independent agents of change, situated outside of the ruling circles (Abuza, 2001: 11). Vietnam, especially during this time lacked these kinds of

independent movements. Secondly, political reform was facilitated by the growth of “an urbanized middle class” (Abuza, 2001). While the middle class has been a force for democratization in many contexts, what is significant, according to Moore (1996) is “not simply the existence of a large middle class but its relationship with the state” (Gainsborough, 2010: 11), thus for this to be an effective change agent it must be vigorous and independent from the state, a condition that has not been present in the Vietnamese context. The fall of Communism should also perhaps have signaled a possibility of democratic transition, but this was not the case in Vietnam. The collapse of Communism between 1989- 1991 had a huge impact on the Vietnamese regime, and brought some pressure to democratize. This pressure came largely from within the party itself leading to democratization being “hotly debated in Hanoi from 1986 to 1989” (Abuza, 2001: 76). However, democracy in the Vietnamese context does not mean political pluralism, thus what began to be advocated at this time was the need for more internal policy discussion within the party (ibid).

#### *4.4.2. Political reform and democratic progress in Vietnam*

The VCP asserts that it is democratic, however democracy in Vietnam is “viewed through a Marxist-Leninist lens” (Abuza, 2001: 21), thus this concept does not have the same connotations as it does in Western discourses. The claim to being democratic is based on the idea that the party represents the interests of the peasants and the proletariat, who make up the majority of the population in Vietnam. The concept has also been framed by the Vietnamese leadership in the “Asian values” rhetoric which advocates four main themes: “(1) The need for an orderly society and societal harmony, in which individual rights never take precedence over the rights of the group; (2) Social duties rather than rights; (3) Group membership and community rather than the individual; and (4) Unquestioned and unchallenged respect for authority” (Abuza, 2001: 22). According to this Asian values perspective, democracy is seen as Western concept that is highly incompatible with Asian culture. Democracy in Vietnam has traditionally been based on a top down concept of democratic centralism, which allows for little more than limited debate within the party.

Despite the lack of transition away from the single-party regime, there has undeniably been some progress towards reform and increased democracy in Vietnam. At the national level, for example, the National Assembly has taken on a stronger role in debating and passing laws. Over the course of a decade, the assembly passed legislation on a number of politically oriented issues including: legislation on gender equity (2006), commune, ward and town level political system reform (2002),

conflict resolution and local mediation (1998), public administration reform and anti-corruption (Wells-Dang, 2010: 107). There have also been significant steps forward at the sub-national level. Following widespread protest and disturbance in the province of Thai Binh in 1997, the party embarked on an attempt to carry out political reform through the establishment of the “grassroots democracy” decree in 1998. The Central Committee of the VCP issued Directive 30/ CT, under the slogan “*the people know, people discuss, people execute, people supervise*”, establishing the policy basis for strengthening the participation of communities at the local level. Decree 29/1998/ND-CP then, aimed to improve the transparency and accountability of local government. Article four of this decree stipulated that information was disseminated to citizens who would then be well-informed enough to participate in discussion, decisions and monitoring of local government. Decree 79, known as the “Grassroots Democracy” decree, “approved the participation of community based organization in development activities at the commune level” (Thayer, 2009:4). However, the Vietnamese concept of democracy needs to be clarified again, as a socialist ideology and political orientation that should not be confused with liberal democracy in the Western sense. Grassroots democracy “is meant more as a ‘social value’...or methodology of governance than as a political system” (Wells-Dang, 2010: 107). However, according to Hoang (2007), through this process of the development of democracy, Vietnam is consciously learning and applying “theories and practices from developed countries and the management experience of Western law-based states where democracy has a centuries-old history, tradition and culture” (cf. Hoang 2007: 4 in Wells- Dang, 2010: 107).

Vietnam appears from an outside perspective ‘on paper’ to have implemented political reform and made progress towards democracy however from the Government’s perspective, these measures are little more than an attempt to preserve their power, address a threat, and prevent future challenges to its monopoly. Nevertheless, despite these efforts to contain the threat of pressure for political reform, these measures, initiated following the unrest in Thai Binh have opened up new political spaces (Wells-Dang, 2010: 107). Another example of an episode of contentious politics which has led to some kind of break-through was the emergence of ‘Bloc 8406’ in April 2006. This marked a major new development, with the coalescence of pro-democracy advocates into an identifiable group, signaling a new cross current in domestic Vietnamese politics. Previously activists had acted individually or in small isolated cliques (Thayer, 2007: 387). This new group, identified as Bloc (*khoi*) 8406, issued political statements asking the government to “respect basic human rights and religious freedom and to permit citizens to freely associate and form their own political parties” (ibid). An appeal was first distributed via the Internet on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, which was followed on 8<sup>th</sup>

April by the issuance of a Manifesto on Freedom and Democracy for Vietnam. The response to this movement was extensive harassment of many signatories by the police, which subsequently provoked a public protest by advocates supporting democracy. This was the beginning of a significant fight-back by supporters of Bloc 8406, and a growth in support for the group, expanding to two thousand by the end of the year (ibid). This is a prime example of the GoV's repressive side.

Returning to progress at the national or state level, significant progress was made around this time during the course of the Tenth Party Congress which met in Hanoi from 18 to 25 April 2006. Four major documents were approved by party delegates which together “set out the main objectives of accelerating economic reforms, developing a market economy with a socialist orientation, speeding up modernization and industrialization, and creating a knowledge-based economy” (Thayer, 2007: 383). The issue of corruption was also responded to, and the call from the public that decisive action had to be taken against it. Thirdly, leadership selection was made more democratic and transparent, with delegates being given responsibility for the nomination of candidates, as opposed to candidates for election being chosen by a central body within the party called the *nomenklatura*. Lastly the Congress increased, slightly, the devolution of power to the provincial level and contributed to the process of generational transition by bringing some changes in leadership (ibid). An important step forward that was made at this point was the release of the revised Congress documents to the general public for comment, which was for the first time facilitated by the internet. The expression of public opinion and the public debate that followed, without overt suppression was an “indication of greater openness and internal democracy” (Thayer, 2007: 382) within the VCP.

#### 4.5. Civil society and Political Space in Vietnam

The concepts of globalization and democracy, taken together, form a framework for the development of my conceptualization of civil society and importantly, the concept of political space which is central to my thesis. Episodes of contentious politics in Vietnam, such as the outbreak of unrest in Thai Binh and the Bloc 8406, illustrate the opening up of new political spaces in Vietnam. The internet in particular also opens new spaces as it is less restricted and its global accessibility adds “a transnational element to domestic political discourse” (Wells-Dang, 2010: 94). These new political spaces and particularly transnational spaces in Vietnam must be explored, due to the many developments that have occurred within them over a short period of time in Vietnam's recent history. According to Thayer (2009) the term civil society has two distinct meanings in the current

Vietnamese context. The first is economic, viewing civil society in terms of local development NGOs delivering services. The second meaning is political and is more relevant to the aim of my thesis. Since the 1990s, the political meaning of civil society has altered significantly in Vietnam, as the term was appropriated by dissidents seeking to promote liberal democracy. Civil society in this political sense refers to “the creation of public space where Vietnam’s one-party state can be challenged by the non-violent political mobilization of ordinary citizens” (Thayer, 2009: 10), or more accurately, “the struggle for democracy against the authoritarian Vietnamese state” (ibid).

Existing approaches are insufficient to explain political space and the dynamic interactions within them in the Vietnamese context. Political space must be understood within the particular local context (Wells-Dang, 2010: 108). I will first discuss the problems inherent in a few sample approaches to defining political space. Firstly, a spatial definition of political space presents a danger of the assumption that geographical or virtual political spaces are associated with a territorial state. However, the actors operating in these ‘spaces’ may not define boundaries according to official territorial guidelines, hence a need for the consideration of human perceptions of “the range of political action and expression that is open to them in a particular time and place” (Wells-Dang, 2010: 206). In this sense, the ‘power cube’ idea, proposed by Gaventa (2007: 206) is useful. According to this construction, space is viewed as closed, invited, claimed or created. Secondly, a democratization- oriented approach to political space is also not fully relevant to the Vietnamese context. Hewison (1999: 224), for example defines political space as “replacing authoritarianism with more representative political regimes” (Wells-Dang, 2010: 94). These kinds of conceptualizations associate political spaces with a movement toward an endpoint of democracy on a defined scale of transition. This implied directionality does not fit with Vietnamese political developments as they have not, particularly recently, followed a linear trajectory (ibid). Political spaces are constantly in flux. A further assumption inherent in this approach is “the deduction that little to no political space can exist in authoritarian systems, since political space is associated with democracy and opposition politics in the first place” (ibid: 96). This does not hold for Vietnam as it is based on a Western-centric concept of democracy which I have argued, is not upheld in Vietnam. According to Wells- Dang (2010), “Political space is not fully limited by the state nor always formally constituted in recognizable institutions” (ibid).

Kerkvliet (2003) suggests that state-society relations in the context of Vietnam should be approached by looking at spaces or ‘arenas’, “in which boundaries, rights, jurisdictions, and power distribution between state and societal agencies are debated, contested and resolved (at least temporarily)” (Kerkvliet in Luong, 2003: 28). These arenas are not confined to particular institutions or specific places, they may also take the form of organizations, groups, policies, problems of controversies. In this, attention is focused not on the state or on society but on the ‘spaces’ in which they interact (ibid: 49). This approach is in line with the ‘strategic- relational’ theoretical approach to studying the state and is a useful approach for the purposes of my thesis as it helps to focus my inquiry. I add to my conceptualization of political space, the dimension of ‘opportunity structures’, defined according to Tarrow (1998: 2) as “consistent dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for or constraints on people undertaking collective action” (Wells- Dang, 2010: 96). This dimension also implies a complex set of interactions between both state and societal actors, and sees political space as created not only as a result of action but through interactions between agents, including strategies and dialogue among them.

## 5. Analysis of context, political spaces and interaction

### 5.1. The effect of deepening globalization on political spaces

In the Vietnamese context, processes of globalization have infiltrated the domestic context primarily via Vietnam’s increased economic integration in the international arena, beginning in 1986 as its economy opened up to the world and being deepened over time, particularly since 2006 when Vietnam was granted accession to the WTO. Vietnam’s exposure to these processes in the economic sector had a knock on effect in the social and political spheres as transnational processes opened up spaces for new actors to have an impact on domestic processes, particularly in the area of development. As Vietnam opened up, INGOs and other international donors rushed into these new ‘invited’ spaces, to assist with the country’s much needed development process. INGOs at this time were engaged with traditional development work, seeking to improve the livelihoods of people and alleviate poverty through income generation and service provision. This kind of action in the new ‘invited spaces’ that emerged during the late 1980s contributed to huge successes in terms of poverty reduction and economic development, however the economic growth which has been “the main factor in poverty reduction over the past two decades” (Thanh Nien News, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2013) is slowing down and the quality and sustainability of growth is a source of concern (World Bank, 2011:

10). The nature of Vietnam's developmental issues has fundamentally changed, a significant proportion of the population have already been excluded from the development process, with over 10 million out of a population of 86 million remaining in chronic poverty (Irish Aid, 2011: 5). This poverty is overwhelmingly concentrated among ethnic minorities living in rural mountainous regions and inequality is widening; "the income gap is growing between urban and rural areas, lowlands and highlands, and between the Kinh majority and ethnic minorities" (World Bank, 2009:45). With these changes in the kind of development required, the solutions are becoming "more complex and need to become more bespoke to the particular needs of vulnerable groups" (Thanh Nien News, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2013).

INGOs in Vietnam appear to be struggling to meet this demand to find new solutions to persistent challenges to achieve further development in Vietnam, this was apparent during my participant observation and interviews. When asked about the progress of development INGO staff responded positively, however they spoke retrospectively about the gains following Đổi Mới and the progress relative to the situation before 1986, "I think it's good, it's good, the poverty rate in Vietnam has reduced strongly, impressively...I need to look back a bit... 30 years" (Interviewee, Ngoc). This automatic referral back to previous development appeared to suggest an unwillingness to discuss the present gains, leading me to believe that progress has been less impressive in more recent times. This view was confirmed during my research, one respondent explained that INGOs' achievements have not been as successful as anticipated which has led to a reconsideration of strategies within the community (Interviewee, Hung). It was suggested by another member of staff that in speaking about developmental progress in Vietnam we should look at two baseline years, 1986 (Đổi Mới) and 2006 (WTO accession) (Interviewee, Thuy). The general view of INGO staff regarding progress made since 2006, when Vietnam became even more exposed and vulnerable to the external forces of globalization, is quite negative, seeing it as "somehow a setback from what we gained before 2006" (ibid). This setback in developmental progress appears to be intimately connected to the increasing pressure of globalization processes on Vietnam, "I think that we are in very changing, we are in a global changing context, and Vietnam has become a middle country...so there are a lot of issues emerge" (Interviewee, Ngoc). I would argue that this event illustrates globalization as having an impact on reconfiguring social and political space in Vietnam, while it initially had the effect of opening up 'invited spaces' for INGOs to intervene, the deepening of these processes has led to an intentional move by the government to close spaces for action by non-governmental actors. The government now "seems to protect itself, and seems to crack down more on the freedom of speech

and the freedom of democracy, it seems that it is protecting itself, and protecting the existence of itself, instead of thinking forward, and looking forward for renovation and democracy” (Interviewee, Thuy).

The government is protecting itself against the threat of the ‘peaceful evolution’ which they perceive as stemming from “the growth of democratization, human rights, and other Western values” (Abuza, 2001: 22), that it is feared will diminish the monopoly of power held by the VCP and the Marxist-Leninist- Ho Chi Minh ideology it upholds (ibid). This threat is seen as a menacing “intrusion by means of culture and ideology” (ibid: 23) with the purpose of destabilizing and replacing the current political and social system in Vietnam. The reality of this threat can be illustrated using Levinsky et al’s (2006) framework for understanding the international or external influence on democratic regime transition. Vietnam has proven to have a relatively low degree of leverage, as it has maintained its monopoly on power and Communist system despite external forces for democratization, and its positioning in Asia makes it slightly less vulnerable to this kind of leverage factor, due to its distance from democratic hubs (the EU and the US). Linkage, however, is high in the Vietnamese context due particularly to the density of Western- led INGOs that are present in Vietnam, and have been an integral part of Vietnam’s developmental path to date. These external forces, are acting domestically in Vietnam, generating a number of sources of antiauthoritarian pressure, by penetrating the media and engaging in advocacy; seeking to shift domestic preferences in a pro- democratic direction and reshaping domestic balances of power between government and non- government actors. These kinds of pressure are frequently operating “below the radar screens of international observers” (Levinsky et al, 2006: 385), hence the need to present the inside perspective. The GoV is aware of this threat and has tailored its institutions to addressing this threat. I argue that the constraints faced by INGOs in their governance work are a combination of barriers that are intentionally constructed by the government in order to protect its own power and legitimacy in the face of the threat of political reform, this can be most clearly seen in the rigidity of the legal framework and the constitution which the VCP are so unwilling to change. And secondly there are inherent barriers that exist due to the GoV’s ideological beliefs which are illustrated by the government’s general lack of understanding and willingness to cooperate with INGOs on governance reform initiatives.

## 5.2. Constraints of the political context and ideological barriers

This ultimate objective of the government to protect its own existence creates significant challenges for INGOs to achieve their developmental goals in this political context. All respondents claimed with great determination that “of course, of course” (Interviewee, Ngoc) the political context in Vietnam presents barriers or constraints to their work, “there are a lot of challenges” (Interviewee, Thuy). I have found that the two most prominent constraints imposed by the political context which were highlighted by INGO staff working on governance issues are (1) related to the legal framework, and (2) related to informal politics, ideas and attitudes of the GoV. The weakness or the legal framework is a constraint for a number of reasons. Firstly, legal frameworks are in many areas non-existent, weak, unsupportive, or limiting due to their specificity and restrictiveness. Secondly where there are sufficient legal guidelines in place, laws and policies are not properly implemented. Finally, in order for civil society to be effective, and for the work of INGOs to have an impact at the national level, the legal frameworks concerning various issues of concern need to be changed so that the impact of their work can be widespread and sustainable. There is thus an explicit and heavy emphasis placed by INGOs working on governance, on this issue and the legal framework is a central target in their strategies (Governance workshop, Hanoi 2012; interviewee, Thuy).

In the case where sufficient legal frameworks do exist however, there are problems with implementation which are due to less formal factors. According to one respondent, “the rule of law in Vietnam is not quite existent, it is not effective, it is not fully complied to, therefore law is there, law is clear, but they do not, the government simply do not follow it” (Interviewee, Thuy). Regarding the cooperation between NGOs and the Government under the decree on associations, a report by CARE and VUSTA noted that “there is sufficient legal basis to establish and implement cooperation between state agencies and non-governmental organizations” (Pham Quang Nam, 2011: 20), however the main reasons behind problems with cooperation is the “non-official barriers”. These non-official barriers are the mindsets, attitudes, beliefs, habits and practices preserved by both sides that are not conducive to cooperation. While it is stated that the attitudes of both sides caused a problem, it was found by this report that the blame was often more on the government’s side; “the limited understanding of non-governmental organizations, along with the despised and guarded attitude is often referred to as the biggest barrier” (ibid). These central issues caused by ‘non official barriers’ can be analysed in relation to the political-institutionalist approach, which views institutions as “formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions” (Amenta et al in

Leicht et al, 2010: 15) in the political context of Vietnam. It also highlights not only the role of ideas, values and ideologies but also the “communication and interaction between structures and actors in politics” (Jönsson et al, 2012: 58), and how these ‘higher order’ structures impact upon “political identities, interests, preferences and strategies of groups” (Amenta et al in Leicht et al, 2010: 28), in this case the group in focus is INGOs.

These kinds of barriers manifest themselves in specific, everyday challenges for INGOs working on governance. One of the most apparent constraints I found during my participant observation was the unwillingness of partners to cooperate and a lack of understanding of the purpose and idea behind the changes INGOs are seeking to make. “I think the biggest difficulty for all the governance work and all the development interventions by INGOs at the moment is how to persuade and convince the local government to buy into our ideas and initiatives and take it forward, and to bring changes and reform in Vietnam” (Interviewee, Thuy). This issue is due both to the intangibility of governance work and the mind-sets and ideological belief systems of the local government officials whom INGOs work with. Governance work is intangible by nature as it is based on bringing about incremental, long term changes in the political structure which will inevitably lead to ‘good governance’ from which development will follow, it is unattractive to partners however, largely due to the lack of financial rewards offered. Thuy noted that it is getting “more and more difficult” to work with the government as they “always think of money”. She explained how potential project partners are interested only in projects that will bring them the greatest financial reward with minimum effort, and explained that the GoV is getting “more wise”, pretending to be interested in “the new way, the new ideas. But then they do nothing”. For this reason, a lot of emphasis is placed by INGOs on the need to convince partners of their ideas and to change attitudes in favour of the promotion of good governance. There is thus a conscious effort being made by INGOs to change the ideals and values of the GoV at the national level who belong to a different ideological framework, the Marxist- Lenninist- Ho Chi Minh ideology. There is a prominent sense of distance between the ideological belief systems of these two actors, with INGO staff speaking about the relationship in terms of ‘them’ and ‘us’.

### 5.3. The idea of democracy- distance between conceptions

To understand the distance between INGOs and the GoV in terms of political ideologies, it is necessary to get an insider perspective as Vietnam, on paper appears to have made democratic

progress and political reform over the course of its recent history, however the reality of the situation looks different. The Vietnamese State claims to be democratic, but this claim is based on a Communist ideology that the party represents the interest of the peasants and the proletariat, who make up the majority of the population in Vietnam (Abuza, 2001: 22), and is articulated in the Asian Values rhetoric, emphasising the need for societal order, respect for authority, and the prioritisation of the community over the individual (ibid). Where Vietnam appears to have made democratic progress, for example with the establishment of the Grassroots Democracy in 1998, which is an important entry point for INGOs, the reality is far from democratic as the decree is used as “a social value or methodology of governance that as a political system” (Wells-Dang, 2010: 107), and a means for the state to sustain the Communist regime. The decree lacks specific guidelines for implementation and is thus not effective as a standalone policy.

While I found that speaking explicitly of ‘democracy’ was almost taboo in everyday conversation, making it difficult to gauge where INGOs stood on their understanding of the concept, my interviews confirmed that INGO staff firstly strongly disagree with the government’s assertion that it is democratic, “Vietnam is not a democratic country, you know that. Only one party is not a democratic country” (Interviewee, Ngoc), and secondly that they understand democracy in line with the Western meaning of the concept. This understanding of democracy can perhaps best be described by the key objectives of Oxfam International’s latest ‘Strategic Change Goal’ on Active Citizenship. They are: (1) supporting people to raise their voice and claim their rights; (2) strengthening the effectiveness and responsiveness of formal institutions; and (3) holding power holders to account (Draft Oxfam International Strategic Plan, 2012). This idea of active citizenship has the concept of power at its core, more specifically empowering local people in poverty. Thuy understands democracy in terms of power “especially the empowerment of the people, especially in the context of Vietnam. The Party has too much power” (Interviewee). This implies that INGOs are seeking to challenge the power of the State, and the ‘non- democratic’ ideology it upholds, by promoting good governance in the Western sense of the concept. Ngoc also described democracy according to this ‘rights based approach’, however her description of how she understood the concept was more explicitly political, “I think democracy is...you...respect the rights of people to express themselves freely, and also at the national level, it should be three powers...so that when you make decisions the other can comment, the other can watch and monitor that process and also democracy is freedom of the mass media. Vietnam is not a democratic country...only one party is not a democratic country” (Interviewee, Ngoc).

#### 5.4. INGO strategies- finding and creating opportunities

This democratically influenced agenda is in line with the greater movement in the Post-Cold War period to bring about democratization in developing countries, and the central role of NGOs in this process as “effective agents for democratic change” (Veltmeyer, 2005:90), their approach however is influenced by the unique political context in Vietnam. I define INGOs in Vietnam’s approach as developmental, according to Carothers’ (2009), in terms of its ultimate aim, emphasising the importance of governance and a well- functioning state as key to the greater processes of development, and supporting political institutions as well as social and economic development. However, INGO approaches are more political in reality, in the Vietnamese context, than they appear to be from an outside perspective, due to the highly sensitive and politicized nature of ideas about political reform in Vietnam. INGOs working on governance are active primarily at grassroots and subnational levels of government as these spaces are more ‘open’ for INGO engagement. The promotion of active citizenship is “a top priority” with the “strengthening of civil society as the ultimate aim” (Governance workshop, Hanoi 2012). This prioritisation of governance work as both a stand- alone and cross- cutting aim for INGOs across the board in Vietnam indicates a move towards a more politically oriented approach. The way in which INGOs operate and take action in Vietnam can be thought of as finding or creating opportunities and overcoming constraints in this specific political context. I define ‘opportunity structures’ as “consistent dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for or constraints on people undertaking collective action” (Wells- Dang, 2010: 96). Two broad INGO governance strategies stand out as key ways in which these actors find and create opportunities within the challenging political context in Vietnam, (1) Partnering with civil society and finding individual champions, and (2) advocacy at national level.

In Vietnam, the most accessible opportunities for affecting change exist at the local level, with local government and civil society. INGOs working on governance have made the support and promotion of civil society a priority and are actively supporting local governments to improve capacity for monitoring, representation and to increase transparency and accountability. Civil society strengthening is an important goal for a number of reasons: firstly, it is weak at present and a stronger civil society is needed to promote good governance; secondly there is an expectation that civil society will take up the role that donors have occupied until now; and thirdly, the development of civil society would support other goals of INGOs by increasing the number of potential partners for INGOs in civil society (Pham, Governance Workshop). Civil society is an important entry point,

“for ...both INGOs and local NGOs” (Interviewee, Thuy), by taking action at grassroots level, INGOs are hiding themselves under “the voice of poor people, the voice of ethnic minorities, and the voice of marginalized groups like women or children” (ibid). This idea of partnering with local NGOs in civil society is an important strategy for INGOs in terms of their own legitimacy in the eyes of the government in particular. When asked about the constraints faced in her work, Ngoc pointed to this legitimacy issue, and to this partnering strategy as the solution. ‘Champions’ are sought out for INGOs to partner with, they then “get them to buy into our ideas and bring changes forward” (ibid). The change that they want to bring forward, according to Thuy is “something bigger and something louder” than the issues they hide behind at grassroots, they are seeking to change the governance structure, the legal framework and policy.

This kind of strategy says a lot about the relationship between INGOs and the GoV. INGOs are unable, as a result of a repressive, single party political context, to speak up on particular issues, they thus must disguise themselves and their agendas beneath the issues in which the government has a vested interest, that is poor and marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, women and children. In order for INGOs to be able to get their ideas for change across in this way it is vitally important to find champions who will drive the ideas forward, or upwards to the national level. These individuals are crucial according to Ngoc, “yes, yes, yes, it’s not about the policy or the strategies to work with INGOs to have a better approach, but it depends very much on the individual, the government officer” (Interviewee). Ironically, considering the focus on bringing about changes in official legal and policy frameworks, change in fact happens through informal politics, via individuals in ‘the system’ whose ideas and attitudes are in line with INGOs rather than the GoV. “At this moment, at this stage” (ibid), informal politics is more influential than policy.

The second strategy concerns national level advocacy. INGOs are increasingly using the media in their strategies, and emphasise the need to partner with the media, engaging it from the beginning of their work, largely for advocacy purposes, and raising awareness through the dissemination of information on their work, in doing this INGOs are taking advantage of the expansion of media, or the globalization of communication which is another way in which globalization has reconfigured the political spaces in Vietnam in which development can occur. The media, although the state has been largely in control of all traditional forms, has invited citizens to engage in politics, for example by screening party meetings on the television, thus opening up a historically ‘closed space’ (Governance Workshop, Hanoi, 2012). More significantly, as it is less restricted and globally

accessible (Wells- Dang, 2010), is the expansion of the internet, which adds a “transnational element to domestic political discourse” (ibid). Newer forms of media, and particularly social media have created a new channel for citizens, to ‘raise their voice’ (Vy, Governance Workshop, Hanoi 2012). This new channel was perhaps most notably, for the purposes of this analysis, used by ‘Bloc 8406’, who generated a lot of interest and political controversy in Vietnam with its democracy advocating movement in April 2006. Apart from this the media is also used for communication among different actors in development, and importantly to change attitudes and raise awareness. The government’s heavy regulation and censorship of the media creates challenges for INGOs, as they frequently change the levels of censorship and clamp down on channels such as blogging. There are mixed perceptions regarding the level of freedom of the media, relative to before, there is “more freedom now” (Pham, Governance Workshop, Hanoi 2012), however INGOs must be careful and ‘diplomatic’ in their advocacy work, “of course the political regime or context does not allow us to show...who we are and what we want, so we have to do advocacy, but in the way that is diplomatic, not like in Western countries, you go outside, you fighting in public, you do campaign, not that...they have conservative opinions about what we want to achieve so we try to go in a more diplomatic way” (Interviewee, Ngoc).

Ngoc explained that advocacy is “a very difficult job, very difficult work because the outcome is a change in policy” (ibid). This illustrates once again the reluctance of the government to change the legal framework with which it appears to be protecting the stability of its regime and ideology. In order for INGOs to create space in this area and achieve any success in advocacy work they must be flexible. By this Ngoc means that “you should see the context, the opinion of different stakeholders...it’s like something you have to feel and act...based on the environment around you” (ibid). This point supports the institutionalist theoretical perspective I adopted, emphasising the causal role of the state and the political context as impacting upon the strategies of actors. In order for INGOs to have any success in achieving their goals they must be well informed on “what is going on and what the agendas of government are in terms of policy” (ibid), so that they can figure out the best way to approach their advocacy work so as not to trigger a repressive response from the government. To ensure that they are informed networking is another key complementary strategy. The importance of networking in terms of strategy was evident, during the entire course of my research I noted an emphasis on networking with other organizations, media, government agencies and civil society generally. INGOs are aware of what kind of advocacy is accepted or not in the

political context of Vietnam, work on specific policies related to agriculture, natural resource governance or land for example, which are defined and less obviously political issues, in which the government have an interest is generally acceptable, however at present any advocacy on constitutional issues or human rights, which are highly political is not tolerated. This kind of advocacy would be associated with the ‘peaceful evolution’.

Advocacy is a crucial strategy as it is a means to reach the national level and affect change there. At present INGOs are confined by the government’s various self- protection mechanisms to subnational levels at the grassroots however I found that there is a great drive within the INGO community at present to scale up their impact, because this is what is needed to ensure sustainability, which is important now given that Vietnam is in a period of transition, in which international donors are beginning to scale down and exit. I got the sense that there is a rush on to improve strategies, and that strategies were leaning towards being more political and perhaps even more politically aggressive. “I think INGOs recognize that if we keep working with the grassroots level, try to build the capacity and try to provide service delivery that will not lead to the great impact. But if we work with the government, try to do policy advocacy that will change, the impact will be much larger” (Interviewee, Ngoc). It is evident from the analysis of various INGO strategic documents, reports and plans that strategies have changed, and that strategies are more openly political, yet these politically charged ideas are being hidden from the government’s view and almost denied. ”Before, I don’t think INGOs try to influence the political sphere in Vietnam, but now, if we try to do policy influence, we try to introduce, NOT, we do not say democracy, but the participation of people in decision making process, is very important criteria of democracy, people can express themselves, people have access to information, people can participate in the decision making process, so I think that INGOs try to influence that, try to introduce democracy in Vietnam, and raising the awareness of people, different groups of people about their rights, that is one of the impacts of INGOs, NOT political system, but yeah somehow” (Interviewee, Ngoc).

## 5.5. INGO strategies and the responsive- repressive state

The state in Vietnam has been characterized by Kerkvliet as “responsive-repressive”, this kind of characterization usefully describes the Party’s approach to any political threat to its legitimacy, and can specifically be applied to its reaction to INGO governance work. The VCP’s responsiveness to INGOs is evident, “it seems that the government tend to listen more to INGOs because they think

that there is something international, something that they can learn from other countries” (Interviewee, Thuy). The Vietnamese regime is too small and vulnerable to disregard the international community, and it is acutely aware of its need to pay attention to global transnational actors, in order preserve its legitimacy and stability, however it entertains these international forces with caution. The government has become increasingly cautious, particularly towards INGOs in recent years, beginning perhaps in 2006 when Vietnam was granted accession to the WTO which further integrated the state into the international arena, however, with experience the GoV have also become wise to and understand the approach of INGOs. “They tend to look at us with caution when we intervene more in specific laws and regulations” (Interviewee, Thuy), previously INGOs were less involved in this kind of intervention, focusing more on traditional service provision and promoting the international image of Vietnam. There is however, on the contrary a lack of understanding between these two actors, “they feel insecure in working with INGOs because they feel that we have a political will...trying to influence the political context” (Interviewee, Ngoc). This may not be so much a lack of understanding, as INGOs do appear to me to have a strong political will, however there is an explicit lack of trust. According to CARE and VUSTA’s report, the state underestimated NGOs, regarding them as non- formal, small scale and amateur, the bigger NGOs however, which in the Vietnamese case are INGOs are more respected. Guarded perceptions towards NGOs are highly evident however, “they are not sure if the cooperation with NGOs and receiving foreign funding are in the right tract, whether this is ‘peaceful evolution or not. There is untrust (in non-governmental organizations) in terms of political ideology” (former Chairman of Democracy and Law Commission, VFF Central Committee, in Pham Quang Nam, 2011: 19). Referring to her specific project, Thuy notes that the government is cautious because “they think that is we do it and if we expose information to the local people, they will know, and they will do something that they cannot control” (Interviewee, Thuy).

INGOs are struggling to overcome this constraint imposed by the government’s fear of the ‘peaceful evolution’, and of losing control of power. There is a general feeling among INGO staff that governance work is “too ambitious” (Governance Workshop, Hanoi 2012), as all governance projects are struggling to achieve their goals within the given time frame, due largely to a lack of willingness, commitment and understanding from the partner (government’s) side. There is also an attitude towards government that they are compromising the governance work and the approach of INGOs in this field. Proposed plans and changes are only rolled out when it is “tangible, specific, they can see the real impact and when it is not political” (Interviewee, Thuy). It is at this point that

the government stops being responsive and begins to be repressive, as Kerkvliet (2010) claimed “it is better not to politicise struggles about people’s livelihood and welfare...otherwise authorities are apt to be repressive rather than responsive” (2010: 52). This ‘politicisation’ appears to happen at the frontier of the legal framework, when institutionalising the work of INGOs becomes a reality for the government. INGOs are increasingly focusing on the use of media for advocacy at the national level in order to influence the central government to ‘buy into’ their ideas, however they are left outside the system when it comes to institutionalisation. “In the first few years, everybody was excited, but now, when it comes to the time of institutionalizing, the time of building the monitoring for the master plan, everybody is hesitant, so you can see that the hardest part is that they will leave us outside the system” (Interviewee, Thuy).

In this period of transition, when there is an apparent rush on within the INGO community to implement change and development before their eventual exit, and with more politically charged strategies, the GoV is being put under increasing pressure to institutionalise the governance progress achieved at grassroots at the national level. While the state has shown great strength in its resistance to political reform and external pressure to date, this current phase of development in Vietnam may mark a crucial turning point and a weakening of the state’s resistance. According to my theoretical framework, the acceleration of globalization processes manifested in the spread of ideas and values and increased linkage to the Western world through the expansion of ‘transnational political spaces’ should affect domestic state- society relations in the Vietnamese political context by generating increased soft- power for INGOs to encourage political reform. According to Levitsky’s (2006) framework, democratizing pressure in Vietnam should be “diffuse, indirect and slow moving but it may nevertheless be substantial” (2006: 387). Whether or not democracy is a likely ultimate outcome, I find that this assessment accurately reflects the kind of impact that INGOs are having on the political context in Vietnam, they are making slow but significant progress in redefining the political context.

## 6. Conclusion: The threat of political reform in a time of transition

We cannot focus on the state alone in order to determine what will happen in terms of development in Vietnam, the crucial thing in this context is the pressures and forces around the state, this is where the change will happen, in that space around the state. In this study I have explained how INGOs are increasingly active in the political sphere, and have tailored their strategies towards being more

politically oriented, however the more politically charged ideas behind INGOs engagement in governance reform work is largely hidden from the government. This is because of a keen awareness on the part of INGOs of the GoV's long-standing mistrust of the international community and their democratic ideas which they fear is a means of destabilizing their Communist regime.

While INGOs are still highly limited by the political context in terms of the kind of action they can take, there has been an expansion of transnational political spaces for action. These spaces are focused in and around the state, which is an expansive space due to the pervasive nature of the state in Vietnam. This space has been reconfigured as a result of Vietnam's deeper integration into the global system and the increase in transnational actors in the domestic context that followed from this. The walls that existed around this space of the state have in a sense been eroded from the grassroots by INGOs, and now they are seeking to chip away further at the protective structure that the GoV have erected around themselves at the national level in Hanoi, in order to keep the threat of the 'peaceful evolution' out, or more accurately to prevent a loss of legitimacy and power. I believe however that this structure is weakening.

I have characterized the state in Vietnam as responsive-repressive as I feel that this best illustrates the way in which the state has acted throughout its history. At present it seems that the GoV is increasingly repressive and cautious towards INGOs, the closer they get to infiltrating the protective structure that they have erected around the central level of government. The state is under increasing pressure to ensure the maintenance of legitimacy as it is becoming more difficult to balance its responsiveness and repression due to the further embeddedness of international global processes in its society. It is in one sense more crucial than ever for the GoV to respond to international and external forces as they are a part of the system and Vietnam is "too small and vulnerable, too dependent on foreign development assistance and direct investment to shut out the international community" (Abuza, 2001: 231), however as these forces become more intensified there is a greater need than ever to repress them in order to protect itself against the threat of the 'peaceful evolution'.

Despite the many challenges presented by the political context in Vietnam, INGOs are persisting in their pursuit of governance reform, improving transparency, monitoring, representation and participation in the Vietnamese political system. The effect of this promotion of good governance is the proposition of a challenge to the power of the state. Globalization, as it has increased communication technologies and the ability to spread ideas at a rapid pace has greatly enhanced NGO's soft power; "Because they are able to attract followers, governments have to take NGOs into

account as both allies and adversaries” (Nye, 2004: 90). This kind of soft power is at work in the interaction between INGOs and the GoV. Operating “below the radar screens of international observers” (Levinsky et al, 2006: 385) it is an interactive process of power creation and dispersion among INGOs and governmental actors that is indicative of political development (Fisher, 1998: 135). INGOs are using this power by working from within, with government officials, or ‘champions’ on the inside who will help to spread their ideas further into and up through the system to the national level, combined with national level advocacy which involves a more explicit strategy to spread their ideas.

INGOs are redefining the political context in Vietnam, working in cooperation with government, out of necessity, their approaches are affected and compromised by the political context, they are however having a significant impact albeit slow. The pressure on INGOs at this time, during the transition period, is to institutionalize the changes they have made at grassroots and would like to see in the future, however their strategies to impact at the political are highly problematic, issues become highly politicized at the frontier of the national level where the legal framework and the constitution lies. The key thing that has been lacking in Vietnam’s development trajectory is political reform. The avoidance and protection against political reform is the one thing that is keeping the Communist Party in power according to my analysis, and INGOs are the most obvious actor that can change this. Of all of the external forces and threats the GoV faces, they pay most attention to INGOs “it seems that the government tends to listen more to INGOs because they think that there is something international, something that they can learn from other countries” (Interviewee, Thuy). What makes INGOs a key threat however is their presence at the domestic level, at the grassroots where the government has a vested interest. Pressure for political reform, and indeed change must come from within (Abuza, 2001; Wells- Dang, 2010).

## Executive Summary

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Vietnam's transition to a market economy, beginning in 1986 coincided with its exposure to the rest of the world and signaled a green light for international actors to enter the domestic context and assist Vietnam with its much needed development. INGOs flooded the scene seeking to bring about economic development, alleviate poverty and provide services for the people of Vietnam. Since this point INGOs have been intimately engaged in the development process, and have assisted in bringing about Vietnam's remarkable growth and development in an impressively short period of time. The pace and scope of development has begun to slow however in recent years. The unsustainability of Vietnam's development process is now evident, as the relative gains from its economic growth are proving to be less significant and chronic poverty persists among the country's ethnic minority populations, added to this are new challenges such as rising inequality. The solutions to Vietnam's developmental issues have become more complex, which has led INGOs to recognize the need for a change in strategy. More recent strategies are oriented around the promotion of 'good governance' with a heavier emphasis than previously on civil and political rights. INGOs are thus now more engaged in the socio- political rather than exclusively in the socio-economic sphere. In this sphere INGOs are exposed to the political system and interact more closely with the GoV which creates an added challenge as a result of the distance between the ideologies upheld by both actors, and particularly the GoV's lack of tolerance for any threat to their power and stability. The greatest threat to the regime, from the VCP's perspective is 'the peaceful evolution', which they associate INGOs as being a part of. For this reason the GoV approaches its cooperation with INGOs with caution and erects barriers to prevent these actors from engaging in issues that are 'too political'. 'Too political' in the Vietnamese context means any work related to seeking a change in the legal framework at national level, and particularly related to human rights or democracy. By acting repressively towards these kinds of initiatives the VCP is protecting its own existence, however I have argued that INGOs, by pursuing political reform in the name of 'good governance', are posing a significant threat to the political status quo, and that further development is likely to happen in light of a weakening of the GoV's self- protection mechanisms.

In this thesis I have explored the case of new political spaces in Vietnam and the complex interactions between the GoV and INGOs in these spaces, asking how INGO strategies are influenced by the unique political context in Vietnam. I investigated this phenomenon using a theoretical framework that highlights the interaction of globalization processes, institutions and state

society relations in non- democratic contexts. The key findings of this study suggest that INGOs are struggling to meet the demand to find new solutions to the increasingly complex problems for development in Vietnam, and that they are under considerable pressure to do so quickly, as Vietnam's newly acquired status of 'low-middle income country' means that the international donor community are considering their exit strategies. A second key finding is that Vietnam's continuously deepening integration into the global political economy is having a profound effect on its development trajectory. Not only is Vietnam now more exposed to external shocks, but the increasing infiltration of globalization processes appears to be connected to a setback in terms of the developmental progress being made by INGOs as the GoV is becoming increasingly cautious towards these actors. More detailed findings illustrate the strategies of INGOs for dealing with the unique political context and how ideas and ideologies shape the interaction between INGOs and the GoV.

A key lesson to be learned from this study is that there is a need to further investigate processes of development in a systemic way, looking at the interaction between both structures and actors, and between external and internal forces in any given context. In order to do this the insider perspective must be explored, which can shed light on the 'informal politics' and 'unwritten codes' that have been shown by this case study to be important influences in terms of how development happens in real life contexts.

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## Appendix 1

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Note: Specific details omitted for confidentiality purposes

### **Semi- structured interviews:**

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Semi- structured interview, “Hung”, INGO “A”, Hanoi, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2013

Semi- structured interview, “Thuy”, INGO “A”, Skype, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2013

Semi- structured interview, “Ngoc”, INGO “B”, Copenhagen, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2013

### **Key participant observation activities:**

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Political Economy Media Analysis, 10<sup>th</sup>- 15<sup>th</sup> August 2012, Hanoi

Informal interview, “Nguyen”, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012, Hanoi [Topic: development and capacity building of representative bodies/ INGO project development and progress]

Analysis of ‘DANIDA Good Governance and Public Administration Reform Programme, Phase II: 2012-15’, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2012, Hanoi

Briefing, “Ethnographic Approaches to the promotion of Adult Basic Education” by Colm Ross, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2012, Hanoi

Informal interview, “Thi”, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2012, Hanoi [Topic: Development of governance programme- Capacity building of Fatherland Front and Community Based Organizations]

Activity development, Community Based Organization mapping, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2012, Hanoi

Training, Results- Based Management, 24<sup>th</sup> September 2012, Hanoi

Report launch, “*GROW: Growing a better future. Expanding rights, voices and choices for small-scale farmers in Vietnam*”, OXFAM, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012, Hanoi [open panel with high- level officials, UN officials, academics, farmers and INGO experts]

Briefing and case study development, on Citizen Report Card tool implementation, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2012, Hanoi

Briefing on current research [State- society relations and everyday politics], Benedict Kerkvliet, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2012, Hanoi

Briefing on monitoring and evaluation, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2012, Hanoi

Activity implementation progress report development, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012, Hanoi

INGO Governance Strategy Development Workshop, 6<sup>th</sup>- 7<sup>th</sup> December 2012, Hanoi

Donor 'Progress Report' development, December 2012- January 2013, Hanoi

District Fatherland Front Leadership and Facilitation Training, 2<sup>nd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> January 2013, Si Ma Cai, Lao Cai

Provincial Project Management Unit Monitoring and Evaluation Training, 4<sup>th</sup>- 5<sup>th</sup> January 2013, Lao Cai City

## Appendix 2

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### Semi- Structured Qualitative Interview Guide

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*Date:* .....

*Respondent:* .....

#### Introduction

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- Acquire permission to record

The objective of my research is to explain the interactions between the Government of Vietnam and International NGOs, and how these interactions can lead to future progress in terms of socio-political development in Vietnam.

I want to understand how INGOs deal with the specific political context in Vietnam, particularly the barriers and constraints presented by this context, in order to understand how INGOs approach their work, and what ideas and values inform and the influence decision- making processes of INGOs.

*Briefing on use of interview data and the rights of the respondent:*

- The material obtained from the interview will form part of my Master thesis. A hard copy of my thesis will be handed into the Department of Political Science at Lund University on 21<sup>st</sup> May, and constitute the basis for examination of my Master Program in Development Studies. In accordance with Lund University guidelines, a digital copy of the study will also be uploaded to an open access database. Before the submission of my thesis you will have full access to a transcript of the interview and to a draft of the analysis of the data I collected.

- In order to protect your confidentiality, only I will have access to the recorded interview, and your personal identity will be kept anonymous.
  - You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time before the submission of my thesis.
  - You have the right to end the interview at any time, or to choose not to answer a question.
- Acquire informed consent
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## Interview Questions

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### **Section 1: *Development and Democracy***

- (i) What, if any, are your thoughts on the progress of development in Vietnam?
- (ii) What is your understanding of the concept of democracy?
- (iii) What role, if any, do you consider democracy or democratic institutions will have in Vietnam's future development?

### **Section 2: *The Role of INGOs***

- (i) What role do INGOs play in the development process?
- (ii) How, if at all, do you feel that INGOs' international character affects their approach to development?

### **Section 3: *INGO engagement***

- (i) What do you understand to be the primary goals and objectives of [INGO] in Vietnam?
- (ii) How do you feel these goals and objectives compare to those of other INGOs in Vietnam?
- (iii) Can you describe the kind of governance work that [INGO] is engaged in, in Vietnam?
- (iv) Can you describe the impact you perceive governance work is having on development in Vietnam?

### **Section 4: *Barriers and Constraints***

- (i) What are the most significant barriers or constraints that you face in your work?
- (ii) What kinds of constraints, if any, does the political context in Vietnam pose to your work?
- (iii) How do you aim to deal with or overcome these constraints?

### **Section 5: *INGO- Government of Vietnam (GoV) interaction***

- (i) In what ways does [INGO] interact with the government in its work?
  - (ii) On what issues (policies etc.) do INGOs and the GoV interact most?
  - (iii) What is your understanding of the power INGOs have in these interactions?
  - (iv) How do you perceive the government's response or reaction to your ideas and your work?
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## Conclusion:

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

- You can send me any further comments you may have via email or phone
- Thank you for your participation