

# Critically Rethinking Public Spaces from Asia: Lessons from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Marie Gibert-Flutre**

Department of East Asia Studies,  
University of Paris

In most of the Western academic literature, public spaces conjures up image of large, open areas with a strong positive a priori related to the democratic process and open debates supposedly historically associated with the Ancient Greek agora. But this dominant framework fails to capture the diversity of practises that are constitutive of ordinary public spaces in cities in Asia. Proposing more open-ended, processual, and performative conceptions of publicness, I show how public space research benefit theoretically from the Southern Turn. My objectives are theoretical and methodological: unpack the notion of public space to make it relevant beyond its historical location and then, develop various methods of spatial ethnography at a micro urban level to overcome habitual representations and open up a promising, comparative research agenda.

I test this conception by displacing it to ordinary streets and alleyways of Ho Chi Minh City, where I conducted extensive fieldwork over the past 12 years, resulting in the recent publication of two books. I transformed rich, variegated local data into an array of experimental maps, visuals and timelines that show how intended and unintended effects, locally and globally-driven processes, interact and produce original public places where local users benefit from unequal conditions of negotiations. This research perspective unveils in particular new insights about the importance and the political potential of ordinary public spaces.

**| DATE |** Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021

**| TIME |** 5.00pm to 6.30pm via Zoom (Singapore Time)

Please Register via: <https://tinyurl.com/sea-MarieGibertFlutre>



**Marie Gibert-Flutre** is Associate Professor of Geography in the Department of East Asia Studies (LCAO) at the University of Paris. Her research deals with the dynamics of public and private spaces in the production and appropriation of urban space in Asia. By critically exploring 'global Asia' from ordinary public spaces and neighborhoods, she turns in particular the traditional approach to 'global cities' upside down and contributes to a renewed conception of metropolization as a highly situated process, where forces at play locally are both intertwined and labile. As Principal Investigator, she manages the Ho Chi Minh City case study of the International SEANNET (Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network) research programme (IIAS, funded by the Henry Luce Foundation). She has recently published *Les envers de la métropolisation: Les ruelles de Ho Chi Minh Ville (Vietnam)* (CNRS Edition, 2019) and *Asian Alleyways: An Urban Vernacular in Times of Globalization* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), co-edited with Heide Imai.