

“Everyday conviviality in emerging multicultural neighborhood: insights from postsocialist city”

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Abstract: This paper aims to contribute to the discussion of everyday multiculturalism focusing on Praha-Libuš, a neighborhood in Czech capital with rapidly increasing presence of Vietnamese happening in the context of former socialist city with ethnically homogenous population and low levels of socio-spatial differentiation. We discuss the character of arising multiculture through the lenses of majority focusing on tensions and conflicts as well as conviviality in everyday life. Furthermore, we attempted to identify issues and places around which tensions emerge and where the everyday conviviality is negotiated, and distinguish differing attitudes among demographic and socio-economic groups of local population.

Key words: multiculture, everyday, conflict, conviviality, neighborhood, postsocialist city

Introduction: new urban realities

Most of the current literature on the experience of everyday multiculture is focused on urban settings with history of foreign migration. Despite the growing literature on “new contact zones” and “new spaces of multiculturalism” (Robinson et al. 2006, Kesten et al. 2011, Neal et al. 2013), less is known about the ethnically diversifying metropolitan areas in new immigration countries. This paper aims to contribute to the discussion of everyday multiculturalism focusing on Praha-Libuš, a neighborhood in Czech capital, which has been characterized by rapidly increasing, though still relatively low (in comparison with west European and North American cities), presence of Vietnamese.

Mere two decades ago, Prague was ethnically homogenous city with a low level of socio-spatial differences (Musil 2005; Sýkora 2009a, 2009b). Post World War II generations have had no experience in cohabitation with numerous populations of other ethnicities, except Roma (Drbohlav et al. 2010, Srb 2004). Ethnic composition of Czech cities began dramatically change since the second half of the 1990s and especially after 2000 in relation with economic migration to cover job demands of booming Czech industries (Čermák and Jánská 2011). Despite the dynamics of immigration was halted

by economic crisis, at present (2015) 5% of population in formerly ethnically homogeneous Czechia is foreign born. In many cities, the foreigners' population reaches levels around 10%. In Prague, foreign population exceeds 160 thousands, accounting for 14% of total population.

The paper builds on insights from a research in which we investigated the experience of majority and Vietnamese immigrants in Praha-Libuš borough, and focused on tensions and conflicts as well as conviviality in everyday life. Furthermore, we intended to move behind general attitudes of majority, that are often taken from popular public discourses, through interviews in which we aimed to identify concrete issues and places of embodied experience around which tensions emerge and where the everyday conviviality is negotiated. We also attempted to distinguish difference in attitudes and experience of various demographic and socio-economic groups of local population. In this paper, we discuss the character of arising local multiculture through the lenses of majority.

Neighbourhood that will never ever be what it was like before

Praha-Libuš is a borough located on the southern edge of Prague. At present day context of Prague, the locality is a unique emerging ethnically heterogeneous neighborhood with relatively high proportion of Vietnamese. Although the overall share of foreign born in Praha-Libuš was only 17% in 2011, which is slightly higher than the overall proportion of foreigners in Prague, more than half of them were Vietnamese migrants. Vietnamese account for 9% of inhabitants, forming the highest concentration in Prague, where the average proportion is 0.9%.

This originally rural area was urbanized only in 1970-80s with the construction of meat-factory and new housing estate of prefabricated high-rises. During the 1990s transformations, housing construction halted and production collapsed. Industrial premises were in 1999 sold to Vietnamese owned company Saparia. Saparia established Sapa bazaar, named after a town in northern Vietnam, which at the beginning served as

a wholesale and logistic center for import of foreign goods and its distribution within Czechia and neighboring Central European countries. It used to be closed area serving only for business purposes but gradually has become a multifunctional area open to general public. The present day Trade and Cultural Centre Sapa is, beside wholesale, also composed of retail shops and services such as restaurants, attorneys, financial services, education facilities or consultancy services that are predominantly owned by Vietnamese migrants. Furthermore, it also plays the role of cultural center where Vietnamese host social events and where they can attend Buddhist temple. The place is visited by around 3000 people every weekday increasing up to 7000 during weekends.

The development of Sapa stimulated immigration of Vietnamese to the neighborhood. Praha-Libuš has become a popular residential place for Vietnamese entrepreneurs and employees working in Sapa who rent and buy flats and newly constructed homes in its vicinity. With the increasing presence of Vietnamese entrepreneurs and employees in Sapa and residents in the surrounding residential zones, the area has began rapidly change its character. As one of the citizens said in an interview: “this neighborhood will never ever be what it was like before”. However, the area development has not been driven only by Vietnamese and involved substantial new housing construction aimed at various customers and segments of housing market.

In the first response to changing ethnic composition, representations in national media and political discourses highlighted problems and negative reactions of some local inhabitants reporting about emerging inter-ethnic tensions. Sapa market was portrayed as closed world of criminal and illegal activities, place with sanitation problems and a major security threat to the country. The neighborhood was discussed in media as endangered by segregation, with worries that it may become a ghetto. This situation has been changing since 2010, when newly elected local political representation, NGOs and representatives of Vietnamese community, with a support from national and city governments, attempted to mediate interethnic interaction through an emphasis on intercultural tolerance, dialog and mutual learning.

The neighborhood exhibits important features (with some of them distinguishing it from

ethnic places in cities with a long history of migration), which shape the character of social interaction, inclusion and attachment to the locality. First, the proportion of foreign born (17%) and the level of ethnic heterogeneity is still relatively low. Localities usually understood in western cities as ethnic enclaves, ethnic concentrations or ethnic neighborhoods have at least 30% of ethnic populations (Peach 1996, Alba, Logan, Crowder 1997; Johnston, Poulsen, Forrest 2003). However, the actual presence of Vietnamese in the neighborhood is higher than the figures for residential concentration as the Sapa bazaar attracts Vietnamese and other customers not only from Prague, but especially from the whole Czechia and even abroad and hence their daily presence is far higher than would be suggested by figures of residents living in the area.

Second, while in western context migrants are more likely to live in deprived neighborhoods with lower social status than majority population (Dorsett 1998, McGarrigle 2010, Jivraj and Khan 2013), Praha-Libuš represents an area with socially mixed population and average social and demographic composition of population. Residential stock is quite diverse, ranging from original village houses to new villa, and from flats in high rise prefabs from socialist years to apartments in newly build condominium towers. This social heterogeneity does not concern only Czech majority, but also immigrant population including Vietnamese.

Third, Vietnamese themselves are heterogeneous in terms of their socio-economic status, immigrant cohort, the length of residence in country, region of origin (Kusnirakova and Plackova 2013). There are vulnerable groups of Vietnamese, usually recent migrants, who are at risk of social exclusion facing multiplicity of disadvantage. At the same time, there are also owners of prosperous businesses living in exclusive housing. An important difference in term of local interactions concerns the second generation of Vietnamese that accomplished education in local schools, well masters Czech and other European languages, in comparison with the generation of their parents, who usually learned only very basic skills for necessary communication in the local context.

Fourth, while there are clusters of housing within the neighborhood with higher

concentration of Vietnamese and other immigrants, our previous research (Sýkora et al. 2015) has shown that residential segregation has not developed on a micro-scale within the area. The particular spatial concentrations are outcomes of distributional effects of availability and affordability of various type of housing for housing demand of various socio-economic groups. The existing present day spatial pattern of ethnic mixing exposes Vietnamese and majority residents to daily interaction.

Finally, as we already mentioned, Czech population has no experience with living in multiethnic places. However, in Praha-Libuš, even the ethnically dominant Czech population is by its majority immigrant population that arrived to the neighborhood only during the 1980s, and then with new housing boom after 2000s. Original rural population thus faced several waves of migrants, while rural to urban migrants, who established their homes here in 1980s faced new round of immigrants with high proportion of foreigners arriving in 2000s.

Conviviality in emerging multicultural neighborhood: approach, concepts and method

In the first round of our research within the neighborhood, we focused on the issue of residential segregation of immigrants and also questioned whether the Sapa area is developing into an enclave of a parallel Vietnamese world to majority society, as was suggested by popular and media discourses. As we disproved both these developments towards “parallel societies” and “segregated worlds” (Sýkora et al. 2012, 2013), we refocused on practices of local everyday interaction between majority population and Vietnamese immigrants. Inspired by the studies of everyday multiculture (Back 1996, Gilroy 2004, Amin 2002, Sandercock 2006, Keith 2005, Neal et al. 2013, Kesten et al. 2011, Wise and Velayutham 2009, Clayton 2009) we focused on the neighborhood as an arena where ethnic and social difference is negotiated, and where occasions for conviviality emerge from the everyday interaction and participation in space and resources.

The everyday encounters in multiculture neighborhoods are usually appreciated for being fluid, inter-ethnic, boundary-crossing and mixing, thus producing cosmopolitan skills and abilities leading to new ways of belonging and togetherness (Lamont a Aksartova 2002, Nava 2002, Wood and Landry 2007). The so called convivial encounters (Gilroy 2004, Neal et al. 2013) at neighborhood and city levels are believed to have socially and culturally transformative effects on ethnic differences as they emerge out of intersecting socio-spatial influences that are more complex and nuanced than abstract and fixed versions of national belonging (Clayton 2009). The evidence shows that especially in the super-diverse contexts the ethnic difference may become a commonplace (Wessendorf 2010).

However, Valentine (2008) critique of the romanticization of intercultural contacts and the related evidence shows excluding and marginalizing tendencies in everyday multiculture (Clayton 2009, Matejskova and Leitner 2011, Gruner 2010, Valentine 2010, Valentine 2014). The everyday encounters may strengthen ethnic boundaries, delineating previous solidarities and hierarchies and encouraging ethnic fragmentation. Inspired by the geographies of race and racism (Dwyer and Bressey 2008), work on prejudice and stereotypes (Valentine 2010, Valentine 2014) as well as practical orientalism and othering (Haldrup et al. 2006, Simonsen 2008), we were also interested how ethnic boundaries are produced and reproduced in the everyday life of the locality through discourses of othering which shape embodied contact with difference, and strengthen conflicts, tensions and antagonisms.

In research conducted during 2013-2014, we investigated the experience of both majority and Vietnamese (we discuss both groups elsewhere, Sýkora et al. 2015). While the public discourse on immigrants is shaped by the majority, very little is known about the perceptions, attitudes and experience of immigrants. However, in this paper we discuss how encountering ethnic difference takes place in the practices and narratives of majority population. The experience of majority has been until recently also neglected in research of everyday multiculture (Valentine 2010).

The available information about the experience of majority reflected quantitative

surveys of their attitudes and selective representations in media. Hence we aimed to map not only general views on Vietnamese newcomers, perceived changes due to immigration, and interpretations of encounters with difference, but intended to move behind stereotypes presented in popular discourse and reveal actual embodies practices of everyday economic, social and cultural interaction. As Neal et al. (2013:16) pointed: “people mix with, encounter one another and manage cultural difference and ethnic identity in more contingent, pragmatic and ‘at ease’ or convivial ways than is popularly imagined”. While acknowledging that the “coproduction between the embodied city and the narrative city, between available discourses in the public debate and embodied experience and narratives evolved in everyday urban practices” (Simonsen 2008:156), we aimed at distinguishing mutual relations between embodied encounters and more abstract level of inter-ethnic relations developed through popular discourses.

As the public debate in Czechia as well as Praha-Libuš has been dominated mostly by conflicts and problems, we aimed at both tensions/conflicts as well as conviviality in everyday life. A growing number of sources describe everyday living in ethnically diverse localities as being rather ambivalent, neither conflicting nor welcoming (Karner and Parker 2011, Kesten et al. 2011, Matejskova and Leitner 2011, Clayton 2009, Noble 2009). Conflicts and conviviality has become constituents of everyday multiculture rather than exclusive characteristic of cohabitation in localities. This ambivalence is apparent elsewhere as national identity frames are loosing their salience through inter-cultural hybridization during everyday interaction in particular locales (Gilroy 2004).

Most of the literature on emerging immigrant destinations stresses the difficulties which emerge from the lack of experience with ethnic difference. This is in particular relevant in the Czech context. The evidence shows that the shorter the history of migration, the less contacts with migrants develop (Kesten et al. 2011) and the more severe is the settled residents backlash to diverse population (Robinson et al. 2007, Hickman 2008).

To reveal complexity and diversity of experience we attempted to detect issues and places around which tensions emerge and where the everyday conviviality is lived. Conviviality may be experienced as casual engagements in public spaces, such as shops,

streets, transport, etc. (Neal et al. 2013, Wessendorf 2010), as well as more sustained social relations with shared goals and activities in institutionalized places such as work, school, childcare facilities, sport clubs, community gardens, leisure venues and other places of association, which Amin (2002, 2012) calls micropublics. In our research we focused on contact zones of encounters in public and semi-public spaces such as housing estates, schools, shops, restaurants or local streets.

Furthermore, we also attempted to find how the attitudes to and encounter with new immigrants and its reflection are influenced by personal socio-economic situation, age and local embeddedness, including the experience with otherness as well as by the perception of structural changes on labor market, availability of services and other transformations in the neighborhood.

We carried out research in public and semi-public spaces where we expected frequent inter-ethnic encounters such as playgrounds, parks, restaurants, pubs, the Sapa bazaar and housing estates. In these places, we interviewed 70 inhabitants of which 22 were individual semi-structured interviews and the rest were group discussions. Group discussions were carried out with children on playgrounds; with customers, mostly man, in restaurants and pubs (around 10 persons); with elderly in local senior club (around 30 persons); and inhabitants, mostly women, on a walk in neighborhood (around 10 persons). The interviewees were a diverse group of people in age between 15 and 78, with higher representation of women, elderly and middle class. We started interviews with the question on general satisfaction with the quality of life in the neighborhood and description of the local advantages and disadvantages. We attempted to understand to what extent the presence of Vietnamese was perceived important for everyday life. Then we turned to questions about familiarity with the Sapa bazaar, character of interaction with Vietnamese neighbors, entrepreneurs and children and the evaluation of mutual interaction. We also mapped the majority perception of local changes associated with Vietnamese immigration and general view on Vietnamese, in cases when interviewees expressed strong barriers towards Vietnamese newcomers.

Living apart together

This section presents the attitudes to and experience with living in a neighborhood with increasing ethnic heterogeneity. First, we discuss the majority narratives and emotions that reproduce or strengthen ethnic barriers with a specific focus on the role of media and political discourses, embodied encounters, reflecting local changes. We present frequent ‘negative’ narratives and emotions as well as we discuss issues and places of embodied encounters with Vietnamese and the impact of both on local life. In the second part, we pay attention to convivial encounters, the sites where they take place, and ways they shape the perception and emotions of majority population. Finally, we comment differences in relationships towards Vietnamese immigrants with respect to habitual positions of majority population.

Everyday multiculture in Praha-Libuš is characterized by fleeting contacts. Most of majority members do not have any Vietnamese acquaintances or friends. Inter-cultural encounter usually happens in public spaces that provide only limited opportunities for cooperative activities. Furthermore, the development of closer personal interaction is also constrained by the life priorities of Vietnamese confined to work that accounts for most of their daily time. As the established population lacks experience with ethnic difference, media and political discourse importantly shape its attitudes towards immigrants. During our interviews, attitudes to newcomers were often articulated with the help of the available public and media images often regardless of respondents own experience. The adoption of hegemonic representations of Vietnamese and Sapa from public and media discourses were, however, rather non-reflexive. Respondents were also not consistent in their opinions and attitudes towards newcomers, which could range from positive to negative depending on the concrete event and its context (similar finding Matejková and Leitner 2011).

New immigration can change the character of locality, tighten competition for scarce resources and rise nostalgia, as well as bring new impetus for urban development (Robinson and Walshaw 2012, Glick Schiller, Çaglar 2009). Important is how the original population experience, understand and interpret these changes (Hickman,

podcast). In Praha-Libuš the interviews have shown a huge sensitiveness of the original majority population to ethnically different immigrants and changes which they bring to the neighborhood. Practical othering is strengthened not only by the novelty of situation, but also by the apparent ethnic difference of Vietnamese in terms of their appearance, behavior and language.

Most respondents expressed fears, annoyance and discomfort. Many were not able to describe what exactly they perceived as the problem. They usually referred to a ‘large’ number of Vietnamese and reproduced images about ‘Vietnamese drug dealers’ or ‘economic criminality’, which they knew from media or public discourses. Often, they estimated the number of resident immigrants much larger than official numbers show and that we found in our detailed field research (Sýkora et al. 2015). Some people even expressed a threat that they will soon become a minority, using metaphors such as being ‘occupied’ or ‘swallowed’ by Vietnamese. Similarly to other places which have experienced recent migration, foreigners are seen as agents of negatively perceived changes related to competition for resources and urban decline (Wimmer 2013). As Amin (2012, p. 68) notices “when publics perceive urban services, utilities and common spaces to be strained or dysfunctional, the stranger frequently gets the blame accused of being over-demanding and undeserving”. Some respondents emphasized shrinking public resources blaming Vietnamese children for taking places in kindergartens. The opening of small shops by Vietnamese was interpreted as ‘taking our opportunities’. The growing number of Vietnamese residents was reflected in narratives about decreasing property values due to locality stigmatization and white flight thus impoverishing local owners. Increased traffic on local roads was predominantly associated with large number of visitors to Sapa centre, often omitting other factors such as the massive growth of suburbia and associated daily commuting and traffic flows between city and suburbs (Novák and Sýkora 2007, Stanilov and Sýkora 2014). Perceived growth in crime, distribution of drugs, hazard and other socio-pathological problems has also been dominantly related to Vietnamese migrants.

The literature on cosmopolitan conviviality acknowledges that ethnic precincts may play a key role in shaping boundaries of belonging and new solidarities through

cooperation and exchange, rather than competition (Duruz, Lukman and Bishop 2011, Hiebert, Rath and Vetrovec 2015). However, such places may also become subject of contestation leading to stigmatization of newcomers rather than cosmopolitan conviviality. In Praha-Libuš, such an ambiguous role is associated with the Sapa area that is often perceived as a ‘world with its own rules’ rather than a regular place to visit and interact. The unpleasant smells and aesthetic as well as negative media image stressing problems with hygiene and criminality, together with local experience of major fire in 2008, are only partly balanced by the ‘good deal’ of cheap goods, food and services packed in an exotic atmosphere. The Sapa bazaar with its ethnic restaurants and stores was narratively constructed rather as spatialized otherness further enhancing ethnic boundaries. These finding correspond with other studies of the Sapa bazaar (Huwelmeier 2013). While members of majority visit the Sapa to shop or eat, their experience does not often change attitudes towards Vietnamese. As the reflections of some interviewee show, it might even further underscore negative perception of Sapa as burden, rather than opportunity for enriching the quality of local life

Despite frequent expression of negative attitudes and biased narratives towards Vietnamese, embodied practices of cohabitation and interaction in everyday life have shown much less divisions. As Simonsen (2008) points, convivial encounters are played out rather on practical than discursive manner. Majority population come in contact, even though mostly only fleeting, with migrants in many different places within the neighborhood, in housing, shops, transport, parks, schools, etc. Important place for the encounter with difference are Vietnamese shops, which have long opening hours to attract customers from majority population. In dealing with customers, Vietnamese learned skills of practical cosmopolitanism that allow them to fulfill needs and expectations of majority (Pecoud 2004). These economic activities influenced majority perception of Vietnamese as having good work ethic. Similarly positive views of Vietnamese as hard working population come from schools, where Vietnamese children reach very good results. Positive images presented in interviews resulted not only from direct interaction but were also formed through media coverage that somewhat stereotypically form a ‘model minority’ (e.g. Lee 2009).

Apart from shops and schools, home and neighborhood are other important and often contested places of the everyday negotiation of difference. Migrants are often seen as disturbing the ‘neighborliness’ by noisiness, polluting surrounding and not obeying established rules (Erel 2010, Gruner 2010). We found that in Praha-Libuš, cohabitation is characterized with a strong will to communicate and negotiate misunderstandings, rather than foster exclusionary, conflicting and avoiding relations. Although conflicts exist they did not dominate the interpretation of cohabitation in the neighborhood. Vietnamese neighbors were not seen as an important issue. Only occasionally, they were commented as not behaving in a civil manner especially in terms of different schemas of purity and defilement including their cooking habits (aroma). At the same time, some respondents appreciated Vietnamese neighbors’ good manners.

Having discussed the places of intercultural exchange, such as school, shops or housing, where belonging is contested, produced and reproduced through convivial encounters, we documented how the experience and interpretations of majority are differentiated, whether in the reproduction of established narratives, through ways of convivial encounters or practices of banal nationalism realized in daily life. In our research, we also found that the language of tolerance and respect as well as abilities and skills to dealt with ethnic difference differed by age, socio-economic status and length of living in the neighborhood (for similar findings Valentine 2008, Valentine 2010, Forrest and Dunn 2011, Ponzo a Pastore 2014).

The multiple and intersecting individual and group characteristics and identities played role as precursors for ethnic contact. For instance children often come to daily contact with immigrants in school having opportunities to gain the knowledge and ability to deal with ethnic difference. Seniors more often expressed fear of changes, sense of displacement and disorientation (similarly Wise 2010). Perceived strong ethnic division was apparent (even so it did not dominate) also among teenagers, with some of them expressing strong hate towards Vietnamese. These attitudes seem to be related to the social milieu in which they grew up (Wessendorf 2010). While the middle-aged population is reported to be more insecure about their economic position and culture value (Valentine 2010), in Praha-Libuš, they seemed to be rather indifferent to the

presence of Vietnamese, with only some individuals expressing fears and discomfort. The long-term established residents often, in contrast to new residents, expressed strong sense of nostalgia. This corresponds with the findings of Back (1996) and Wimmer (2013), who found that a strong sense of local belonging ('neighborhood nationalism') negatively influences the acceptance of newcomers. An important difference in structuring perception and experience appeared between population with lower and middle socio-economic status (similarly Valentine 2010, Forrest and Dunn 2011). The less tolerant attitudes of less educated and least wealthy were in a sharp contrast to opinions of those describing themselves as well educated, who used the language of tolerance and mutual understanding.

Conclusions: conviviality on an open path of neighborhood transformation

In this paper we have focused on everyday conviviality in an emerging ethnically heterogeneous neighborhood in the context of post-socialist city, which was two decades ago ethnically homogeneous, yet with the societal transformation and following integration into global economy become a subject of intense international migration. Praha-Libuš is a place of ongoing social and cultural transformations induced especially by Vietnamese immigrants economic activities concentrated in Sapa Trade and Cultural Centre, largest Asian bazaar in former socialist countries of Central Europe, and by their settling in surrounding residential quarters. Praha-Libuš is an example of emerging new socio-spatial formation, which can not be defined by a stable set of characteristics (a state typical for urban changes in postsocialist city, see Sýkora 2015). At present, Praha-Libuš is neither an ethnically segregated locality, nor it resembles an ethnically diverse neighborhood, where people of various identities and statuses mix with each other transcending social and cultural cleavages and dichotomies (Landry and Wood 2007, Wassendorf 2010).

Currently ongoing everyday negotiations between indigenous population and newly coming immigrants are setting the course for future state of cohabitation in increasingly ethnically variegated city. In this paper we have shown how the attitudes of majority

and their everyday interaction with ethnically different populations are impacted by popular discourses at national level. However, this can also work vice versa. The actual practices, process and outcomes of cohabitation of populations with perceived and communicated ethnic differences in this neighborhood can provide examples taken by politicians, media and general public that can be mediated through further public discourses. The modes and outcomes of current negotiations thus can establish paths for future developments towards either more cosmopolitan or, on the other hand side, more ethnically segregated city. At present, we face critical junctures making choices that will impact the development of our cities for decades to come (Sýkora 2008). We thus attempt to contribute to the understanding of ethnic cohabitation, point to developments that could lead to the formation of new path-dependent lock-ins and help to avoid problematic paths that could inhibit more inclusive, cohesive and less segregated urban future.

The research of majority population has shown that the attitudes to migrants are substantially shaped by its exposure to increasing ethnic difference as it is perceived through daily fleeting contacts with newcomers, and is supplemented by the instant flow of popular stereotypical images of immigrants reproduced by media as well as within popular discourses among majority inhabitants. Many respondents related migrants and their activities with negative shifts in the structure of opportunities and possibilities in local life, for instance in such fields as competition for jobs, pressure on the provision of social services, increased traffic congestion or declining property values. However, these statements rather resulted from superficial and uncritical parroting of headlines from news and applying them to local contexts as well as from projecting dissatisfaction with some local developments to immigrants (see also Amin 2012), without discussing the complexity of their causes. The common narratives expressed threats stemming from rising presence of foreigners and ethnic differentiation without reference to real embodied experience with cohabitants (of perceived different ethnicity) and not engaging into more in-depth articulation of the role of migrants in reshaping local structure of opportunities. As Valentine (2010) suggests, stories and images, predominantly negative, are circulated and applied to justify prejudices stemming from perceived economic and cultural threats of new migration to local life. Although the

negative attitudes and opinions towards migrants were in some instances also stemming from difficulties and discomfort in negotiating difference in embodied encounters with newcomers at residences, in Sapa, and other places, the discourse of majority was dominated by practical othering based rather on abstract otherness following media and political discourses (see also Haldrup et al. 2006, Gruner 2010).

Much rare, yet existing, are narratives that acknowledge the positive impact of Vietnamese investments on the use of the rundown industrial premises, provision of shopping and other opportunities used also by local populations and visitors attracted to the Sapa Trade and Cultural Centre, bringing effective demand on housing market or healthy competitive examples of diligent Vietnamese pupils in local schools. While many respondents referred to examples of convivial encounters with Vietnamese within the neighborhood, these cases of embodied experiences often followed after general and more negative narratives pronounced at the beginning of interviews. It seems to confirm insights of Valentine (2008) that positive encounters with difference tend to be read only as being individual and does not easily penetrate to public discourses. It also points that the negotiation of difference, redrawing boundaries, old hierarchies and solidarities proceed through real embodied encounters in fields of local economy, schools and housing rather slowly. In the interviews, we were also informed about examples and practices of affective cosmopolitanism such as fascination and incorporation of elements of ‘others’ (Nava 2002). Despite still rare, these are making its way as one of the forms of encountering difference enriching not only the complexity of transformations in ethnically diversifying neighborhood but also setting the path towards more cosmopolitan rather than ethnically divided city.

While there is no unified and coherent view, the most pronounced majority attitude to Vietnamese presence in the neighborhood is rather than by ‘togetherness’ characterized by tolerant indifference accompanied by nostalgia, despair, and hidden racism. Fortunately, while the emerging contours of new forms of belonging are characterized by still lacking recognition (Vietnamese often report feelings of low acceptance by majority, Sýkora et al. 2015), they do not drive multicultural relations to serious tensions and conflicts. While the division of migrants and established population is

strongly pronounced in narratives and discourses, it does not discourage locals from convivial interaction, which we observed especially among younger and better educated population. As Valentine (2008) emphasized, the gap between practices, on the one hand side, and values, in our case expressed through narratives, on the other hand side, can be quite wide. As the process of urban and neighborhood transformation through ethnic encounter and incorporation is still in its beginning, there is room for action research through involvement in public debate, local activities and impact on public policies that can help to transcend this gap.

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