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Reflexivity
in the negotiation of participation: insights from a culturally-embedded community project in Vietnam

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fulfilment of requirements for the degree of
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by

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the possible negotiation of participation within development practice in Vietnam based on different understandings of reflexivity among different development actors. Specifically, it adopts a qualitative approach, using a sustainable community livelihoods project in Central Vietnam as a case study, to ask the following questions: (1) How do Western and local development facilitators understand reflexivity in participatory development in Vietnam?; and (2) How do Western and local development facilitators negotiate and practice reflexivity in participatory development in Vietnam?

These questions are important because while participation and fieldwork partnerships in community projects promise mutually-beneficial opportunities for shared learning, they also involve negotiations of power. The reflexivity of development practitioners assumes that they can obtain thorough understanding and knowledge of the local culture and facilitate participation appropriately, which may not actually be the case. Secondly, little is known about how participants think or practice their own culturally-embedded understandings of reflexivity in their interactions with non-local practitioners. Thirdly, there is a knowledge gap about how participation intersects with reflexivity as "Western" development discourses and local understandings are negotiated.

Semi-structured interviews were employed with three groups of people positioned differently within the case study project: international development practitioners, Vietnamese development practitioners and local community members. Interpretative methods of auto-ethnography and reflexive writings were used to analyse the researcher's own understandings of reflexivity and the working of power from his prior work as a translator in this project.

Building on existing critiques of reflexivity, and through careful analysis, the thesis interrogates assumed links between reflexivity and better facilitation in community projects. The negotiations explored in this research include rethinking the principle of reflexivity in the context of local cultural norms as these significantly shape values of development work and likely benefits for practitioners and participants. From extracted perspectives of research participants through semi-structured interviews and the researcher's reflections by means of auto-ethnography, an alternative approach is suggested to aid development practitioners in reflecting upon notions of "self" and "others" in order to examine various conceptions of participation in theory and practice.

Key words:

Cross-cultural development practice, empowerment, facilitation, participation, reflexivity, Vietnam

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Acronyms

ABCD	Asset-Based Community Development
BDSRLP	Binh Dinh Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Project
CIG	Common Interest Group
CM	Community member
COMINGO	Committee of Foreign Affairs
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
FDG	Farmer Discussion Group
GO	Government official
LC	Local consultant
IC	International consultant
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NZAID	New Zealand Agency for International Development
NZAP	New Zealand Aid Programme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PACCOM	People's Aid Coordination Committee
PIT	Project Implementation Team
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRD	Participatory Rural Development
SRL	Sustainable rural livelihood
VSA	Volunteer Service Abroad (New Zealand)
VUFO	Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisation

Chapter One: Introduction

I.   Background

This thesis is about reflexivity about and within the negotiation of participation as it is expressed in qualitative forms and reflections by stakeholders carrying out participatory development work in Vietnam.

There are various ways to understand participation and to practice it. The term "participation" itself in this research has more to do with the way development interventions are designed and delivered. Although we can trace the emergence of participatory approaches back to the 1940s, not until the 1960s has the concept of participation been widely discussed in development studies, when approaches to it began to be interpreted and practised in assorted ways. In the literature, the concept of participation has been examined at length, especially since the 1980s as an alternative approach to development in the enshrined works of Robert Chambers (1983, 1997) and critiques of it (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Lange, 2008; Robins, Cornwall, & Von Lieres, 2008). In practice, all donors, development agencies and practitioners worldwide have included participatory approaches in their agenda, making the term no longer something of a Western-centric discourse of development.

However, the pathway to common acceptance of participation has not always been smooth. Many have become disenchanted with participation that assumes that what works in one development context is good and can be replicated in another. There remains a heterogeneity of local cultures and internal politics that "outsiders" are not always aware of when they engage in promoting participation (Cornwall, 2008). If we believe that participatory development seeks to address the issues of imbalanced power dynamics, development practice should be fine-tuned to be inclusive of local aspects of culture and the

space of participation. In doing so, participation can better favour the course of increasing the understanding of why power issues exist in a certain context and why adopting a foreign approach may not solve these issues. According to Appadurai (2007), cultural practices can empower the poor, and while the notion of change-making is embedded within power issues in development, I suggest that examining reflexivity through the lens of cross-cultural practice will enrich the discussion on how participation is negotiated in the culturally-embedded context of development practice.

II.   My positionality

My own personal experience in development projects in Vietnam directly influences this research in its central questions and its methods. Before undertaking the Masters of Development Studies programme, I was employed by several development projects. My role consisted of cross-culturally and cross-linguistically communicating development objectives to different groups of beneficiaries. This role has constantly raised challenging questions about the different understandings of reflexivity and their influence on the negotiation of participation which arose from power relations embedded in the participatory development practice of Western and local practitioners. These questions, therefore, come from my own identity and positionality as a then local development worker bridging local culture and knowledge with new perspectives of development introduced by Westerners. Exploring this positionality is important as it informs my research design and analysis and helps me identify the approach I wish to take towards the participants in this research and the handling of information generated.

The development of my research topic began in the second trimester of Part I of my study at Victoria University of Wellington. Returning to university study after nearly ten years working in community projects in Vietnam, I began to explore various classmates' observations about cultural aspects of development

with a focus on participatory community development and their experiences. As the course progressed, I was puzzled by the seemingly different or changing definitions of participation and reflexivity in the discourse. For me, these concepts appeared to be too inflexible and did not fully reflect the lived experience of development work with which I was familiar at a community level.

Starting as a field officer for Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) in Vietnam, I have been able to work among different communities and with many other development practitioners including volunteers, specialists and consultants, both domestic and international, or with backgrounds in both public and private sectors. Many of them are expatriates firstly coming to Vietnam with very limited knowledge of local cultures, then after a number of years, they often shared with me that they had benefited through their fieldwork with the communities as much as they thought their contribution "empowered" the communities. Participation, in my experience and self-reflection, has always been a mutual and reciprocal process which benefits both the community and the development practitioners as facilitators. This means development practitioners always have the opportunity to obtain a thorough understanding and knowledge of the culture and cultural intimacy which includes extensive knowledge of social, familial, cultural, religious, historical and political backgrounds. In post-colonial contexts like Vietnam, fieldwork partnerships ideally should include mutually beneficial opportunities for shared learning, exchange of ideas and the advancement of knowledge. Such an observation raises challenging questions that inform this thesis and which are essential to my own evolving identity as a development practitioner acting as a "bridge" between North and South or West and East.

III. Conceptual framework and research questions

1. Conceptual framework

Building on existing critiques of reflexivity to be presented in Chapter Two, my aim is to interpret the landscape of power at play when development workers assume that they are fully aware of their own self-consciousness and positionality while working simultaneously with the community in a participatory way. The scheme of concepts which I have operationalised in this research to achieve the set objectives is presented in the following diagram (Figure 1.1).
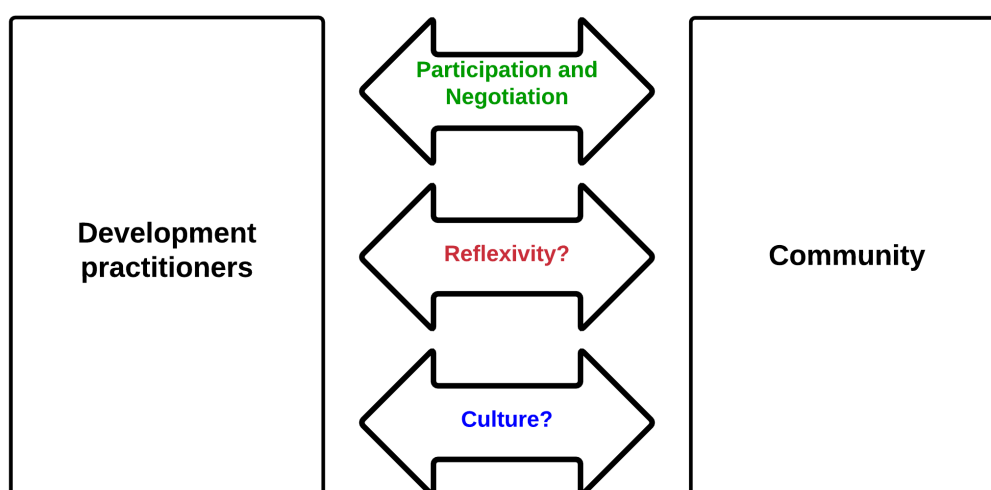
Figure 1.1. Conceptual framework

2. Research questions

The core words, also buzz-words or jargon in development (Cornwall, 2008), "participation", "empowerment", "culture" and "power" have penetrated and flourished through the whole thesis, and together they present all the confusion, compromises and ethical dilemmas when participatory approaches are adopted in the culturally-embedded development context of Vietnam. Power dynamics in participatory development practice often come to light through reflections of scholars and others (White, 1996; Chambers, 1997). Kolb (1984) mentioned that reflection turns experience into learning. On the significance of reflection and action, Freire (1970, p. 87) stated, "within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction

that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers". The need for power and/or reflexivity to be negotiated arises when something is off-balance in development work.

My conceptual framework defines the research questions. The framework includes, firstly, the proposition that reflexivity and positionality are fluid concepts in practice, and secondly, awareness of the importance of cultural reflections in exploring different perspectives on participatory development. These considerations are reflected in the central research question that will guide my research and define my research approach which is:

What are the effects of different understandings of reflexivity on the negotiations of power within participatory development practice?

This central question will be supported by two guiding questions as follows:

1. How do Western and local development facilitators understand reflexivity in participatory development in Vietnam?
2. How do Western and local development facilitators negotiate and practice reflexivity in participatory development in Vietnam?

Specifically to address the questions above and building on the main critiques of reflexivity in participatory development as outlined in the forthcoming literature review, I seek to answer the two following sub-questions:

1. How is power negotiated when development practitioners assume that they can be reflexive and work with the community at the same time?
2. How can development practitioners be reflexive and work with the community at the same time?

Also, the description of my research approach builds on the insights from the conceptual framework. In general, the following framework (Figure 1.2) is

employed to effectively demonstrate the inter-relations between the key research questions.
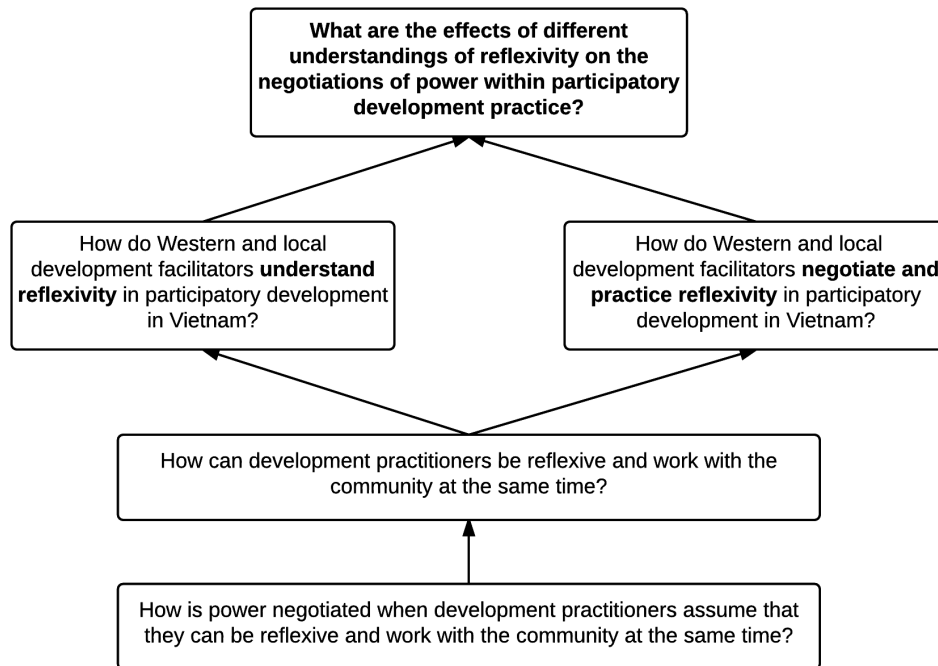
Figure 1.2. The inter-relations between research questions

IV. Thesis structure

This introduction is followed by Chapter Two, the review of relevant literature. First I outline the ebb and flow of participatory development, then I identify critical debates around participation and power which form the rationale for this research. Reinforced by a critical review of the literature of reflexivity and power relations in development practice, this part identifies the gap and potential for research.

Chapter Three presents the research context, which details the two big pictures: the Vietnam context of participatory development and an overview of the case study project. In Chapter Four, I explain the epistemological framework which informs the research questions and my choice of methods:

semi-structured interviews and auto-ethnographic observations. I summarise my perspective of engaging with participants in a reciprocal relationship. I then describe how I designed and undertook data collection and data analysis. Ethical concerns and several limitations of the research are also raised in this chapter.

Comprising thematic discussions of participants' perspectives as key findings, Chapter Five is my first data analysis chapter. Through presentation of important themes and stories fortified by relevant literature, the negotiation of participation is explored. I also analyse aspects of local culture to see how these have impacted on the practice of reflexivity of participants.

Chapter Six, auto-ethnographic reflections, provides not only my subjective interpretations of data which are condensed in thematic reflexive writings but also my observations on how reflexivity is practised collectively in the context of the case study in specific and the culture of Vietnam in general. These reflections also offer my own practice of reflexivity as a self-learning journey during the whole course of this research. Finally I conclude in Chapter Seven with a summary of the research, and offer several concluding reflections and suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature review

I.   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to provide a critical literature review and a theoretical framework for the research inquiry; and, to explore the historical background of participation in relation to negotiations of power and reflexivity within participatory development discourse. It outlines different perspectives of participatory development, then close attention is paid to participation, power relations and reflexivity in culturally-embedded development practice. Key elements such as empowerment and working cross-culturally will also be closely considered.

II.   Participatory development: A confluence of historical experiences

According to Schech and Haggis (2000), since the domination of growth theory in the 1940s and 1950s, development was seen as a key process to achieve desired improvements and the state was assumed to play a crucial role in that process. Subsequently, progress was measured as economic growth concentrated upon material enrichment. Development, through this approach, was focused only on economic transformation while other aspects such as culture and society were ignored.

Then during the emergence of modernisation theory in the 1960s, attention was also paid to social and institutional changes while economic factors remained the central focus (Bebbington & Bebbington, 2001; Willis, 2011). Despite the great cultural differences between the West and the East, or in some cases, First and Third World countries, modernisation dogma was converted into powerful interventions and policies which were assumed to achieve economic development in the Third World. Nevertheless,

modernisation theory was then understood to have caused widespread damage to fragile environments and indigenous cultures in many developing countries (White & Pettit, 2007). Consequently, dependency theory emerged in the early 1960s to explain causes of poor economic performance and increasing poverty in developing countries. Shortly after that, according to Willis (2011), dependency theory was criticised for being heavily concerned with economic factors, and again, for ignoring the social, cultural or political contexts within which development took place.

To address these shortcomings, development started to be discussed from different perspectives as a heterogeneous system which is differentiated by socio-economic and cultural factors, such as race, religion, class, caste, profession, gender, language and cultural traditions, and as depending on communities and their resources (Servaes & Malikhao, 2005; Tyson, 2013). Expressly, development has come to be understood as a structural transformation "which implies cultural, political, social and economic changes" (Rassool, Heugh, & Mansoor, 2007, p. 6). Haque (1999, p. 247) suggests that "there is no universal framework of development for all societies", therefore "Third World" societies should develop or adopt their own development alternatives in order to rescue their people from poverty, hunger, economic and political subordination, and cultural and intellectual subjugation.

According to Desai and Potter (2013), approaches to development have shifted over the last decades, from an emphasis on developing infrastructure and large-scale projects in the 1960s to alternative development in the 1970s and 1980s, which focused on meeting basic needs of people in developing countries. This new trend argued for the mending of existing imbalances in social, economic and political power (Friedmann, 1992). The shift to more people-oriented development paradigms that emerged in the 1970s was promoted and inspired by educational theorists, such as Paulo Freire in 1970 that focused on empowering the oppressed (Chambers, 1983, 1997; Mohan, 2013). Paulo Freire's ideas were later used to develop approaches and

methodology to political literacy within participatory development such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA) (Mohan, 2013).

Terms such as participation, empowerment and indigenous knowledge became dominant in the world of development and by the 1990s, all bilateral development agencies claimed to have adopted participatory policies (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). In particular, discussions around participation became combined with various theoretical shifts that have emerged during the last three decades. These included feminist (Gelb, 1989; Kabeer, 1994; Marchand & Parpart, 2003; Cornwall, Harrison, & Whitehead, 2007), cultural (Schech & Haggis, 2000; Watts, 2003a) and political (Freire, 1970; Friedmann, 1992; Chambers, 1997) perspectives. As a result, several concepts such as local knowledge and power relations have come into view and been linked to participation. These have contributed to what is commonly known as a "paradigm shift" in the way people perceive relationships among themselves and power relations within development initiatives (Chambers, 1993; Mikkelsen, 2005). Nelson and Wright (1995) insist that, whichever approach to participation is adopted, participatory development, or sometimes "bottom-up" participatory development is fundamentally about power. This focus on power relations has paved the way for new inquiries and principles in development practice, such as positionality and reflexivity, to be employed by development agencies and practitioners.

The sustainable livelihood approach does not lie at the heart of this research. However, it is important to critically look at this approach to emphasise the necessity of rethinking reflexivity and negotiations of power in a culturally-embedded context of development practice. Community development programmes require a broader range of skills to reflect the holistic nature of development. Skills such as participatory development, training, empowerment, capacity-building, institutional building, micro-economics and governance will facilitate longer-term sustainability (Narayan, 1995; Ashley and Carney, 1999; OECD, 2001). Sustainable livelihoods use participatory

approaches and are, therefore, often grouped with the above skills. (Harris, 2000).

To improve development effectiveness, according to Narayan-Parker (2002), Deneulin and Shahani (2009) and Kabeer (2010), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are better achieved by community initiatives. Built from resources of solidarity and local growth within existing cultural and government structures and iterative mobilisation of local successes, the initiatives, with proven effectiveness, can scale up to address larger needs using methodologies such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). These methodologies have been tested in a number of countries including Vietnam over two decades (Taylor, Taylor, & Taylor, 2011).

The whole purpose of development is being redefined so as to bring people to the central stage. Participatory Rural Development (PRD) also identified by someone as community-driven development or community participatory development (Stöhr & Taylor, 1981) has been an approach for more accountable governmental implementation seeking to increase poor people's participation. It has increasingly been promoted as a major component of poverty alleviation strategies.

Most developing nations are still struggling with efficient use of their resources. In order to overcome the physical and administrative constraints of development, it is necessary to transfer power from the central government to local authorities. Distribution of power improves the management of resources and community participation which is considered key to sustainable development (Manor, 1995; Harris, 2000). Participatory development initiatives favoured by the sustainable livelihoods approach may involve highly complex situations with many elements, stakeholders and interactions and they are open to social and cultural influences.

Having outlined some aspects related to mainstream development orthodoxy since the 1950s until recently and the emergence of participatory development, the next section provides a range of interpretations for participation and power relations, which are seen as prominent features in this new development paradigm.

III. Participation and empowerment

Mikkelsen (2005, p. 55) asks: "What, then, has come of the "new paradigm"? And what is in the words and the discourse of "participation in development"?"

First coherently articulated in the 18th century by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his work *The Social Contract*, the modern concept of participation has had many interpretations. Recently, the definition of participation in development is often located in development projects and programmes, as a means of strengthening their relevance, quality and sustainability. In an influential statement, the World Bank Learning Group on Participation defined participation as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them (Rietbergen-McCracken, 1996).

Hart (1992) and Pretty (1997) argued against this definition that, participation has become a fashion in almost all development work and this has created many paradoxes. The term has been used to favour extension of control of the state as well as to build local capacity and self-reliance; it has been used to justify external decisions as well as to devolve power and decision-making away from external agencies; it has been used for data collection as well as for interactive analysis involving a lot of resources. According to Mansuri and Rao (2012), the World Bank has invested about US$85 billion over the last decade on development assistance for participation.

Within participatory development, it has been acknowledged that local communities should decide the meanings and values of development and benefit from outsiders' knowledge and information without being dominated by it. Freire's ideas had a major influence on the increasing popularity of participatory development models with community empowerment at the centre. According to Freire, the process of empowerment and engaging in dialogue sparks critical consciousness which enables the shift from reflection to action (Freire, 1970). Arnstein (1969) and Connor (1988) considered participation as a categorical term for power. Accordingly, participation refers foremost to a redistribution of power that enables have-nots to share in the benefits of society. Many development interventions seek to promote the sharing of power among individuals and communities and this process is often addressed as "empowerment" (Willis, 2011; Mohan, 2013).

From experiences in rural development projects and research, a typology was suggested by Pretty, Guijt, Thompson, and Scoones (1995) with its application in development practice. This categorisation has become widely used in participatory learning and action methodology. The described forms of participation are understood as possible stages of participation within a project cycle. (Figure 2.1).

Passive participation	People participate by being told what is going to happen or what has already happened.
Participation by information giving	People participate by answering questions posed by extractive researchers and project managers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches.
Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted, and external agents listen to views. These external agents define both problems and solutions, and may modify these in the light of people's responses.
Participation for functional incentives	People participate by providing resources, for example labour, in return for food, cash or other material incentives.
Functional participation	People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project, which can involve the development or promotion of externally initiated social organisation.
Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones.
Self-mobilisation	People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems.

Figure 2.1. A typology of participation.

Source: Pretty et al. (1995, p. 61)

Since its early days in development practice, empowerment has been defined as "a social action process by which individuals, communities, and organisations gain mastery over their lives in the context of changing their social and political environment to improve equity and quality of life" (Rappaport, 1984, p. 3; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1994). This perspective is inspired by the theoretical discourse on the role of power in societal order and political institutions (Dahl, 1957; Giddens, 1991; Gaventa & Goetz, 2001). From the late 1990s onwards, researchers at development cooperation think tanks, such as the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) in Sussex and the World Bank, have investigated the potential of participatory mechanisms to increase human capabilities and to empower the poor in order to overcome existing societal and political power structures (Gaventa, 1982; Nelson & Wright, 1995).

Participatory development, since then, has become an umbrella term for projects that seek to actively empower beneficiaries when including them in

project design and management and to give them direct control over key project decisions, including management of investment funds. In developing countries, participation has even been claimed as indispensable because of its significant impact on development and is frequently regarded as crucial in all phases of a typical development project including designing, budgeting and implementation (Cooper & Elliott, 2000; Layzer, 2002; Sopanah, 2012). According to Mansuri and Rao (2004), potential gains from participatory development are large as it also aims to reverse power relations in a manner that creates agency and voice for poor people, allowing them to have more control over development assistance.

However, there has been no clear consensus in the literature as to what constitutes participation or empowerment or whether there is a clear and direct relationship between them. Murphy (2014, p. 5) comments, even though planners may be well-intentioned, the key point is that neither persons nor communities are ever empowered. Whilst the international community has flagged the concepts of empowerment and participation as means to alleviate poverty in developing nations, there is a large difference between the realities and ideal of these principles. Lozare (1994) for example, questioned whether empowerment is "a product of participation or whether it is a precondition to participation" (p. 239).

There is no blueprint prescription for assuring participation and empowerment, but participation does not occur in a vacuum. It is determined by socio-economic, environmental, political and cultural contexts within which individuals and communities live. In general, there is still some confusion as to who is to be empowered: the poor, the socially excluded, the community, development practitioners or all of these stakeholders (Mosse, 2001). In many projects, development practitioners are more at the centre of the projects than the poor themselves. It is also confusing about the ownership of projects, as donors and development agencies working in rural areas of developing countries have objectives of an equal partnership with local participants but,

"whoever pays the piper calls the tune". This is another difference between the conceptualisation and realities of empowering and participatory approaches (Mosley, Hudson, & Verschoor, 2004). There exist gaps in the literature that do not address the above problems.

IV.   Power relations in culturally-embedded development practice

In order to examine the linkage between participation and negotiation of power in a culturally-embedded development context as one of the main objectives of this research, it is necessary to recognise the key dimensions of participation which are, in turn, affected by each culturally-embedded context. The literature concerning different understandings of the relationship between culture and participatory development will be reviewed under this section to examine power relations in culturally-embedded development practice.

Much early thinking on development did not accord participation a central place in culture. During the World Decade of Cultural Development (1988 – 1997), Dube (1987) emphasised the importance of how change agents, especially those connected with programmes of international aid, should prepare themselves to deal with culture and traditions as barriers to change. Culture and traditions, according to several scholars including Dube (1987); Escobar (1995); Liamputtong (2010), do not necessarily adapt to demands of development, yet they are intervening variables of considerable power and contribute to a community's special sense of being. They provide bases of social integration, and offer guidelines to action during periods of uncertainty. Harris (2000) points out that, one of the five principles recognised under the framework for sustainable development is the condition of having participatory approaches and knowledge of the local context and these principles must be closely bound to cultural aspects, or "culturally-embedded".

In development literature, it is now generally acknowledged that approaches based on modernisation and dependency theories have suffered significantly from their top-down perspective. Bradley (2014, p. xx) argues that development practitioners "operate within a world of mythical representation of other people because they are caught within a macro system of power that is not concerned with responding to real need". The predominant discussion is usually determined by a development professional, the only one who has the wisdom to bring lasting change to communities (Bradley, 2014). This mindset of professionals is especially problematic in an obvious challenge of international development: working cross-culturally, especially if the professionals are from different cultural backgrounds. That is not to mention if they are not aware or provided with cross-cultural training to reduce the severity of culture shock and uncertainties of which necessity is critically addressed in a large part of the literature on cross-cultural training for working abroad (Levine, Park, & Kim, 2007; Cheney, Christensen, Zorn Jr, & Ganesh, 2010).

On the other hand, as mentioned above, Escobar and Crush (1995) and Liamputtong (2010) emphasise the necessity to re-examine the idea of participation with the focus on life, cultures and indigenous knowledge as conditions of and for change. In order to highlight the necessity of the negotiation between "Western" discourses and culturally-embedded realities of participation, it is necessary to look at the development organisations that undertake these types of projects in partnership with local communities. The existing literature realised a similar research focus: the importance of "partnership" or "joint participation" (Overton & Storey, 2004), however this partnership is more at the level of donors and aid receivers.

A large gap also exists in the literature with regards to participation of the management systems for development projects (Brett, 2003). Brett (2003) points out that external agencies and development practitioners have a defined role in development projects while they introduce their own criteria of and

make the strongest claims for participatory approaches. Unfortunately by doing this, they also limit the process of participation when not acknowledging how they can benefit and learn to enable the local people to evaluate their performance if they fail in their projects.

In much literature, it has been asserted that participation and culture are intertwined; national, local, and professional cultures and their formal institutions co-determine the level and methods of participation (André, Enserink, Connor, & Croal, 2006). The significance of local cultural and political contexts for participatory development practices has been mentioned in the literature (Abraham & Platteau, 2004; Mansuri & Rao, 2004, 2012; Schuurman, 2013, p. 22). Although its importance is mentioned, it seems that there is no thorough study on the role of cultural context in participatory development.

Hofstede and Hofstede (2001) defines the cultural dimension of "power distance", which is related to the problem of inequality, as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. This represents inequality (more versus less), but defined from below, not from above. This definition is critical because it carries a very important message about participation. It highlights that participation without redistribution of power can frustrate the powerless.

Regarding stakeholder participation in development, Reed (2008) discusses the importance of socio-cultural factors in the adaptation of participatory approaches in practice regarding the decision-making context. Johnston (2001) examines two participatory methods, the Delphi survey and scenario analysis, to understand the role of cultural context in proper selection of a methodology. Mansuri (2004) mentions the challenges associated with participatory projects when external agents perform it in a new culture. She argues that, to turn the pyramid of decision-making by giving beneficiaries

voice and choice, should not result in ignoring the social and cultural context within which they live and organise themselves. Abraham and Platteau (2004) show that in the case of participatory development which is used as a new approach in aid programs in sub-Saharan Africa, the various aspects of the social and cultural fabric have a significant role. They described some socio-cultural values of societies that may represent constraints to participation such as the "high degree of personalised relationship", "other-regarding norms", "strong beliefs in the role of ancestors and supernatural powers" and "strict respect of status and rank differences".

While Green (2010) defines participation as a "boundary object" to create the possibility for groups with divergent perspectives and interests to enter into temporary collaboration around shared objects of management, the participation gap of community-driven rural development in Vietnam lies in insufficient negotiation between "Western" development discourses and the culturally-embedded reality of participation. In development literature and practice, participation is generally seen as tokenistic and a possible way to reject statism and top-downism (Mohan, 2013). Van de Fliert, Pham, Do, Thomas, and Nicetic (2010) noted, some development organisations in Vietnam have started to include objectives such as "staff development", "conservation of indigenous cultures and product", and "empowerment of women" besides achieving general goals in development projects. The three former objectives are well-matched with the cultural aspects of Confucian dynamism which was Hofstede's later-added cultural dimension.

For the context of Vietnam, development practitioners are required to get out of their comfort zones and work across disciplines, travel into unknown areas, and face cultural barriers. This can be unsettling for all parties involved including community members and requires continuous reflections and negotiations of power (Van de Fliert et al., 2010). The negotiation suggested in this research will include rethinking the principle of reflexivity with regard

to key local cultural norms that will significantly shape the values of development work and benefit practitioners concurrently.

V.   Facilitation

Facilitation and the role of facilitators have been discussed both extensively and intensively in delivering community development interventions using participatory approaches. The concept of facilitation as a people-oriented approach to stimulate individuals and groups in change and learning was initially brought to the fore by Rogers (1968). The inter-personal relationship between facilitators and learners, as Rogers (1968) suggests, must be built on the foundations of trust, respect and mutual understanding. These foundations were developed by Thorne (1992) into the three core conditions, namely realness, acceptance and empathy, which significantly shaped the role of facilitators as change-agents.

From a theoretical standpoint, recent calls for development fieldwork and activist research have generated more attention around the responsibility and role of both fieldworkers and academics, which is to make a difference "on the ground" as to address situations of power imbalance (Cumbers & Routledge, 2004). Specifically in development fieldwork and agricultural extension, the practice of facilitation has been discussed as embracing the skills required to manage group activities conducted by the facilitator who has limited authority/power while assisting the group with identification, solving problems and enabling them to participate in decision-making (Schwarz, 2002). According to Preissing, Cadwallader, and Albrecht (2009), the facilitator has a crucial role as the development agent who assists local farmers, unleashing their aspirations, potential and needs related to their daily practice or livelihoods, and helps them communicate with other stakeholders.

Using more dialogic and participatory approaches to deliver development interventions, facilitators are often seen as partners rather than instructors and experts to project beneficiaries (Connell, 1997). This approach has been reviewed in the previous section as a means to empowerment, of which facilitators must be aware of their reliance on local knowledge and local systems of culture and values. This necessity suggests that the local contexts are vital to participatory development interventions which at times requires the facilitators to take various roles including brokers in cultural situations, hence they must be competent to adapt to cultural differences arising from the local development context (Bicker, Pottier, & Sillitoe, 2003; Quintana, 2004).

VI.   The negotiation of power

Analysis of discourse is simultaneously an analysis of power. Discourse uses power to shape production of knowledge (Thomsson, 2006). Power, according to Foucault (1980, p. 49), "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, [and] produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression". Simultaneously, the power that permeates everyday relationships can be connected to hegemonic purposes, defining dominant modes in the social order by excluding others and legitimising a particular way of living.

In development practice, development agencies and practitioners together present an explicit positionality which reveals a power relationship vis-à-vis their participants. This positionality often defines "others" as inferior and passive recipients. In aid partnership and gender discourse, recent authors such as Sultana (2007) and Jamal (2014) have pointed out, the negativity of "others" in postcolonial discourse does not only include issues of poor communication, skills, and technology, but also poor moral values, poor education – in short, overall cultural backwardness. Eriksson Baaz (2005)

elaborates, these "other" participants in non-Western developing countries are considered unreliable and untrustworthy compared to Westerners. The literature also reflects that, for a while, it has been a common view that the "under-developed" are construed as ignorant and uncivilised and thus in need of the continuous presence of Western NGOs. If a project does not achieve its objective, the blame is placed on the local community's lack of knowledge and skills (Bradley, 2014).

In the context of development aid, power struggles are embedded within its disciplinary histories and institutions, and despite liberating and participatory claims, power struggles reflect hegemonic intent (Hackner, 2004). The developed world directs the evolution of the developing world, based on its own socio-economic success (Moore & Schmitz, 1995). These forces enact power not only through their practices but by promulgating ideas and preferences that define the world in Western terms via "captured social imaginaries and constructed identities" (Peet & Hartwick, 2009, p. 222).

Hegemony practised by the developed world is implicit in relationships between the powerful and the powerless (Hackner, 2004). Therefore, development practitioners working in the context of developing countries are bound to adopt the prevailing ideas represented by a consensus of powerful thinkers of international development (Hackner, 2004). In other words, "Development is therefore at the same time rhetoric, official practice and political theory, while also serving as a framework for descriptions, on a global scale, of human misery and hope" (Rew, 1997, p. 81). Major development decisions are frequently made because of ideologies and politics that reflect "the way the dominant power (the West) would like the world to be", without any options for negotiating power (Stiglitz, 2002, p. x; Bradley, 2014).

The next section reviews the literature of reflexivity in development practice to scrutinise the relationship between reflexivity and diverse cultural dimensions.

This relationship highlights the importance of how the power hierarchy is accepted and negotiated.

VII.   Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a concept that is increasingly gaining prevalence in development practice and literature, particularly with respect to development practitioners working with the uncertainties of practice and considering themselves getting out of their comfort zones while interacting within different cultures and environments. Concepts of reflexivity arise from a methodological and philosophical reflection on development, but they are not a purely intellectual process: they concern ongoing practical changes. Originally a principle in social work theory, the idea of reflexivity has been very influential in qualitative research, prompting Pillow (2003, p. 176) to observe that "reflexivity is invoked in almost every qualitative research book or article and has been posited and accepted as a method qualitative researchers can and should use" to both explore and expose the politics of representation and power dynamics. In a similar vein, Finlay (2003, p. 5) asserts that reflexivity "is now, arguably, a defining feature of qualitative research".

According to D'Cruz, Gillingham, and Melendez (2007), recent literature has regarded reflexivity as an important feature of professional discretion and ethical practice. However, it has been such a confusing array of terms when, even though having their roots from "the use of the self", the concepts of self-awareness, reflection, reflectivity, reflexivity, critical reflectivity and critical reflexivity have been used by different authors, sometimes interchangeably in the most recent literature, to mean different things (Kondrat, 1999; Mosca & Yost, 2001; Ruch, 2002). This observation of "some blurring between the concepts" (D'Cruz et al., 2007) is critical to the increasing interest in reflexivity and reflective practice over recent decades because these concepts are explicitly associated with approaches to improve professional practice.

Furthermore, Adamowich, Kumsa, Rego, Stoddart, and Vito (2014) stated, it has been extraordinarily difficult to review the literature of reflexivity in what appears to be a messy and complex field in which traditional disciplinary boundaries and shared criteria for academic rigour do not always apply. In fact, it is extremely problematic to assess the ability to be reflexive, if there is no agreed upon definition.

With an attempt to translate the term, D'Cruz (2000) proposes there are three main variations in the meaning of reflexivity. The first implies the practitioners' individual choices so that reflexivity becomes a skill for them to make sense of the situations they face in practice and to aid in decision-making (Kondrat, 1999; Ferguson, 2003). The second concerns how knowledge and power are generated and negotiated within the practitioners' self-critical process (Parton & O'Byrne, 2001; Taylor & White, 2002). In the third variation, reflexivity is concerned with emotions as an important part of the process of knowledge creation and is related with how culture might influence the practitioner's actions (Kondrat, 1999; Ruch, 2002).

Lax (1996) observed a shift from traditional to more post-modernist and social constructionist orientation including the reflecting process. This shift has also been evident in Eastern spiritual and philosophical practices such as Buddhism, which are receiving increasing public support and appear in keeping with the post-modern shift and its focus on self, relationship, narrative, multiplicity, diversity, and reflexivity. In fact, Nagata's above-mentioned perspective resonates with others whose interpretations of reflexivity refer to Buddhist practices of reflexive awareness (*svasamvedana*) or ways the "self" (*anātman*) reflects how it sees things, or practices "to train the mind to be more open and to generate healthy mental factors" as Lax (1996) puts it (MacKenzie, 2008, p. 263; Thompson, 2010). In this way, it has always been highly controversial among Buddhist thinkers as to whether reflexivity is potentially self-awareness or not (MacKenzie, 2008). However, if the translation from its Sanskrit equivalent (*rang rig*) by Garfield (2006) is

correct, reflexivity (of awareness) in Tibetan Buddhist presentations was well-defined and debated by Ju Mipham Rinpoche (1846 – 1912), an important figure in the *Ris med*, or nonsectarian, movement influential in Tibetan in the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries (Garfield, 2006; Burchardi, 2007). As the Rinpoche debated, it is obvious that, conventionally, consciousness is reflexive (Mipham, 2002), and no philosophical analysis could ever refute the reflexivity of awareness (Garfield, 2006).

In searching for a better understanding between reflexivity and personal experiences, Nagata (2004) created the term *bodymindfulness*, which she coined from *bodymind* – the integral experience of one's body, emotion, mind, and spirit – and *mindfulness*, the Buddhist practice of cultivating awareness. Nakkula and Ravitch (1998) initiate a discussion around the reflexive deconstruction of the "self" which also enriches the understanding in direct experience and empowers the ability to act from it because of the feeling of knowing that emerges clearly in the moment. Nagata (2004) suggests, when working cross-culturally, development practitioners and researchers can be guided by this sense of felt meaning when they purposely engage with cultural differences during their field work and participation.

Reflexivity is also considered central to qualitative approaches to understanding and reshaping fieldwork relationships. Qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation (fieldwork), interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions, reflections and reactions (Myers & Avison, 1997). In fact, some have confirmed the critical and essential values of reflexive perspectives of researchers in action research (Moore, 2004; Watt, 2007; Turner, 2013) and participatory action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007). This idea of reflexivity as something beyond reflections which calls upon researchers to reflect and act almost simultaneously on their actions is similar to the notion developed by Schön (1983) on reflection-in-action. In a case study to investigate participants' reactions to community-based dialogues

on food and justice, Turner (2013) commented, by being reflexive and candid about the role as researcher, she was able to enhance the participatory nature of the research. In particular for researchers and practitioners in the field, according to Sandelowski and Barroso (2002), reflexivity implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry; and, in between the researcher and participants to the social interaction they share. Ryan (2005) asserts, reflexivity is also impacted by the changes in environment and the participants involved. Among these, reflexivity acknowledges that all knowledge bears the impress of the social relations entailed in its production, including the complex power relations between researchers and participants.

From a development practice perspective, reflexivity can function as a strategy to address the power inherent in the development practitioners – community relationship and as an analytical tool for recognising one's own social standpoints (Haney, 2002). Eyben (2014) defines reflexivity as how we understand ourselves and are understood in relation to others. In recent development discourses, impacts of reflexivity have become more and more widely discussed in light of social and cultural norms that influence power relations.

Focusing on the post-colonial context of development, Kapoor (2004) suggested the terms *hyper-reflexive development* and *hyper-reflexivity*, to inform development academics and researchers against the representation of those in the Third World when working with the community. His main critiques are mainly drawn on the argument of Spivak that researchers from the Global North, when engaging the "Third World Other" for their own personal research interests, might easily bring in the risk of "masquerading as the absent non-represener who lets the oppressed speak for themselves (Kapoor, 2004, p. 637) and this risk might constitute a continuing form of imperialism. In general, Kapoor's notion of hyper-reflexivity presents a moving

away from and beyond traditional ways about which reflexivity has been conceived and engaged as a complex, multifaceted process.

Reflexivity, however, is not a one-way practice. Reciprocally, participants are also described adopting a reflexive approach to practice as rewarding and as promoting their trust in relations with practitioners (D'Cruz et al., 2007). For example, ideally among key characteristics of participatory action research, researchers are required to "treat participants as competent and reflexive agents capable of participating in all aspects of the research process" (Kindon et al., 2007, p. 14). To be reflexive, participants investigate their interactions via introspection as they occur and through this mode of "being reflexive", they reflect on various elements such as verbal, nonverbal, feelings, and thoughts.

The rise of reflexivity has not gone without criticism. Even though it is offered as both a constructive and critical approach to practice, a number of scholars have critically questioned it in relation to how power operates with knowledge that presents both "opportunities" for emancipation and "dangers" of oppression (D'Cruz, 2000; Parton & O'Byrne, 2001; Taylor & White, 2002). For some, it is disastrously inward-looking and self-indulgent, effectively installing development practitioners' self at the centre of the work, to the exclusion of far more important issues (Patai, 1991). However, calls to relinquish reflexivity completely are relatively rare and many more contributions debate the merits and demerits of different versions. For example, Rose (1997) argues that reflexivity is impossible, and rather than making relations of power explicit and enabling negotiations, the use of reflexivity has often brought about its own form of concealment. For reflexive development practitioners to assume that they can be fully aware of their own self-consciousness and simultaneously work with the community, the entire landscape of power is extremely problematic. In a similar vein, Pillow (2003) calls for a move away from what she calls "comfortable" uses of reflexivity towards "uncomfortable" reflexive practices that disclose the "messiness" and actively unsettle or disrupt

the processes through which empowerment is enabled and guaranteed. Under growing influence of post-modern analysis of power, development practitioners have encountered increasing pressure to critically reflect on their positionality to maximise "opportunities" or minimise potential "dangers" they could bring to local participants (Mohan & Stokke, 2000; Kindon, 2012).

Development is an exercise of power, this is true of development as discourse and as practice (Apthorpe, 1996). As Foucault claims, the effects of power dynamics are "repressive and empowering" (Cruikshank, 1999). Rahnema and Bawtree (1997) stress the importance of reflecting on positionality and questioning knowledge and power which are gained through doing development research.

To summarise, "Western" discourses emphasise the key to ethical development work as an ontology that suggests that human beings are dynamic agents capable of reflexivity and self-change, and an epistemology that accommodates the reflexive capacities of human beings within the development process. Several perspectives focus on the reflexivity or the "use of the self" (Habermas, 1990; Giddens, 1991) while others refer to reflexivity in a collective sense (Foley, 1999). In development research, reflexivity generally means the importance of subjectivities, the reactions of the communities to development plans, projects, outcomes which should be built into the development process.

Despite acknowledgement of the participants being reflexive, this remains a gap in the literature, as recently, a large part of the literature is focused on reflexivity from the practitioners' perspectives. The collective characteristics of the practice is key to interrogating some of the issues of power (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009). It is this gap the remainder of the thesis seeks to address.

VIII.   Summary

This chapter has sought to ground the study and engage with key themes within the existing literature on participation and power relations in participatory development. Based on the review of relevant literature, it has examined various concerns of power, including considerations that academia and development practitioners may be complicit in the production of neo-colonial knowledge, and that their practices may "silence" participants when engaging themselves in a participatory development context.

The chapter also reviewed the literature within which the concept of reflexivity is explored by development practitioners and how they interpreted the concept for their practice. The reviewed literature highlights the importance of being reflexive and conscious of cross-cultural practice and values based on the researchers' two personal beliefs: (1) that knowledge is situated and therefore development practice must be localised; and (2) that an awareness that bringing about change involves making a difference to both individual and collective cross-cultural development practice. Addressing the collective characteristics of participation in the chapters which follow will illustrate the importance of cross-cultural values in development practice.

Chapter Three: The research context

I. The Vietnamese context of participatory development and participation

This chapter reviews the context of how participation has been adopted and promoted in development work in Vietnam. It also identifies what influences local participation in order to investigate how participation is perceived differently by major stakeholders, and in turn, how it is exercised in reality.

Since the Đổi Mới (Renovation) policy was introduced in Vietnam in 1986, the participatory approach underpinning many development projects has attracted special attention as a move away from the top-down approach frequently employed in development work. Despite socio-economic, cultural and political obstacles, many believe participation in development projects in Vietnam has recently been strengthened especially after the government realised that the top-down approach had been undermining local capacity. However, the questions about whether local participation in development projects should be promoted and whether it is feasible in Vietnam remain a major concern among development practitioners.

1. The culturally-embedded context of Vietnam

Vietnam has had a long-established centralised and powerful political core. The development context of the country has been historically structured and culturally embedded in the doctrines of Taoism and Confucianism from China as well as in the strong tradition of Buddhism. Together, they have been identified as a religion-culture system of *tam-giáo* or *the three teachings*. Participation, as considered by the Western development hegemony, has been under the influence of this existing Vietnamese cultural inheritance in

theoretical and practical terms. According to Moo-Sang (1998), for a long period of time, development interventions in Vietnam were negligent to indigenous knowledge or local cultures where local participants were often given limited opportunities to share their opinions.

Buddhism and Taoism consider active participation in daily life patterns and conscious lethargy from daily affairs as two dominant but opposite and conflicting attitudes. In Vietnam, these attitudes do not represent going separate ways but rather are a matter of daily choice-making. As often demonstrated by elites when adopting Buddhist and Taoist ways of living, the Vietnamese preference of these two attitudes would be the tradition of lethargy as a distinctive effort to maintain "self-face" (***thể diện***) or the status quo. These attitudes imply the fear of losing face and the constant consciousness of maintaining face (Nguyen, 2015). In other cases, participation is considered a duty to be filled more so than a desirable end. Furthermore, due to the tradition of lethargy, even under circumstances where participation is demanded to achieve a specific communal benefit, there remains a tendency toward reluctant or grudging participation.

Introduced to Vietnam as early as the beginning of the Chinese rule in the second century BC, Confucianism gave Vietnam a highly organised hierarchical society (Gernet, 1996). Yet while encouraging the improvement of the individual, it did so in order that the individual could better function for the community as the individual is perceived to be always less important than his or her family and the communalism of which that individual is a part. In this sense, Confucianism is anti-individualistic and the ideology was regarded by the elites as an effort to reinforce the state-centred social and political control. From this power-centralised perspective, individuals would participate in daily affairs only when being "authorised" to do so.

Further, the highly institutionalised participation structures influenced greatly by the ***tam-giáo*** ideology system have been enforced by the introduction of the

Marxist-Leninist ideology to Vietnam, which brought with it the idea of social welfare, or public subsidisation. Over time, a system of dependence and expectation began to arise. Consequently, the mobilisation of resources for development programmes at local levels was heavily dependent on public subsidies, which were limited in many circumstances to "authorise" as many local participants to participate in development interventions.

More recently in Vietnam, participation, originally understood as people's participation, has been acknowledged in terms of including previously excluded groups, such as small-holders in the case studies, by targeting project benefits directly at them. As a result, the contemporary term "project beneficiaries" has been coined and entered development discourse. The key ingredients of this kind of participatory development are the project, the donor – development agency, project inputs, beneficiaries and economic impact analysis and so on. In development literature, participation is often interpreted as people's direct involvement throughout a participatory development project cycle.

Notably, the first similar interpretation of community participation was from Paul, in a World Bank paper on Community Participation in Development Projects (Paul, 1987) who defined participation as "an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receiving a share of the project benefits". This first introduction to the concept of "beneficiaries" into development discourse was so remarkable that many development agencies espoused it uncritically. More recently, however, the vocabulary has changed again and since 1992, the term "stakeholders" has emerged for participatory development projects. The term is literally built around the notion of "having a stake in something", presumably similar to Chamber's notion of "handing over the stick", and the resulting commitment and involvement which this implies. Stakeholders are defined as "those parties who either affect or are affected by the Bank's actions

and policies" (Bicker et al., 2003). The key concept is that stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives.

Explanations for this evolution of language centred largely on the idea of people having a tangible and concrete "stake" in a development project, as opposed to merely being "waiters upon providence" (loosely rendered from the Vietnamese saying, "waiting for a fig to drop into the mouth" – "*nằm chờ sung rụng*"). The notion of stakeholders would seem to imply a process of active involvement, as opposed to being passive beneficiaries of project outcomes. In the most contemporary approach to participatory development projects, there is often a "stakeholder analysis" as the first step to produce a matrix of different groups which demonstrate different power relations among project stakeholders or players. Ideally, this step, among others, will help reveal the nature of participation in the project. From one end, participation is often defined as the backbone of the project and has formed the implementation approach. From the other end, participation might be expected as an outcome of a project.

2. From collectivisation to participation

Before the Đổi Mới was launched, participation in Vietnam, often referred to by the government as "people's participation" (Dang, 2012), was seen as a barometer of subsidised collectivisation. The Đổi Mới enabled the country to learn from the experiences of development in the past four decades of experimentation of collectivisation and communisation of agricultural production in North Vietnam. The renovation also aimed to examine the consequences of rapid collectivisation in the South after the North and South of Vietnam were reunified in 1975 (Boothroyd & Pham, 2000), to initiate economic growth linked closely with social progress and equity, cultural development and environmental protection (Government of Vietnam, 1991). The new policy marked a significant transformation to collectivisation, with

the market-led economy giving ways to promote more community-based development interventions with less government subsidies.

The top-down approach to community-based development in Vietnam was seen to provide ideas and initiatives to local people in a uni-directional way (McAnany, 2012). Since the Đổi Mới, participatory approaches have inspired social changes with the involvement of the community (Van de Fliert et al., 2010). Accordingly, participatory approaches have been advocated by NGOs and development projects in the country, especially funded by international donors in agricultural development in rural areas.

Until recently, large proportions of both government budget and international funding assistance have been allocated for developing capacity building in development projects, especially in rural development and agriculture (Poussard, 1999). In such projects, intensive and extensive training provided to extension staff focus on participatory techniques such as data collection, planning, project implementation, grassroots training and project evaluation.

Currently, participation is expected to improve effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of development projects, and to strengthen local ownership of projects. For the sustainability of the project, local participants are expected to mobilise their own resources and commit to make decisions for their own future. Although the concept is gaining huge popularity in reports produced by both donors and the government, aspects of participation have not been examined systematically and critically, especially in terms of their relevance and acceptance by intended beneficiaries in development projects.

Yet, it has been challenging to initiate participation between the government and development agencies, according to Nørlund (2007); Hakkarainen and Katsui (2009). Poussard (1999) remarks, until the late 1990s, the ideas of participatory and people-centered development were still unfamiliar to the centralised, hierarchical environment of the single-party socialist state of

Vietnam. This newly-adopted approach demonstrates a perception gap when participation is operationalised at different levels. The approach generates power structures that are distinctive of development partnerships in Vietnam. For example, operation of international NGOs in Vietnam and their administration by the government of Vietnam have also been managed by government decrees, including Decree No. 12/2012/ND-CP, which came into effect on 1 June 2012. (Previously the Prime Minister's Decision No. 340/QD-TTg promulgated in May 1996). Accordingly, a number of government agencies have been established to manage, cooperate and facilitate the humanitarian and development aid activities of international NGOs. These include the Committee of Foreign Affairs (COMINGO), the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisation (VUFO) and the People's Aid Coordination Committee (PACCOM).

Regarding practising participation at local levels, participation has also been hindered by the tradition of highly centralised decision-making and the practice of top-down planning in delivering development interventions. The literature identifies a number of key factors that influence participation in development work in Vietnam. Moo-Sang (1998) and Hakkarainen and Katsui (2009) referred to socio-political contexts and communal culture as key constraints to participation of project stakeholders and beneficiaries in Vietnam. Participants and project partners in the field tend not to believe in their power to raise their voices, influence decisions and make changes. Furthermore, in Vietnam, there exists the historical tendency of subsidisation.

II.   An overview of the case study project

BDSRLP was an initiative of Binh Dinh Provincial People's Committee (PPC) with the goal of contributing to improved livelihoods of the commercially active smallholders by enhancing the competitiveness of the agricultural and rural development sector in the province. The project design, while developed

within the context of provincial agriculture and rural development, focused on areas of interventions developed by the local Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). The timeframe was 5 years (2009 – 2014) and has been extended to a Phase 2 with further focuses on enhancing food safety, best farming practices and safe use of agriculture chemicals to achieve food safety[1].

Linking smallholders to markets provided considerable challenges in two main areas. The first is consideration of poverty reduction. Poor subsistence farmers with little access to land resources and or credit do not actively participate in markets. They sell small surpluses of production, and at times of pressing requirements for cash, they may sell livestock. In this process, they are price-takers rather than price-makers; in the markets they work in, they are opportunistic. Their ability to participate in efficient and effective supply chains is thus limited. The second major challenge is overall lack of business and marketing acumen, and the relative inability of government departments to assist in value adding and marketing (Cadilhon, Moustier, Poole, Tam, & Fearne, 2006; Weinberger, Genova Li, & Acedo, 2008). To address these challenges, the priority was commercially active poor farmers[2].

The project has been jointly executed by the PPC and the New Zealand Aid Programme (NZAP). DARD has been the implementing agency. Under this arrangement most project activities are expected to be executed by provincial departments and authorities with NZAP responsible for project supervision and technical backstopping.

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[1] This is pursuant to Decision 446/QD-UBND by the Provincial People's Committee of Binh Dinh regarding the implementation of the National Project for Food Safety for the period of 2011 – 2020.

[2] Poor commercially active smallholders, according to the project design documents, are defined as semi-commercial farmers, whose main cash income comes from the sale of agriculture products surplus to family needs, and where less than 50 per cent of the total value of agriculture production is sold.

In terms of external technical assistance, some project activities needed specific or advanced national expertise, either from within Binh Dinh Province or from within Vietnam. International technical assistance has been recruited under NZAP's technical advisor contracting guidelines and regulations.

1. Project beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries were from two main groups; (ii) rural households participating in target districts in target project sites; and, (ii) staff of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Project Implementation Teams (PITs), and staff from other provincial departments providing services to the project.

The target groups were the poor commercially active male and female farmers of Binh Dinh, who working in groups, have the potential to improve production, quality and diversity of product to meet well-defined market needs. Common Interest Groups (CIGs) of farmers were established as a focal point for production and quality improvement and as a means of supplying the volumes and continuity of supply required for successful marketing. With commercially active poor farmers as the main beneficiaries, particular care was taken in ensuring that the composition of CIGs included poor farmers and strategies for linking these farmers to markets through partnerships with more commercially active farmers developed and implemented.

According to the project completion report, as of March 2015, the project provided stable employment to 1,246 farmers within rural areas, in which 523 were women. These farmers' income has been 30 to 100 per cent higher than before the launching of the project. It has also provided significant rural employment opportunities in small and medium enterprises that have been developed or expanded as part of the project activities.

2. Project concepts

Project concepts are common notions or approaches shared by all the stakeholders participating in a project activity. The two concepts summarised below are particularly important to the project under discussion in this research.

2.1. Participatory approaches

The participatory approach underpinning this project departs from the top-down approach frequently employed in development practice in Vietnam. The traditional top-down approaches to community-based development in the country provide ideas and initiatives to local people uni-directionally. Project guidelines have sometimes been uninformed by knowledge of a local system or culture while there has been little scope for local people to share their opinions with project leaders during the planning and implementation stages of a project. The participatory approach used in BDSRLP attempted to reverse this process by encouraging the participation of local people in every aspect of project management. Local farmers were assisted by researchers and consultants, whose main role was to facilitate the participation of the local people by finding solutions they deemed acceptable.

2.2. The "project approach" of implementation

This initiative took a project approach to implementation. This enabled the phasing and timing of investments to match the development of skills, changes in the environment for adoption of interventions based on the likelihood of success of each intervention. It meant that progress in some components was faster than in others and that as project implementation continues there would

be a need to make timely decisions on the relative level of investment in each of the project interventions relevant to provincial rural development strategies.

Understanding the local situation and culture was considered vital to both the planning and implementation of this project. Identifying and planning effective project activities depended on a deep understanding of local realities and the needs and potential of the location. While the project management board and consultants were given the opportunity to learn the local situations, project beneficiaries were expected to be empowered to discuss what activities might be appropriate for each of the project components. To do this, several participatory tools were used including focus group discussions, farmers' field school and participatory workshops. These efforts to understand local contexts are ongoing and continue long after project interventions are delivered for extension in the next phase. This way, project activities remain flexible when new issues or concerns arise over the course of their implementation.

3. Project goals and objectives

The overall goal is to contribute to improved livelihoods of commercially active smallholders by enhancing the competitiveness of the agricultural and rural development sector in Binh Dinh province. The purpose of the project is to strengthen the capacity of provincial institutions and agri-business sector to implement market-led rural development activities to provide sustainable economic social and environmental benefits to poor commercially active smallholders. This is to be achieved by facilitating a shift from subsistence-based opportunistic selling to more market-led semi-commercial agricultural production systems. The change will be accomplished by (i) strengthening DARD knowledge and skills in agribusiness, market and supply/value chain development and technology; (ii) aligning product volume and quality/safety to meet market needs; (iii) mobilisation and cooperation between producers to plan and maintain ownership of product further up the supply chain; and (iv)

practical demonstration that together these intervention strategies provide financial benefits to farmers and economic benefits to the province.

The underlying theme to all project components has been the development of a greater level of understanding, knowledge and skills in the areas of agribusiness, supply chain management and marketing. This knowledge and the skills were improved both at the departmental level, and with targeted farmer groups. Development of these skills improved the likelihood of project sustainability and their application to non-project farm products and non-targeted districts in the future. The driver for change was the demonstration of improvement of production, quality and food safety and the economic, social and environmental benefits that accrue to the target groups in each component, rather than to try and implement change across all communes in all districts. Once successfully demonstrated the project sustainability strategy was destined for allocation and prioritisation of provincial and district resources on scaling up of successful market-led interventions.

III. Summary

This chapter has detailed the two big pictures of this research: the Vietnamese context of participatory development and an overview of the case study project. The first section sketched key and specific socio-political and cultural characteristics of Vietnam with a brief look into participatory practices, while the second section provided a close look into the agriculture sector of which the case study project helps strengthen using participatory approaches. By establishing the context and foundations for the research process, these pictures identify research gaps in the literature review of how participation has been advocated in Vietnam in practice. More theoretical justifications for the same purpose will be provided in the next chapter: the research methodology.

Chapter Four: Methodology

I.   Introduction

This chapter firstly explores the epistemology framework which has shaped the practicality of research questions. Secondly, I clarify aspects of my positionality and its implications. Thirdly, I review the selection and recruitment of participants. Fourthly, I explain my research design, integrating qualitative research and the consequent employment of a mixture of interpretive and reflective methods for data collection and narrative analysis. Lastly, I discuss the ethical aspects of my research and design limitations.

II.   Epistemological framework: social constructivism

Babbie (2015) argues that paradigms are often difficult to recognise because they are so implicit and taken for granted. Articulating a research paradigm is based on answering the following questions around ontology (how do we perceive the world), epistemology (what is possible to know about the world and how do we get to know it) and methodology (what tools do we use to interpret what we know)? Given my own culture and interest in culturally-embedded development practice, I have chosen to integrate social constructivism with my professional experience in constructing my research design.

Social constructivism posits that reality is socially constructed through relations, language and context (Burr, 2003). Consequently, it questions the existence of an objective truth. It argues that reality is relational, not subjective or objective, as reality is created in social processes in which people interact in a given context. This epistemology also values my subjective experience and practitioner engagement with research and accepts the existence of multiple

realities of rural communities in Vietnam shaped by historical and cultural norms (Creswell, 2013). My comprehensive understanding of Vietnamese rural communities and access granted by local officials have permitted me to interpret their realities in relation to power and their own practice of reflexivity in development fieldwork. As such, I attempt to question my own "ways of knowing", or at least, with my positionality, to critique objectivity as an "interpretation of the world of our immediate experience" (Angen, 2000, p. 386). Objectivity is, here, considered a myth and knowledge is situated (Dunn, 2005) and the researcher should be aware of his or her perspectives when claiming to know something (Haraway, 2013).

Walsh (2005, p. 89) asserts the decisions on methods for data collection arise directly from the "philosophy, ontological and epistemological assumptions, disciplinary orientation and paradigm of the researcher". In this research, the researcher wants to explore how participants "make sense of their social worlds (...) [and] the people's intentions, motivations and subjective experiences" (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 4). Understanding my own underlying philosophy has allowed me to make informed and subjective decisions relating to the methods I choose.

III.   Positionality and implications for research methodology

According to Scheyvens (2014, p. 7), the researcher exists along a continuum between "insider" and "outsider" extremes. Occupying one of these roles does not conform to strict categories; they can be negotiated. My supposed positionality in this research has been both as insider, and outsider because of my association with development stakeholders. The ability to move along either direction of the continuum is important in this research as it helps answer the question on how a development practitioner's reflexivity is negotiated.

Chacko (2004) asserts it should not be assumed that developing scholars based in Western universities will be able to return "home" to do research immune of issues of power relations and ethics. Therefore my positionality may have had certain impacts regarding power dimensions when I collected data. Nonetheless, these impacts meant I had to negotiate my positionality and reflect upon it in order to place myself as an outsider to understand reflexivity and positionality in doing qualitative field research from various perspectives.

According to Hopkins (2007), positionality or multiple positionalities have an influence on knowledge and understandings of ethical practices. My association with local development stakeholders, and my "insider" status, may have had almost no influence on international expats and community members that I talked to, due to the strong partnership we have built for a number of years in the field. On the other hand, my "outsider" positionality as someone who has come back to the province after a year studying in New Zealand could have been a disadvantage with government officials not willing to share perspectives about political aspects of their work (Chacko, 2004). In general, I foresaw that I would have to try to position myself neutrally when interviewing my peers as other staff members of public sector, development NGOs and rural householders. This positionality did not detract from the validity of my research. On the contrary, it enabled me to understand the data with depth (May & Perry, 2011).

Furthermore, doing field research as a male researcher might be both challenging and straightforward at the same time when discussing my positionality. First, being a male researcher in Vietnam may influence the approach to participants and their responses. For example, Scott, Miller, and Lloyd (2006) noted that in Vietnam, being female researchers facilitated easy rapport with female respondents yet resulted in far less when socialising with males. On the same note, Smith (2006, p. 143) noticed a negotiation of the female researcher's positionality depending on whom she was interacting with when doing field work in Asia, as she "gained perhaps greater access than a

male researcher, who would have had access to male domains but only limited access to female domains". I argue that, since the interviews do not refer directly to gender, this positioning as a male gives me a specific understanding on gender issues and therefore would enrich my subjective experiences which are essential in a social constructivist epistemology as part of my learning process.

As Murray and Overton (2014, p. 25) point out, the researcher's position during fieldwork may "fall-out" naturally as the research project and the questions on the positionality of development practitioners when practising reflexivity become clearer. This has inspired me to veer away from an inflexible framework in embarking on this study.

IV.   Research location, case study site and recruitment of participants

1. Research location and case study site

Most of my field research took place in the province of Binh Dinh in central Vietnam where local culture has played an important part in the design and delivery of development interventions. The research context of the Binh Dinh Sustainable Livelihoods Project – Linking Poor Rural Households to Markets (BDSRLP) forms the basis of a case study on how facilitators and beneficiaries negotiate their participation.

The location of this study was primarily chosen due to my personal links to the province. Having working experiences with local communities was a strong motivating factor for situating this study in the province. Practical concerns have also been taken into account as I have had a good support network and rapport already in the province where I communicated straightforwardly with my participants. Issues of time, money and the scope of a master's research

project having to be completed within a year also have restricted the research to the single location.

The case study approach has the advantage of narrowing the topic of participatory development practice into a smaller, more manageable size and gives a specific example of the reflexive practice in real-life (Yin, 2013). In-depth knowledge of an individual example is sometimes more helpful than fleeting knowledge about a larger number of examples (Gerring, 2006). By focusing on the development implications of BDSRLP, a deeper understanding of the development implications of how international practitioners practice reflexivity will be made.

2. Participants: a reciprocal relationship

I selected thirteen key players in the case study project who participated on a voluntary basis. They included three international development practitioners representing their development agencies, three local consultants, two government officials and five community members of different ages and genders.

My interest in selecting these participants grew out of previous engagements with them. This selection reflects the arguments of Bondi (2005) and Bennett (2009) that in order for a researcher to understand the experiences of participants, he or she must first engage in their emotional environment and be aware of positionality, feelings and emotions vis-à-vis the participants. In this way, a strong trust relationship was built wherein I could identify with the experiences of the participants, being reflexive and empathetic.

To maintain a good level of participation in my research, I saw it as imperative for me to foster reciprocal relationships with participants through the sharing of research data (Overton, 2013). This I hoped would ensure that any

knowledge created in the course of the research was a result of participation, and generated through non-exploitative processes (Louis, 2007). For Escobar (1995), development discourse has been constructed to legitimise the voice of Western experts and undermine those of local participants.

The goal of interviews and observations was to establish a set of themes based on different perceptions of community and participatory development practice and examine how different actors negotiate their participation and reflexivity as necessary to achieve good development outcomes. Then, disparities and similarities in data gained from interviews were explored to reveal power dynamics between different development stakeholders from development agencies, government officials and the community. The aim of such an approach was to promote conversation between participants and myself to draw out information that is meaningful to the case study project, while still being relevant to broader research questions.

In particular, after finalisation of my research proposal, I began communicating with international and local facilitators through emails since April 2015 to seek approvals and arrange schedules for interviewing. I confirmed with them my research focus and that the field research would take place in June and July 2015. I also consulted with them about their interest in taking part in the research. By mid-May I was able to confirm a list of respondents.

This initial stage strengthened the relationship I had already built over the years working side-by-side with them in local development projects. With community members, I spread my wish to interview and they happily agreed to take part. This stage also helped define some expectations and began the process of collective reflections.

V. Research design and Methodology

1. The amalgam of qualitative and interpretive methods

A direct consequence of the social constructivist epistemology was the selection of a qualitative emphasis and an interpretative auto-ethnographic framework that employed reflective practice as a means for generating data from personal experience. While a qualitative methodology enabled a more equal conversation to take place where power could be negotiated in ways that was not generally considered or thought possible in more quantitative approaches (Barnes, 2000), interpretive methodologies were also grounded in a constructivist epistemology and had an emphasis on the analysis of constructions of meaning, of the ways people make sense of their everyday activities and surroundings (Mottier, 2005). Given the nature of the research subject, it was necessary to employ qualitative methodological research to attempt to describe, understand and interpret the experiences of local communities culled from the words and narratives of select informants (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative data collection methods often entail immersion into the world of the participants and allow the researcher to become, to some extent, an insider and to discover the culture and world view of the social actors' taking part (Creswell, 2013). As noted earlier, the long term relationship I have had with local participants has enabled me to easily slip into the role of a "temporary insider" for this research.

Merriam (2014) asserts that a case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis, hence all methods of gathering data from testing to interviewing can be used. Enacting this amalgam of methods involved use of various reflective research methods that employed selective and interpretive lenses.

2. Data collection

2.1. Ethics

First, this research was reviewed to receive ethics clearance through the Human Ethics Committee at Victoria University of Wellington. Written consent was sought from all participants, including written consent to allow voice recording of the interview. My first anticipation was that in certain situations, verbal consent may be required as several farmers as key participants have limited levels of literacy but that did not happen. All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. All agreed to be referred to by a coding abbreviation to maintain their confidentiality, but were happy that I should use the project name as it is a good case study of participation.

Second, regarding ethical concerns for implementation of the semi-structured interviews as outlined in the previous section, I considered the initial briefing for participants about the interview and ethics an essential exercise which informed quality research outcomes, and thus for the subsequent quality of the data (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Therefore, each interview started with a short briefing which covered fundamental ethics, including the rights of informed consent, the right of free choice, rights of privacy and confidentiality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

2.2. Semi-structured interviews

This research used of semi structured in-depth interviews to enable development practitioners to define Reflexivity as how they understand themselves and are understood in relation to others (Eyben, 2014). Semi-structured interviews balanced the need for a certain degree of rigour of data while allowing participants to better reflect their own realities. Other than

that, this method brought good opportunities for the participants to participate and drive the research process (Bryman, 2012).

To familiarise participants with the concept of reflexivity, first I needed to come up with an explanation of the term itself. Until recently, there has been no agreed equivalent to *reflexivity* in Vietnamese language. The most connected translation in Vietnamese for the terminology is found in the part of speech of the adjective, *reflexive*, or ***phản thân***, which is commonly used in teaching grammar of foreign languages to Vietnamese learners, eg., ***reflexive pronouns*** (English) and ***reflexive verben*** (German). ***Phản thân,*** however, has its two elements originally derived from the Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary which gives way to a possibility that this term had itself been translated into Chinese before it was translated into Vietnamese. My translation of the term *reflexivity* into Vietnamese was for the purpose of interviewing, hence basically built on the familiarity of the non-English-speaking interviewees[3] to the adjective of ***phản thân***. Through discussions on reflexivity with interviewees, it was necessary to elaborate this translation using a "confusing array of terms" and experiences (Kondrat, 1999; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The semi-structured format allowed me to pose particular questions while also enabling more open-ended conversations. In line with the narrative analysis approach, my effort was to gather stories without limiting participants' freedom to share and discuss issues or ideas. In particular, I asked participants to share perspectives around my research questions, including their understandings of power, how emotions and cultures might shape development practice, major impacts of local culture on the level of participation demonstrated by project stakeholders and so on.

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[3] Of the thirteen interviewees, only eight of them speak English and four of these are native English speakers.

Specifically, I carried out interviews with around thirteen participants as the main method of data collection of the research. As outlined in the selection of participants, these participants represented three groups of a community project of stakeholders. I believe this selection justified a good spread of development partners, including international and local facilitators and community members. Although through initial communication, participants seemed willing to share their perspectives, conversations generally took long periods of time. I was highly aware that my participants were busy and their time was valuable.

I was aware that for this activity, it was just as important to interview the community members as it was to interview international experts and government officials. When using interpretive methods to find out how participants interpret events in real-life development practice and how they negotiate their power, this criteria obviously made different realities of participants equal and undiscriminating (Mikkelsen, 2005).

The foremost consideration before each interview was options for interview locations. For most participants, interviews were carried out in their work places. Even though I was determined to be as flexible as possible to locations of participants' choice, this spatial perspective was important to identify participants as the "hosts" so they felt free of power constraints or domination, thus it strengthened my positionality as a field researcher wishing to create a sense of participation (Kindon et al., 2007, pp. 22-24).

In a similar vein, Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) pointed out that by briefing the participants about the purpose of interviews and aspects around ethics, the participants will become more comfortable. For my case, I began each interview with introducing my research and myself. Interview questions were flexible and merely prompted more stories and reflections. The goal of interviews was to establish a set of themes based on different perceptions of community and participatory development practice and to examine how

different actors negotiated their participation and reflexivity as necessary to achieve good development outcomes.

This process included an interview schedule and list of questions constructed around a core of standard predetermined questions. For each interview, I asked around seven or ten guiding questions to different groups of participants depending on the varied perceptions of each respondent on specific concepts such as reflexivity, power and cultural impacts on participatory development. This remained a methodological limitation because there is no fixed and proper translation for each term. To overcome this, key questions were structured around three main themes of analysis: Power, Reflexivity and Cultural impacts which may bring about a negotiation of the two former themes (Figure 4.1).

Semi-structured interview themes

Theme 1: Power

1. Please tell me about your reflections on how power is exercised in the project.
2. Please tell me about a time in the project when you felt a sense of powerlessness.
3. How well do you think local and international facilitators negotiate their power in the project?

Theme 2: Reflexivity

1. How would you define reflexivity?
2. How do you practice reflexivity in your work?
3. What are some of the benefits or challenges associated with being reflexive?
4. Do you think being reflexive is about an individual or collective exercise of power?
5. If reflexivity is about "how emotions and cultures might shape development practice", how do you negotiate between different sets of cultures to enhance project implementation?

Theme 3: Cultural impacts on participatory development work

1. How would you describe your experience of working cross-culturally in Vietnam?
2. What strategies do you employ to navigate your cross-cultural work?
3. What are features of local culture that allow you to exercise your power in the project?
4. How would you describe the major impacts of local culture on the level of participation demonstrated by other project stakeholders?

Figure 4.1. Semi-structured interview themes

I also foresaw that during the course of the interviews, it might become necessary to make changes on the interview questions or add new ones to the questionnaire as the need arose. To reduce this risk, most questions were open-ended and the respondents were asked for facts as well as opinions. In this approach, the open-ended questions were used as a guide, rather than a prescription. I was able to foresee that the time spent with participants would be more conversational in tone and the length of the interview would not be fixed, rather it responded to the realities faced by the participants. Such interviews are highly appropriate in Vietnamese cultures as they give participants a place to start but are not prescriptive in where the participant might go in their response. Refreshments were provided during discussions and interviews.

2.3. Observations

Essentially, observations helped me become familiar "again" (at the time of doing the interviews, I had been away for over a year) with the social and power landscape of my research context. As mentioned previously, I was continuously negotiating my positionality between the "insider" and the "outsider" extremes (Scheyvens, 2014), therefore I anticipated a constant state of reflexive inquiry. Keeping detailed journals about my observations was how I recorded my own negotiation of positionality. This particular technique will be clarified later in this chapter.

According to Gray (2013), the approach of participant observation originated from anthropological research and usually involves intensive study carried out over a long period of time. However, the time for participant observation in my research was relatively short, as I made a total of three field visits to interview community members and only five interviews were conducted with other government officials and local facilitators at their work places. This

aspect of field work was also important for rapport-building for more effective interviews.

Besides interviews, observations helped me vastly to "get a feel" for the participation environment when I made a trip to the communities to interview. McGregor (2006) describes journal writings as useful analytical tools for the researcher to think through the recorded issues. For this purpose, I kept a journal where I wrote down all thoughts as a diary, observations, intentions and impressions related to my field work. Observations were conducted informally and varied according to site conditions and time constraints. The large part of my observations was written up after they were concluded, as I anticipated challenges to taking notes unobtrusively and without interrupting my observations.

3. Data analysis: thematic coding and auto-ethnography

A critical aspect for consideration of doing semi-structured interviews is data validity. In qualitative research, the validity of data relies heavily on the quality of interaction and the depth achieved (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004) which also rely on the researcher's conversation skills and being reflexive and often as much about the relationship formed as the information shared (May & Perry, 2011).

Data analysis was an ongoing event that was developed and crystalised over my research timeframe. In analysing the data collected from the interviews, data was interpreted and coded in relation to my research questions. In particular, interviews were transcribed and transcripts were analysed and grouped thematically. The themes and quotes from these interviews formed the basis of the findings. Together with my reflections written in my journal, these have been useful for me to identify other gaps in the literature and answer questions that arose during participant observation. I also wrote down

my reflections on every participant. During the interviews, I asked participants whether the meaning of what they were trying to convey matched the meaning I made from my interpretation. Disparities and similarities in data gained from the interviews were analysed to reveal power dynamics between different development stakeholders from development agencies, government officials and the community.

Within the general scope of qualitative research, researchers examine their research subjects in their natural settings as they interpret phenomena and the meaning people attach to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative researchers also "are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience" (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992, p. 4). I complemented this with the analytical approach of auto-ethnography to put into words my experiences and critical reflections.

The selection of auto-ethnography was largely due to the fact I had been studying the concept and practice of reflexivity and my approach for constructing knowledge from my subjective experience. Moreover, this reflective methodology is by all means supported by the social constructivist epistemology as outlined earlier (Angen, 2000; Burr, 2003; Dunn, 2005). This method assisted my data analysis process in two ways: (1) to interpret my reflections and observations as a personal and self-reflexive learning experience; and (2) to develop my critical thinking as I interpreted different realities of negotiation in the context and culture of my research location; and (3) to learn from this analytical process and share my findings with others.

Firstly, my aim was to live my research and to learn from it as a practitioner who shared his learning and experiences with others. Writing myself in as a development practitioner alongside my participants made my own experiences a topic of investigation in their own right (Ellis, 2004) and helped me study the culture of the community through the lens of the "self" within the social context (Panourgia, 2000). Acknowledging the simple definition of reflexivity

as "how we understand ourselves and are understood in relations to others" (Eyben, 2014), the way I understood myself informed what I wrote and how I constructed meanings (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008). My interpretation of my field observations created understandings of who I was in relationship with others, hence it was a reflexive practice. In general, the interpretive form of auto-ethnography places the researcher as a subject and knowledge interpreter (Mottier, 2005).

Secondly, as I was narrating my reflections within a culturally-embedded development context, I was inseparable from this context and culture. Using auto-ethnography enabled me to use my lived experiences reflexively as a way of looking critically at the interactions between the "self" and the "others" and how these partners negotiated their power in development practice (Lockford, 2002; Ellis, 2004). In this way, it brought me into dialogue with how participants were negotiating their participation, power and reflexivity in practice.

VI.   Summary

This chapter explored the qualitative methodology of the researcher's social constructivist perspective and its consequence as a combination of qualitative and interpretive methods. It explained the rationale for examining different perspectives and understandings of key concepts and how different Western and local facilitators would practice reflexively alongside their work. As much as revisions were made to interview questions during interviews, this chapter justifies how further subsequent conclusions drawn on the findings will complement existing literature of reflexivity and participatory development practice.

As a narrative researcher, I analysed the perspectives provided in interviews as well as the stories lived, remembered and recorded in my journals. As

mentioned, because data analysis should be an ongoing event, it involved a consistent process of writing, reading and re-reading journals and interview notes. A result of this process saw general themes of results were identified, crystalised and connected to the literature (Feilzer, 2010). This corresponds to the belief of Richardson and St Pierre (2008) that through reflexive means of inquiry, the researcher understands the "self" and the process of meaning constructions.

Chapter Five: Perspectives of participants

I.   Introduction

This chapter illustrates how participation is negotiated by key development actors in the case study project. It shows that the contemporary approach for the BDSRLP is not framed or executed independently from the different goals, interests, ambitions, cultures and management styles of participating development agencies, the Vietnamese government and beneficiaries at many levels. Indeed it shows how the different logics and the contingent practice of national and international experts, practitioners and officials are constantly translated into power through a process of negotiation.

Looking at participation in this way, my aim for this chapter is to examine the central themes of: (1) trust and rapport, (2) facilitation, (3) local culture and (4) reflexivity. To date these aspects of participation have located power too vaguely in the hands of Western donors and their voices (in many cases, consultants), or in the government so that they have become abstracted from local beneficiaries most affected by political and economic development interventions. This misrepresentation of the locus of power conceals the subtle social networks built on trust, the diverse roles of actors, brokers, cultural perspectives and interests behind participation. In reality, attending to participation should also prioritise understandings and practices which unfold in the contingent and compromised space of culture (Li, 1999). In what follows, this space will be examined through the forms of negotiation of participation highlighted by participants through their semi-structured interviews. Particular attention is given to how power was exercised by different project stakeholders.

II. Trust

Trust is fundamental to the building of participation (Sillitoe, 2010). While a project structure refers to social practices, organisations, or groups that play a role in participation and capacity building, it also refers to the relationships among these groups. Some of these social practices and organisations may have a limited role. Therefore, to establish participation, new forms of organisation need to be built and/or existing ones expanded in their performance. In the context of the case study project, some participants talked about this dimension of trust building in the following ways:

> *The big step was to introduce the F(armer) D(iscussion) G(roup) concept. (International consultant 3[4], Interview, June 23, 2015)*

> *We have come to realise that the establishment of the C(ommon) I(nterests) G(roup)s really has formed the core of good participation and success for the project. (Local consultant 2[5], Interview, June 26, 2015)*

However, building trust was critical among each group of participants. It seems common and reasonable that development assistance is often given to marginalised groups. But these groups may lack in-group trust, or may not have a tradition of working collectively to reach certain development objectives. This facet of building trust is critical, yet it can be compromised when the selected communities are key beneficiaries with satisfactorily established in-group trust and familiarisation of participatory approaches from their participation in projects of a similar nature. A government official described this nature as follows:

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[4] About International consultant 3 (IC3): Male, an agriculture specialist, lived and worked in Vietnam and engaged in participatory training for over ten years.

[5] About Local consultant 2 (LC2): Female, an agriculture specialist and government official also working as the local technical consultant for various community projects in the province.

> *Because they [CIG farmers] are key people and they are trained. So they see the overlapping interventions and become fed up with being participants of the projects (Government official 1[6], Interview, June 26, 2015)*

The official continued that negotiation would happen first and foremost, usually at the project design stage when the government held the power to recommend target communities to donors:

> *The negotiation for this selection at the project design was smooth, as it was also the expectation of the donors to select potential participants and sites too, so successful interventions would be extended. So they were happy with the recommendations of local bodies [the provincial government and/or DARD] after both sides reached an agreement on the indicators for selection. For this step, specifically the local bodies were more powerful. (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015)*

Often as facilitators of similar participatory projects the consultants knew that the quality of social relationships was essential for participation and successful small-holder development interventions. In fact, friendships, trust, and belief in the willingness to share and make use of project resources were integral to collective action. This was perceived by a local consultant when she told me:

> *Remember power has the ability to reverse itself. Farmers show their power, if you are not convincing, by sitting there and smoking. Some go home. So being a friend, building trust is the first thing… [M]ake*

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[6] About Government official 1 (GO1): Male and involved in various development projects in the province with experiences of delivering participatory training and facilitating community development for over twenty years.

them believe, because in Binh Dinh, belief is the key to participation.
(LC1[7], Interview, June 23, 2015)

Trust and friendship, when built on relevant cultural norms, can also be evaluated as a form of social capital for community development. In a broader sense, this form of capital is often correlated with confidence in public institutions, civic engagement, self-reliant economic development, and overall community well-being and happiness (Phillips & Pittman, 2008; Green & Haines, 2015). Social capital can also be integrated into development initiatives. According to Harris (2001) and Luong (2003), crucial social capital to support rural livelihoods is relatively low in Vietnam as well as in other Third World development settings. The case study revealed that social capital had been built through local customs of rapport building. These were more than just a group of participants sharing drinks at lunchtime:

As friends we wanted to know each other and I think it was less formal: having a few drinks and joking and laughing, then the next time we all felt comfortable. Building rapport is part of the teaching of the F(armers) D(iscussion) G(roup) concept. (IC3, Interview, June 23, 2015)

[T]he drinking part is very culturally specific to Vietnam. I am still not sure whether there are any achievements from it at all. It was certainly a big help in bonding… (IC2[8], Interview, June 22, 2015)

Of course, you have to do a little bit of that drinking, otherwise you're not seen as normal… I don't like that hard alcohol as I drank it anyway because it is important to do so. I am always conscious of

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[7] About Local consultant 1 (LC1): Female, a government official also working as the local technical consultant for various community projects in the province.

[8] About International consultant 2 (IC2): Male, an agriculture specialist, lived and worked in Vietnam for nearly ten years.

making sure I am following protocol to a point. I won't drink raw blood, no matter what. Or eat dog meat. I even had duck blood with farmers, only a tiny bit, it was ok but it's not really what I like doing. (IC1[9], Interview, June 21, 2015)

There are certain times that newcomers find it hard to become part of the whole. He [the international consultant] had to negotiate with himself. For example, local farmers would offer a consultant some half-hatched duck eggs at dinner. At first he was scared, but we insisted and he attempted to try and even have a sip of local vodka. A nice try after all, to become like one of us. In fact, after that he told us that was a good adaptation to a new culture. And the other way around, our farmers will need to observe and be adaptive to his culture. On New Year's Day, we offered the consultants some other local dishes but they couldn't take, so we needed to learn that and would not insist later on. (CM1[10], Interview, June 27, 2015)

Because Vietnamese people strongly distinguish between in-group and out-group relations, they are not often willing to open their inner world to outsiders or newcomers since out-group situations increase the concerns for self-face (Oetzel, 1999; Vu & Napier, 2000; Nguyen, 2015). Consequently, fieldwork, facilitation and data collection might become more effective in informal situations in cultural contexts in Vietnam if trust is built through sharing alcohol and local foods. Facilitators and those new to local cultures will have to negotiate with themselves about the extent to which they are able to leave their comfort zones to create opportunities for participants to build

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[9] About International consultant 1 (IC1): Male, safe vegetable expert and professional development practitioner, working in Asia for over 10 years.

[10] About Community member 1 (CM1): Male, has a university degree on business administration, a manager of a local agriculture cooperative in the province and running the safe vegetable enterprise which receives BDSRLP support.

trust through shared activities. Several participants spoke of the need for this informality in trust building.

Not long ago we were guided to complete farm diaries. The workshop was tense because farmers did not agree with the approach and know how to complete certain things. It was almost sunset and the meeting was not over, even after we had a coffee break to discuss the issues less formally. Then we suggested to resume after dinner, and he [the consultant] was happy. At night there were more of us and he seemed to be better at explaining, and we got the problem solved. At times when it seemed stressful for everyone, both sides had to compromise to come to a "play and learn" approach. Sing a song, for example... (CM3[11], Interview, June 27, 2015)

So it was never a formal occasion and it's all about building trust and keeping it small. As soon as you get to a big meeting, you deal with a lot people who possibly don't know you. As soon as the suit and tie go on, it's the time you can kiss results goodbye. (IC2, Interview, June 22, 2015)

Here in Vietnam as a consultant you need to be aware of the formal and informal ways of facilitation. Technical workshops and meetings are more of the formal way of facilitation, while there are other informal facets of facilitation, I mean, knowledge and skills can also be transferred during a coffee break or meals you have with the participants. But the formal approach is mainstream and takes place most of the time due to the familiarity of people to the "class-room" way of facilitating a workshop or meeting. (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)

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[11] About Community member 3 (CM3): Female, full-time farmer and vegetable grower.

Mattessich, Monsey, and Roy (1997) identified three leading factors to successful community work, including characteristics of: (1) the community, with an emphasis on local culture, (2) a trust building process, focusing on the reciprocal relationship of trust and mutual understanding of the facilitators and the target communities, and (3) a facilitator who has flexibility and adaptability to constantly changing situations and environments. In the case study, these factors were fundamental to processes of negotiation, enhancing trust between consultants and community members:

> *In Vietnam, sometimes people are looking for "what's this guy going to do to me?" and when you try to help someone, you'll be looking for "what am I going to hurt them with?" People don't take it as "all help", and "there must be a reason he's doing this". No one gives you anything for nothing. That is when you need information situations to build the trust (IC2, Interview, June 22, 2015)*

The above examples demonstrate the importance of embodied negotiations which build trust towards worthwhile development efforts. Most participants asserted that in-group and out-group agreements lead to a commitment to implement changes and a positive working relationship that supported long-term development initiatives. Despite the strong influence of Confucianism and other cultural values that might restrain participation, building trust stimulated a climate of reciprocity in which beneficiaries of development interventions were more likely to share the benefits within their wider community. The next section contextualises the facet of facilitation within other examples of the negotiation of participation from the case study.

III. Facilitation

Development practice is contingent on power imbalances that are often unavoidable because of the different backgrounds, life histories, living

standards and levels of education experienced by development practitioners and different stakeholders. Participatory development aims to address these uneven power dynamics through the use of facilitators (Connell, 1997). In a more challenging way, the development practitioner – facilitator has to shape development work through "an active and equitable partnership between rural people, researchers and extensionists" (Scoones & Thompson 1994, 61), which has to be, according to Escobar (1998), re-fashioned to serve particular cultures and places. This section discusses how facilitation can influence cultural norms in development practice.

While participation along the continuum (Figure 2.1) (Pretty et al., 1995) will be reflected better in the next chapter, here I focus on the levels of functional participation and interactive participation because of their relevance to the case study where facilitation attempts to promote such types of participation. Accordingly, with the established groups of participants, functional participation and interactive participation were enabled to meet predetermined objectives related to the development project. Cornwall (2008) stated, this is probably the most common type of participation in development to increase project efficiency and reduce costs. These types of participation, I would assert, are particularly relevant to describe participation in the case study, with the establishment of the Common Interest Groups (CIGs) and local institutions. Two characteristics of these types of participation are worth expanding to explain how the negotiation of participation is facilitated in the case study.

First, the involvement of people does not tend to be at the early stages of project cycle or planning, but rather after major decisions have been made. This point reflects the case study, when in most cases, local bodies and consultants have the power and take initiatives to rather "recommend and select" project beneficiaries at the first place, even when the approach was deemed as a "bottom-up" rather than a "top-down" one. The reflections of a local consultant are illustrative of this point.

It relies heavily on the project design. For example, we just worked on a survey on demands for sustainable livelihoods in afforestation areas. We were using a more bottom-up approach rather a top-down one. There are two approaches for this project. First, you could work with the district people's committee and their functional divisions will be consulted to decide what is best for the community. So they ended up recommending about ten options for livelihoods models. Then you held a meeting with communal levels to discuss these models. One commune for example would decide on about five models while another decided on three. Then you consulted with the community, asking them if they would recommend any other models besides the eight. The community groups of around 30-50 people would then recommend as they wished, then voted. And sometimes of the eight models, only one was voted. And another was recommended. So you have two models to go. So as technical consultants, we must be involved actively and analysed these two models to report to the district. Then the implementation plan is developed. And normally, if consultation happens like that using that approach, it is so advantageous for local participation, as farmers would be selected right at the beginning. (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)

Second, institutions tend to depend on external initiators or facilitators but may become self-dependent. To discuss power relations between provincial bodies and external agents, including international consultants and facilitators in the case study, this point reveals that, even when local bodies have the power during project design, they have to negotiate it because they depend on the facilitators in the selection of project beneficiaries.

[I]t is important that we could choose the farmers at the beginning. Because we were doing trials, then if it worked, we would extend it

to other areas in the province. We were not aiming at bringing the impacts in the whole provincial scale originally. So consultants were effective to help us develop indicators for the selection of participants and sites, and identify types of interventions (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015)

But if something is designed externally and it's imposed on somebody who didn't really have a say on how it was going to be implemented and what their roles might be, then you can expect things to not be harmonious as they could be. But thinking culturally about these things, of course we know that Vietnam is a country that's transitioning from a very top-down process into one that's more capitalistic if you like, and the old and the new are coming to conflict at some times things don't change as quickly as possible because the people looking after the old things don't have the capacity to make those changes. (IC1, Interview, June 21, 2015)

Local bodies are sometimes incapable of developing indicators for selecting project participants. Thus, power in this facilitation process is held by donors and external facilitators. This is pertinent to the three dimensions of power in relationships identified by Larmour (2002) in aid conditionality. The first dimension of power is the ability of one side (local bodies) to get the other side (the facilitator) to do something it might not otherwise do. The second dimension is the ability to control the agenda: the donor/external agents and the facilitator decide what is important and should be talked about and what is unimportant and should not be talked about as indicators for selecting project participants. The third dimension is the facilitator's use of power as ideology or the ability to control thoughts and desires when they discuss project objectives with the target communities.

Thoughts shared by different interviewees show another controversial aspect affecting how facilitators build relationships with project participants and

other stakeholders: time. Issues of time and length of the consultants' inputs are important in a culturally-embedded development context, especially when a project covers sensitive topics. Without time, it is challenging for a facilitator to begin honest dialogues (Gardner, 2003). Considering that the project's financial budget is sometimes limited for "paying the consultant's time", several consultants shared their opinions as follows:

That was my biggest disappointment and frustration that I couldn't handle (…) because my time here was always seven or eight days. I was here, working on a few files, suggesting a few things, make a new activity plan and I was gone. I actually felt that my local counterpart from DARD would have loved me to stay for two weeks and work with him, and done these things together. It's not that he's not capable but sometimes after leaving, I left him doing these things by himself and that was very disappointing in that sense. I felt unfulfilled in that way. (IC1, Interview, June 21, 2015)

We see that the consultants' inputs are normally not long enough to work with our farmers, to make us participate better. (CM5[12], Interview, June 27, 2015)

If you are new to Vietnam, short inputs are a waste of time. (IC3, Interview, June 23, 2015)

Perspectives of government officials on limited investments of time for the "fly-in, fly-out" consultants were somehow contradictory:

I think for development projects in Vietnam in general, international consultancy would be essential only when the expertise we need in

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[12] About Community member 5 (CM5): Male, an accountant of a local agriculture cooperative in the province and running the safe vegetable enterprise which receives BDSRLP support.

very new and complicated. Otherwise it is too costly. And I have seen in many cases, the consultants need too much time to familiarise themselves with local culture and legislations before they really work on the interventions. They don't make use of available sources of background information, which is not reasonable. (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015)

When he [the international consultant] spent most of his time to collect data and recommend challenging, unrealistic tasks, it cut down his inputs in time and there were not enough knowledge as well as resources to carry out what he recommended. So we ended up having some disagreements. (GO2[13], Interview, June 28, 2015)

From the range of perspectives, it is challenging to ensure sufficient time and key players will need to negotiate the necessary amount of time and budget to enable the consultants to be more culturally competent and realistic with task priorities (Ottier, 2005). This also leads me to question the cultural competency of development practitioners in promoting participation. Many have argued that development professionals should function as cultural brokers in order to facilitate participatory development. Based on the perspectives shared by different development actors in the case study, I would assert that, while cultural competency is essential to facilitate participation, cultural brokerage in development practice is negotiated.

According to Bicker et al. (2003), the facilitator may be the only representative who is seen as both a direct stakeholder and better able to adapt to cultural differences. The facilitator, also often assuming the role of the broker, is expected to translate new values of development into comprehensible terms for project beneficiaries and the surrounding society, whilst maintaining

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[13] About Government official 2 (GO2): Female, involved in various community development projects in the province.

existing values of local culture and knowledge. These expectations arise so that project resources can be mobilized for effective facilitation planning, as mentioned by a government official in his story below:

Facilitation is actually not challenging, if we consider as much as possible all the cultural and traditional aspects of the community. It needs detailed planning and caution when we do it. Each commune and village has traditionally followed a different agenda for agriculture production and harvesting, for example. Their target crops are different. Also the lifestyles can be different. Their kids go to school at different times of the year. You know in flooding areas, schools start earlier in the year. So you need to consider those local aspects. These are difficult, sometimes extremely difficult as you need to take those into account when encouraging local participation. And if you identify these aspects accurately, facilitation is very likely to succeed, and so is the project (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015).

Bicker et al. (2003) also identified the following qualities required of a facilitator to work in the three-way complexity of power relations: (1) to be the most neutral participant; (2) to have the greatest command of both local and outside knowledges; and (3) to be best able to mediate knowledge and cultural conflicts.

Towards this end of minimising power imbalances, within the case study project, it was critical for the facilitator to assist in the negotiation of participatory methodology, since the project's participatory nature required consideration of local culture, knowledge and wishes of local people. However, the local government or the donor did not necessarily support this requirement, as mentioned by one of the local consultants who told me:

In Vietnam, planning is still of a top-down approach and what we call participatory approach has still been mentioned as a formality.

It is not really the government which manipulates this top-down way, it is also the donor and project implementators who have the power to provide directives to how participatory a project should be. (LC3[14], Interview, June 27, 2015)

The complexity of the negotiation process was claimed to be "unavoidable" by a government official:

Having said about the importance of local features, usually negotiation is unavoidable. Consultants and donors are more used to working with larger scale of interventions while the local needs are of much smaller scales, so we need to effectively discuss and update for donors. And the saying we have Vietnam, "nine people have ten ideas" describes this negotiation process well. (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015)

Popular understandings of participatory techniques and tools such as PRA depend on facilitators understanding the cultural and political contexts, and the previous history of participatory work in their project locations. Some believe these techniques and tools are put into practice as an innovation applicable for developing countries. For others, it is associated with Western development agencies, as requested by donors, and compared negatively with indigenous participatory practices. In contexts such as Vietnam, the meanings and practices associated with participatory techniques are embedded with traditional values and practices, as one local consultant illustrated in her "black-pig" story:

And the consultations or interviews at the community would bring so many lessons to the technical consultant. For example, if the district

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[14] About Local consultant 3 (LC3): Male, freelance technical consultant, involved in various development projects throughout Vietnam for over 20 years.

recommends a model of black pig production, and as it is a new livelihoods model, farmers will say "yes" initially. But when you interview them, it turns out the black pigs are not suitable for such a model, because on a day of a death anniversary for example, one or two pigs would be killed for cooking. And it's not profitable if they raise pigs for commercial purposes like that. It's the culture and it has impacts on the livelihoods. So we suggest rice cropping instead of livestocks, because in this area famine happens six months a year. The community will also say yes, and we also say yes, after a lot of discussions. It means there must be some interactions and participation enforced by the technical knowledge so farmers accept the idea before a project is really implemented. (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)

In various cases, the facilitator would view and use participatory approaches as practical tools for delivering specific project outcomes, including project design and planning. In this thesis, they represent differences between the Western and Vietnamese way of development thinking:

I think we all welcome new development concepts from the West, but these concepts are not always acceptable in Vietnam, since the greatest effort has been to care about how local participants are struggling to earn their daily incomes. In the West it is different because farmers there are more financially secured. Local incomes of farmers are still low because it is the conflict of long term versus short-term benefits which constrains the process of participation of local farmers. Even when they understand the desired development goals. This is where negotiations happen most frequently, at both the planning and implementation stages of the projects. (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015)

These differences imply the facilitator has to negotiate "the gap between East and West" through practices of reflexivity when introducing participatory approaches to community development:

> *I always think of how East and West can meet in certain aspects and be critical upon each other. I guess that is my focus of negotiation and my individual process of thinking reflexively. This might be because I used to work as an interpreter too, and I have seen that bridging the gap between East and West is important. Thinking reflexively makes me learn from the reality that East and West are so different (LC3, Interview, June 27, 2015)*

Participation is not only functional and/or interactive as demonstrated by the case study project, but negotiated through facilitation. This negotiation process reflects Larmour's third dimension of power that the facilitator might use power as the ability to control thoughts and desires when discussing project objectives with the target local communities and introducing Western understandings about participation. Cooke and Kothari (2001, p. 14) argue that participatory development is tyrannical as it may foster "illegitimate and/or unjust uses of power". I agree with this because their sentiments relate to how differently the facilitators in the case study shaped their development work under constraints of local culture. In the culturally-embedded context of Vietnam, the negotiation process employed by consultants as development facilitators is inevitable. The fundamental question relating to key dimensions of local culture and how these initiate a negotiation of participation will be examined in the next section.

IV. Aspects of local culture

While the research questions did not ask specifically about local culture, many participants referred to it when discussing other aspects of participation and

facilitation in the project. This section explores two cultural dimensions: firstly a discussion of aspects of local culture from the perspective of the Western and Vietnamese interviewees to show how they comprehend the relationship between culture and participation; and secondly, a consideration of aspects of culture which were thought to constrain or enable participation. Views on culture arguably encompass and affect how development practitioners perceive cross-cultural facilitation and consultancy and how they operate in development fieldwork. Earley and Ang (2003) suggested that the comprehension of culture and knowledge of cultural differences refer to the cognitive aspect of cultural intelligence. I interpret this as the individual development practitioner's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings.

Generally, key project players recognised culture as a significant facet of participatory development practice in Vietnam. In their stories, not only have the consultants but also representatives of local bodies and community members realised the importance of preparing themselves for better cultural intelligence. Aspects of local culture have affected all key stages of project design and implementation, and have influenced participation. Two local project players demonstrated this:

> *Obviously there was the impact of local culture on the nature of participation of these projects. It's a common feature within the country's culture on how power is shaped. (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015)*

> *The cultural aspect is seen through the recommendation of an appropriate approach of using a more "hands-on" practice, learning by doing so you can demonstrate the immediate impacts to them [project stakeholders], because they prefer a more straightforward way of teaching. (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015)*

If you count on facts and figures so much, then in the implementation, sooner or later you will see challenges in terms of culture and traditions. But to be honest, culture has not been emphasised much for years. But clearly if you have a great knowledge about local culture and build on that, the project is more likely to be successful than those which focus on purely socio-economic data analysis. (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)

The above observations demonstrate firstly, when key project players, including local bodies, reflect on the adoption and delivery of participatory approaches, they are aware that local culture should be emphasised. Consequently, the participatory nature of the project and local culture are mutually dependent. However, for international consultants, many told me that, prior to their arrival in Vietnam, they did not have significant understanding of Vietnamese culture:

If you knew then what you know now, because you make a lot of assumptions when you work in a cross cultural thing, and depends on how well briefed you've been prior, and my briefing before coming to Vietnam was virtually non-existent, I didn't get any briefing at all, so it depends on how good the departments are at explaining cultural things. As well informed that you think you might be, you make a lot of assumptions, which usually turn out to be wrong. You certainly have some amusing situations that arise from it because you've assumed wrongly. (IC2, Interview, June 22, 2015)

I didn't understand the culture aspects completely and I never will understand it completely. So I think, being better prepared before you come is important (IC3, Interview, June 23, 2015)

Due to a lack of preparation, some faced challenges working cross-culturally as described in several incidents and misunderstandings from their early days of doing development work in Vietnam.

> *At times the participation did not go very well, as the consultant was demanding and several staff members were not comfortable with that. But it's more of his strong personality, and not the fact that he did not get along well with others because of a cultural challenge (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015)*

This also signifies that development practitioners do not anchor their facilitation to a certain style and they rather negotiate their power in the given culture, as reflected in the narratives below:

> *To be fair, there a very few international consultants in Vietnam who have long-term assignments. Most consultants come and work in short terms. Their knowledge on local culture is not always at a satisfactory level and many don't really understand how farmers work traditionally. That is why they need to work in coordination with local staff so they can contribute (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)*

> *I've seen people come and they've got their power then after a short period of time they are in a mental break-down scenario. Their agenda is not going to work and they've created a brick wall in front of them before they really got going. There is always a brick wall no matter what way you attack it (IC3, Interview, June 23, 2015)*

These perspectives describe the concept of culture as a changeable construct. All interviewees agreed that participatory development practice must be adapted to the Vietnamese culture but felt they were able to negotiate participation and influence the culture and mindset of other project players

through their facilitation. One consultant shared his viewpoint on the issue of "per diems" – financial incentives to encourage participation in community projects as an aspect of culture to prove this point:

> *Let me take another example of how local cultures and participation are connected. It is actually about how per diems and financial incentives are used. In Vietnamese culture, one person is not encouraged for committing "ăn cơm nhà, vác tù và hàng tổng" (having one's trouble for one's pain). This describes the nature of one person doing good for his community using his own resources without having any kinds of compensation. Charity work is also similar. But for development projects, sometimes it is the per diems or incentives that motivate participation, of both local communities and local staff. Because of this cultural aspect, we can't always expect good participation without some forms of "reward" for participants. I was personally involved in a project to help disabled people, and it requires a large input of time of communal officers. These officers are often hard working, and frequently overwork to fulfill other project tasks while their monthly salary is often too low for them to live on. And so the negotiation happened, to make sure they get a reasonable amount of per diems, or fuel expenses for their travel to work with the disabled in the commune. So this example offers to us the relationship of local culture and local hardship as a consequence of low incomes and the necessity to negotiate how project resources are used to promote better participation. (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)*

The interviewee related per diems to local culture, reflecting how this relation might trigger a negotiation process between key project players, i.e. the donors, local bodies and local participants. Even though the idea of giving per diems for project participation has recently been criticised as a "sustainability challenge" (Søreide, Tostensen, and Skage, 2012; Sanner and Sæbø, 2014).

Whether or not this idea might become common practice, the argument of how it is negotiated in the interviewees' contrasting examples is obvious:

> *Many donors are aware of this hardship and seem to be more understanding when they approve right at the beginning the per diems for project staff at communal levels. Some others say no, because they argue that the officers are on the government's payroll and it is unreasonable to pay them to do good for the community. Personally I think this argument is not valid in the negotiation. Because basically the salary does not enable communal staff to live even in minimal comfort. Many communal officers need to make extra money on their farms and working for the project limits their time for this. … [T]here is another cultural aspect that has the impact on participation of communal level staff. That is how local people perceive their functions of doing "việc công" (public work) and "việc tư" (private work), so the prioritisation is different. The priority always goes to the work for the government as it obviously affects their long-term benefits. Sometimes a project meeting and a communal meeting are scheduled for the same time, and the officers must attend the communal meeting. Communal work is referred to as "việc công" while project work is referred to sometimes as "việc tư" and there are no obligations if they skip fulfilling their part. (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)*

> *To be fair, it was us who created the idea of financial incentives and the habit of farmers receiving incentives to come to meetings. As soon as you suggest to give per diems, the habit comes to reality. (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)*

A government official questioned if the result of the negotiation upon this matter was still hanging somewhere in the power relations of project players:

Could you imagine how difficult that would be, considering the culture of getting incentives as a reward for participation? And it could be quite a negotiation. So donors and local bodies at the beginning, when agreeing upon the grant funding agreement, this matter should be discussed and concluded, so the issue does not have to linger somewhere during implementation. And when you make the overall action plan at the design phase, detailed cost norms should be projected and agreed for all project activities such as costs for workshops, meetings, and other aspects of facilitation. It is like a framework to be agreed upon, the result of negotiations. (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015)

In the process of describing how international consultants perceive local culture, it became important to reflect on the differences between the local culture of Binh Dinh and other regions, and also the difference amongst communities in the same province. As the concept of culture is perceived to be shaped by interactions between individuals, aspects of historical and social development consequently form different interpretations and a web of social negotiations (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Therefore, an essentialist take on culture as a static and border-defined entity should not be applied and must be negotiated by development practitioners. These negotiations, in the interviews, have been interpreted as a demand for different approaches to participation, as one stakeholder put it:

[Y]ou realise your power when working with different groups with different thinking and you need to negotiate your power so you can think of a better way to approach them. (GO1, Interview, June 26, 2015)

According to McLeod and Nguyen (2001), local cultures in Vietnam are rich and vary a lot from region to region. It is therefore essential for the development practitioner – facilitator to learn unique cultural and traditional,

sometimes ceremonial aspects from the target community of the project. This uniqueness is both an advantage and disadvantage when the facilitator wants to engage better local participation. In some villages, there have already been traditional rules and regulations which are not necessarily cultural but more legislative, a code of conduct for certain aspects of livelihoods. These rules and regulations may coincide with the targeted goals for enhancing their livelihoods using project interventions and technical advice of local bodies or consultants, as one local consultant told me.

In Vietnam, local cultures are different from province to province and region to region. So it is the cultural gap that even local consultants have to overcome. This gap is more often than not bigger for international consultants. (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)

In South Vietnam, farmers are more open to new interventions though. It's because they are generally not as conservative as farmers in Binh Dinh. This is how cultures are different across regions. In a southern province, farmers would welcome the idea of investing some hundred million Vietnam Dong for an automatic, more mechanised irrigation system, so they don't have to work under the hot sun in the middle of the day and they can drink instead of manually irrigate their crops. In contrast, in Binh Dinh, farmers prefer to work manually and spend the money on buying cattle. So it is a cultural thing for farmers here to "take the pains" of not mechanising their farming techniques. I think the further up north, the clearer this feature is. (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)

The above story supports the common view that people from the North of Vietnam tend to be more conservative whereas people from the South are considered more easy-going. Stockton (2006) explains that this difference is because of the history of partition of the country during the war which is still considered to have an influence on today's differences in culture between the

North and the South. In modern Vietnam's background of communism, the culture in the South is described as more liberal in their mindset compared to the culture of the North, and presumably the differences in the political history of the two parts have had an effect on their cultural development.

In the interviews, it is unclear whether the culture of Binh Dinh, with the province's "conservative" characteristics, would require a new rationale for participatory development. However, it is suggested that consultants should learn to see if local rules are applicable to their participatory methods. In the province, some rules are written while some are just verbal agreements, but in general they have been established in the history of the communities. For good participation, consultants need to reflect these rules and cultural aspects in the upcoming development interventions, otherwise their technical advice will become alienated from local perceptions. The most significant recommendation to each international consultant, in this case of having to work in the distinctive culture of the province, is to realise the cultural gap, and hence tailor their specific methods for facilitating participation to become more culturally intimate.

> *First, you need to know farmers in Binh Dinh are much more conservative than those in North Vietnam. And so you need to design a project, tailor the approach that enough time is needed to make this change. Three years instead of one, for example. Long rains wet the road longer. It is called culture-based, tradition-based, and local production norms should be taken into account. (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)*

> *Each commune and village have traditionally followed a different agenda for agriculture production and harvesting, for example. Their target crops are different. Also the lifestyles can be different. Their kids go to school at different times of the year. You know in flooding areas, schools start earlier in the year. So you need to*

consider those local aspects. These are difficult, sometimes extremely difficult as you need to take those into account when encouraging local participation. And if you identify these aspects accurately, facilitation is very likely to succeed, and so is the project. (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)

You start talking about a subject but then you realise they don't know the facts that make up the subjects. So you would start with and end-point of the result you wanted, and work the way down to right at the very start. For example, to grow some grass, it's not how much you're growing but you have to work all the way back to soil and fertilisers before you actually put the grass to the ground (IC2, Interview, June 22, 2015)

In Binh Dinh farmers hate it when the consultant always changes his agenda. So don't think it's the money that draws them to the meetings. It's a whole set of values that build up your good position to make them trust. Farmers in Binh Dinh believe in this so much, unlike those from the North or the South (IC3, Interview, June 23, 2015)

Another aspect of national culture expressed by the interviewees is the notion of paternalism in Vietnam. In its light, I problematise the allocation of participation and who, out of both males and females, would be the decision-maker and thus hold power. To engage participation of local households, international consultants need to be aware of the strong family orientation in Vietnam, stemming from paternalism, as a cultural attribute (Thomas & Peterson, 2014).

Generally when the decision was made, it would come from the male. They would have a lot of input into the discussion but the outcome is always the man's point of view. And the same within the

office system. So the power goes to the males. (IC2, Interview, June 22, 2015)

[T]o go back to local culture, for effective project design, previously in other projects we invited all the stakeholders to the city. And we realised, those able to come were all males. Women are occupied totally by housework and caring of the family, some work on the fields. But the approach of BDSRLP for project design was that, we went to the communes to consult with stakeholders, for female participants to have a say. It was a big increase in the number of female participants, say from five or seven per cent to almost fifty per cent the number of participants were females. From this you can see that Vietnamese culture normally don't support the participation of females if you don't adjust your approach. I've seen in other countries, the men can happily share the housework with their wives, but Vietnam is different. (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)

Thomas and Peterson (2014) argue that paternalism is found in cultures with a high-power distance and traits of Confucianism, which arguably match the Vietnamese culture as portrayed in the stories. The story demonstrates that while facilitators direct participatory activities, the identification of project beneficiaries is often shaped by perceptions of what the project can deliver, and does not always represent local culture. Particularly, it was shared by the local consultant above that, domination of a certain gender might discourage participation, and the participatory approach for identifying project beneficiaries needed to be adjusted. This has been a critical fact for participatory community projects, when a participatory activity is "strongly shaped by local relations of power, authority and gender and it can conceal differences in terms of who produces and of ways of knowing" (Mosse, 2001, p. 19).

Rooted in the country's Confucian tradition, collectivism is one of the most noticeable characteristics of Vietnamese culture. Recently this characteristic has also been bolstered with the adoption of a socialist development pathway which once campaigned for collectivisation as introduced in Chapter Three. This Confucian-based collectivism denotes people's adherence to a centralised and structured set of social relationships and family hierarchy. According to Smillie and Hailey (2001), Eastern cultures value the importance of ascription, whereby positions and power are commonly ascribed by virtue of birth, kinship ties, personal relationships and connections. Vietnamese culture also values honor, and therefore the central collective dimension means to maintain a good reputation, to save the face (*giữ thể diện*), either individually or collectively within a community (Nguyen, 2015). Like other Confucian-based cultural characteristics of modesty, this aspect of saving the face is collective – groups and group membership matter and reputation is both gained and lost not only through actions of individuals, but also through actions of others with whom one is closely associated (Uskul, Oyserman, & Schwarz, 2010).

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) point out another key characteristic of the Asian style of leadership, a "power distance", under which the less powerful members accept that power is distributed unequally. In the Vietnamese development context where cohesive farmers' group relations are visible, it is essential for development agencies to place importance on strong personal relationships between project management and communities with whom they work (Smillie & Hailey, 2001). This implies negotiating relationships between the two groups of players.

Again, let us look at the importance of the informal and highly personal relationships as a significant cultural aspect in the case study. Most interviewees viewed this cultural aspect as an enablement for better project efficiency and participation.

I think more often than not, results happen through informal situations, some unplanned events and informal space such as a coffee shop. I can think of formal situations where results happen, but more often than not, in a formal situation, everyone is on guard, and you don't always walk out feeling "that went out well". In formal situations, you often have a hidden agenda yourself... [T]he result of participation sometimes would come out of informal situations and I think it is a culturally thing. (IC2, Interview, June 22, 2015)

Such national cultural aspects, often regarded as alien to Western cultures which are highly individualistic and privilege low power distance, have urged the need for development agencies and practitioners to be aware of the negotiation process. Accordingly, effective development projects in Asia have been working closely with local communities along the two variables of being highly participatory, yet personal at the same time. Smillie and Hailey (2001, p. 96) called this negotiation a "mutual dialogue" where power relations are not based on formulaic, and structured processes, but more on common sense and shared beliefs.

Another concern is that participatory development tends to disavow the development practitioner's complicities and desires, "making [participation] prone to an exclusionary, Western-centric and inegalitarian politics" (Kapoor, 2005). This complicity refers to the facilitator - practitioner's inescapable affiliation with a certain cultural and ideological origin that informs the operation. The disavowal of one's contingent cultural and ideological interests serves the desire of narcissistic self-promotion and self-glorification, while the disavowal of complicity and desire by participatory development becomes a "technology of power" as a result of which participation can easily turn into its opposite: coercion, exclusion, panopticism, disciplinarity.

Finally, linked to the importance that development practitioners subscribed to working cross-culturally is the priority they gave to the learning process during their delivery of project interventions, especially in their fieldwork. This attitude, regarding the limits of personal knowledge and the Western way of thinking and doing in the Vietnamese cultural context, was embedded in a process of reflexivity, which will be discussed in the next section.

V. The individual practitioner: Being reflexive while navigating development work

Throughout this thesis, the terms of practitioners and participants are used to differentiate two groups, both having important expertise and capabilities: the practitioners generally employed by a development agency to work on a development project and the participants who are the project beneficiaries. Reciprocity arises from participation and power dynamics because each individual plays a specific role in a project as reflected through their explicit positionality.

For development practitioners, being reflexive may infer the need to develop a deep insight into the community in question, as well as trust and acceptance by them (Fowler, 1997). Aspects of being a reflexive development practitioner in Vietnam link directly to participatory processes which place a high priority on engagement with project participants as partners or project drivers rather than as clients (Smith, 2009).

The practice of reflexivity revealed from the insights of the interviewees can only mean so much in terms of strategies employed by development practitioners to navigate their cross-culture development work. This strategic navigation of professional work is close to the suggestion of Schön (1983) on reflection-in-action. On the other hand, dilemmas faced by practitioners everyday are sometimes beyond technical and rational approaches, hence they

are urged to question the knowledge and power they gain through their work as a learning process (Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997). This holistic process can be facilitated through reflection. Below are several interpretations of reflexivity provided by the participants.

I reflect every day on what I am doing. So I think about if I was caring myself well, did I the right thing, could I have done it better and if there are some cultural things I missed. I think about those things all the time. It's not something I do after a mission and I am constantly evaluating it... [R]eflexivity. Reflecting upon oneself is how I would perceive it. The process of reflections. Self-analysis. Self-awareness. As I said, I am constantly reflecting and thinking. (IC1, Interview, June 21, 2015)

I understand reflexivity a practice of learning from experience, especially when something fails. When I tackle an issue, I will spend time to individually reflect on what I have done, what really causes the issue, what can be improved and so on. So it's like looking at yourself in the mirror, to understand yourself better as an individual. But it is always a challenging process for someone. A lot have practised reflexivity without knowing it, or even being able to call it as "being reflexive"... [I] think naturally and traditionally in Vietnam, all participants are often reflecting. So it can be either a collective or individual way of reflection. In the past when learning from lessons was only a requirement for reporting, it has become more genuine nowadays with a better understanding of participation. (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)

Thinking back to make sense of the [consultants'] advice is what we would do every day and when we have a meeting, and we'd call it "learn from experience". (CM1, Interview, June 27, 2015)

The community member and local consultant simply interpreted reflexivity as to "learn from experience" which resonates with the link between learning and action as suggested by Schön (1983). All the commentaries verify two perspectives in the literature on reflexivity. First, different stakeholders in the case study are aware of "the use of the self" and the role of reflection (Habermas, 1990; Giddens, 1991). Second, there has been no agreed upon definition or perception of reflexivity, because of the blurring between the conception (D'Cruz et al., 2007). When asked if they had heard about the term reflexivity in English before the interviews, only two interviewees had, while others, through my translation, generally related it to reflection. This observation was mirrored by a local consultant in his statement below:

> *A lot have practised reflexivity without knowing about the term itself, or even without telling if they are "being reflexive". (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)*

Despite this linguistic limitation, it is evident that most of my research participants have familiarised themselves with the practice. They further expressed that development work might be guided by a sense of anticipated meanings while engaging with cultural differences during their participation (Nagata, 2004). The essentials of being conscious and mindful were distinctly named by both the international and Vietnamese consultants.

> *[N]ot consciously but I guess subconsciously. A lot of the days you just do research work, that's not an issue. But when you work with farmers, usually you go back in the car from the meeting, talk about the way it went. But when I am at home, it would be subconsciously going around in your mind as a cause-effect thing. You always were left in your mind with the impression that you could have done it better or there's another way of doing it. (IC2, Interview, June 22, 2015)*

In reflexivity, I think that the word "conscious" is very important. Also "mindfulness". I suppose it can be a skill you develop or some people have where, because of sense of self-belief, or based on experience... [B]eing mindful is something we all are at times. But not always. And you have to practice it. (IC1, Interview, June 21, 2015)

Several interviewees also reflected on the concepts of cause and effect and self-belief, no matter how differently these terminologies are understood. Reflexivity, according to Giddens (1991, p. 20), is a defining characteristic and intrinsic to all human action. In my opinion, this definition and the interviewees' insights resonate with the interpretation of reflexivity referring to Buddhist practices of reflexive awareness (MacKenzie, 2008, p. 263; Thompson, 2010). Even though the debate on whether reflexivity is self-awareness remains unsettled in the literature, there is a hint from the interviewees that they perceive reflexivity as closely as a "methodology of practical consciousness" (Giddens, 2013, p. 36). Thus, there seems to be a similarity between the Western-defined notion of reflexivity and the Eastern way of reflection.

[I]t depends on your own values and motivation. A passionate development worker would be more aware of emotions and cultures, for example, to make their work more adaptive to local contexts. Others who choose development work as making a living would be more concerned of their goals and not of the process to achieve the goals... [T]his process of reflection reminds me of the Eastern way of reflection and Buddhist practice of Zen. And it could be a natural process for a development practitioner to be reflexive, however in Vietnam I think it is also natural for many not to hold on the past events too much. I think here in work, one does not like to be self-criticised, as they tend to look forward, think of the future. (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)

Prevailing upon this similarity is the key to how development practitioners negotiate their understandings on reflexivity. In Vietnam, facilitators and practitioners assume the role of cultural brokers, which literally means "bridging the gap between East and West":

> *I always think of how East and West can meet in certain aspects and be critical upon each other. I guess that is my focus of negotiation and my individual process of thinking reflexively. This might be because I used to work as an interpreter too, and I have seen that bridging the gap between East and West is important. Thinking reflexively makes me learn from the reality that East and West are so different (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)*

Mosse (2001) questioned who is to be empowered: the poor, the socially excluded, the community, development practitioners or all of these stakeholders. I argue, as long as this question remains unanswered, the sharing of power should be considered for every group, including development practitioners. Although participatory development practice seeks to tackle power imbalance, it is important to acknowledge the potential for disempowerment of development practitioners who come from a different cultural background, education and living conditions associated with their reflexivity. Because facilitating participation in development work is not culturally neutral or context-free, there is an urge to invite reflexivity to explain what is in question related to culture. Several key questions made by a consultant below on the cause-effect relationship of uncertainties express this:

> *I don't think anyone working in a foreign culture situation could leave a meeting, saying "that went out well", "this was great". I am sure nearly everyone leaves and says, "Well it was ok but I am sure there is a better way of getting this to happen". You always go over it both consciously and subconsciously and often you come up with*

reasons why or things you analyse and see that there are things that you would change and that would change the results. You don't always see the effects either. That is probably the limitation, the cause and effect. You often don't see the effect because you work with uncertainties, so you don't know how the cause has any implications to the effect. It's a very circular thing that it keeps on coming back. You change one, how does it change the other? (IC2, Interview, June 22, 2015)

As Hornstein (1994) pointed out, the strategy to navigate work is to accept that there is a great deal to learn and prepare to live and work with uncertainties.

There are two parts of preparedness. I don't know how to describe them. One is the aim or approach that you document everything. And you can't function without it. And I myself would be of the "organic approach" where you have a framework and you leap in and let's see things happen. I like that approach best. I look at the people and I think "No, it's not going to work for them. I am going to change this". (IC1, Interview, June 21, 2015)

You never can feel well-prepared when you come to a new culture. And every day I am living outside my comfort zone. I might be prepared to do things without questioning it in my new culture because I think it's expected of me, but I am not feeling comfortable about it. I just don't want to offend anybody by showing it. And even now, years later, I can't say that I am living in my comfort zone. I am always waiting for the unexpected or uncertainties to happen. I can plan my day as well as I like but I know that I have to leave many hours for the uncertainties to happen. (IC2, Interview, June 22, 2015)

The literature identifies many different kinds of reflexivity related to how power and knowledge are situated and negotiated (Kondrat, 1999; Parton & O'Byrne, 2001; Ruch, 2002; Ferguson, 2003). Critical reflexivity is to make the choice of appropriate methodologies and the exposure and examination of underlying assumptions guiding the practitioners' actions and worldviews (D'Cruz et al., 2007). The underlying premise of ethical work is that, practitioners must constantly question and negotiate their choice in power relations with others. This means that they need to be open to being wrong, and realise the incompleteness of their knowledge.

The immediate reflection of the development worker might be on the fundamental ethical principle of non-malfeasance, or "do no harm", as suggested originally by feminist researchers such as Hill, Glaser, and Harden (1998). Why is this reflection the first and foremost? The below story gives us the answer, based on the participant's viewpoint on situated knowledge.

> *In Vietnam, the knowledge you transfer is really situated knowledge, as it takes the whole community to validate it... [I] think it's Eastern culture for people to ask "would this do any harm?" rather than to ask "would this do any good?" when they see a consultant demonstrating some new skills or knowledge. So in Eastern culture, it is natural to worship and respect traditional knowledge and ways of doing things that had been enshrined for thousands of year and of course it is common for people not to accept new knowledge at the first glance. (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)*

According to (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), by self-questioning, the development practitioner is a morally involved, self-aware, self-reflexive and interacting individual who holds the self personally responsible for the cultural and ethical consequences of their actions. Once trust and reciprocal relations with project participants are built, sustaining them is another step toward participation. Instead of reflecting on "being questioned" by local people, a consultant in the

case study was highly aware of how being reflexive made a good team-member and the language of participation as he asked himself:

I think everything is about being individual. The ego. So being reflexive I think will help you be a team member. But it's more important that it's not a bullying team member… [T]he concept of no hierarchy or hierarchy, top-down approach, it's part of our language all the time. And one thing I have observed is that people say so often about "going down to the farmer level". It's digusted me. There is no such thing as "going down to a farmer". We should never use language like that. There are no lower positions. We are all singularly and separately equal. Although somebody elevates themselves to positions through their own ego – that is like the thinking of lower and higher. In my mind, it's all equal. But sometimes we use language because it engrained in us. It's not appropriate. It's hierarchial, as opposed to non-hierarchial. And I think that's something I've tried to eliminate from the way I think and how I reflect on it. That's all my reflexivity. It's one of the things I think about. How do I care in myself? Did I seem a bit arrogant? I just constantly think about that. (IC1, Interview, June 21, 2015)

The reflection on various ways to present the "self" is important to avoid local participants "othering" the facilitator. This should minimise the power imbalance caused by the insider – outsider positionality dynamics, in a similar way to what was described by Sultana (2007).

I think local farmers don't take it seriously, but perhaps because I am also a local. But presenting yourself is really important and should be negotiated as well. Don't dress up too much, that's how we remind ourselves. A fancy car is not recommended, except that you are travelling a long way. But many don't know how to present

themselves as a friend to farmers, which is really not appreciated by Binh Dinh farmers. (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)

I see that Western development workers care a greater deal of how to present themselves and become more exposed to criticism and that is why being reflexive matters more to them than to Eastern workers. And when coming into a new culture of the developing countries and Eastern countries where most participatory development projects are based, they consider their positions as the "outsider". Meanwhile in their own country, the geographic space of the projects, Eastern development workers don't see it necessary to question if they are the outsiders or insiders, or they naturally refer to their positions as the "insiders". (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)

The reflections of local facilitators, including consultants and government officials, seemed to infiltrate their positionalities of insider catalysts in the project. Even with good local insights, they might struggle to achieve local credibility, especially when personal commitment to the common good is overridden by personal rewards (Fowler, 1997). Specifically, they were aware of two things. First, it was necessary to undertake a lengthy process to gain community acceptance and trust which may be hampered by cultural prejudices as discussed in the previous section. Second, it might be an advantage to gain mutual trust, as long as they are aware of this and, in other words, can reflect on this as a power relation. Building trust does not always work as a perfect strategy. For example, one of the most difficult tasks is to facilitate communication within groups of stakeholders so that meetings do not degenerate into non-productive complaint sessions and personal arguments. In Vietnam this is a particularly difficult task, because many local consultants either come from a local government body or have worked previously with the community and thus meetings become mundane. For this reason, the development professional has to continually reflect on his or her actions to

determine whether they are facilitating or directing, providing information or solutions.

> *So being a friend, building trust is the first thing. Second thing is your knowledge, not the academic one but the real-life one to resonate with what farmers think. (LC1, Interview, June 23, 2015)*

The *"second thing"* from the above statement is the importance of realising that participants support what they help develop and vice versa. Again, not only does this reflection help signify the reciprocal essence of trust, it implies the continuity of a development worker being reflexive along the project timeline. Another example of this strategy, as reflected by the international consultant below, is to be assured and self-assured that information and professional advice should be shared carefully so as to provide examples, options, and possibilities for consideration rather than to raise any expectations which may lead to disillusions.

> *I don't think you should promise anything in terms of increased income until you can actually create the opportunity. So raising expectations for farmers whose default expectations only lead to disillusion, it makes it much more difficult for future projects because there's suspicions, "Oh we've tried that before, don't believe them, it didn't work"... [We] must be really careful not to promise and create expectations that simply are not realistic. (IC1, Interview, June 21, 2015)*

Generally speaking, reflecting on the "self", either as a Western-defined practice of reflexivity or an Eastern way of reflection, demands an amalgam of learning and openness to uncertainties. Navigating the "self" in cross-cultural development work into and through a positionality is shaped as much by a cultural context as by development worldviews, methods and personal factors. Being reflexive remains a persistent challenge for development practitioners in

creating knowledge of what is right in order to be participatory. From the discussion, it is apparent that positionality evolved from a development practitioner's work in a different culture might be a matter of negotiation between the "self" and others to reveal how power is exercised.

VI. Summary

Perspectives shared by the interviewees underline the necessity of trust and building relationships between key project players including consultants, government officials and community members as a crucial cultural factor in development work. As presented in this chapter, seeking personal relationships between people as the project beneficiaries and development facilitators is envisioned to result in mutual trust and friendship. This priority, over any other kind of development intervention, has been explicitly mentioned more than once in the stories. Despite the fact that all of the Western development practitioners are reflexive about the cultural and language barriers as a constraint to participation, they have made efforts to overcome other cultural barriers and this can be seen as an archetype for the theme of negotiation.

The interviewees' perspectives have revealed that cultural knowledge is pivotal to effective cross-cultural development work. The process of creating a shared cultural understanding in the case study can be described as a negotiation process where the development practitioners' cultural knowledge is interpreted into a form understandable to other participants. This process takes place continually through social interaction and negotiation (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Through this approach the cultural knowledge sharing of the "taken for granted" aspects of culture is regarded as tacit knowledge, which then is "translated" into explicit knowledge from which a shared understanding and learning process can be developed.

Development professionals are involved in a web of relationships in which their positionality for each relationship and project will be distinctive and fluid. As agents, their present and future moral and political responsibility finds its form and space in distinctive narratives. These narratives make it possible to learn to act and redefine their basically plural positionalities in which the narratives differ and can be exchanged, where narratives make life possible because they may give space to all human experiences and the changing historical contingencies are confronted.

Two important issues have arisen from this small-scale interview process: first, the need to consider the negotiation of power and role of the local culture in the negotiation process; and second, confirmation that participation is highly constrained by the local hierarchical influence on how a participatory development project is designed and implemented.

In retrospect, the power of different stakeholders is reflected when short-term versus long-term project outcomes are negotiated perceptibly. In the questioning model of assessment, the questions reflect the worker's agenda, not other people's. Embodied in the answers they gave are implicit or explicit perceptions about the negotiation of power and preconceptions about the major cultural factors that affect this negotiation process.

The second important issue is that negotiating power is only effective when development practitioners are highly motivated to take into account the local hierarchical way of facilitation. In light of personal reflections on the negotiation of power, it would be easy to view the efforts towards the participatory approach as ineffective and tokenistic, but this would devalue my attempts to build on my experiences. Exploring different understandings on local culture during the interviews has encouraged the participants as key stakeholders to undertake further initiatives to facilitate better participation. In doing so, I have focused on culture and power.

Chapter Six: Auto-ethnographic reflections

I. Introduction: Why am I writing these auto-ethnographic reflections?

As I was seeking answers to my research questions and as I elaborated in the Methodology, one of my methods for analysis was auto-ethnography. This method focused not only on my experience as a development worker, interpreter/translator and facilitator involved in participatory development practice in Vietnam but also on the aspect of self-learning that I engaged in from the fieldwork for this research project as a student of Development Studies from a Western academic institute. Besides having this practitioner – learner position, I have also placed myself in the research as a person being born and growing up in Vietnamese culture which I am still learning about. This means how I am undertaking this research is bound by the contemporary socio-political and cultural context leading to my understanding about development approaches and ontology.

The interpretive worldview within which the social constructivist presentation of the "self" is placed, as outlined in Chapter Four, is the standpoint from which I understand my own underlying philosophy and uncover the ways others "make sense of their social worlds" (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 4). However, I could only begin my journey of self-learning, and hopefully enrich the literature on and understanding of participation through explicit analysis of the existing literature, after I was clear about the meaning of the methodological tool I was using. First, I had to uncover and deconstruct the morphology of auto-ethnography to its every morpheme. That is, I needed to see that auto-ethnography is about exploring my "self" (*auto*) which is placed in the power relationship with individuals or groups of "others" (*ethno*) in the form of writing (*graphy*) about negotiating participation as the subject matter

of this thesis. Thus, although the description which follows departs from the "self", it does not always linger on it. The purpose of this auto-ethnography is to analyse the relation between myself and others.

Even though I don't really call myself a Buddhist, I am deeply influenced by Buddhist teachings in my daily thinking. I might not be able to recall the moment when I first read about the "self" and the "wholeness", but in fact, from time to time I have found myself re-reading and thinking about the following lines in the Dalai Lama XVI's *The Four Noble Truths*:

> *All material objects can be understood in terms of how the parts compose the whole, and how the very idea of "whole" and "wholeness" depends upon the existence of parts. Such dependence clearly exists in the physical world. Similarly, non-physical entities, like consciousness, can be considered in terms of their temporal sequences: the idea of their unity or wholeness is based upon the successive sequences that compose a continuum* (Dalai_Lama_XVI, 1997, p. 82).

From this perspective, I would like to add that writing an auto-ethnography is also an ongoing praxis of merging the "self" to the larger "others", a practice of "letting go" of the "self" and deconstructing it so it can become part of "others" and the wholeness. This way, once I am writing down (*graphy*) my subjective reflections about the "self" (*auto*), I must acknowledge and must not forget the existence of the literature on the subjects being constructed by "others" (*ethno*). For this purpose, using auto-ethnography as an empowering tool, I have to simultaneously reflect on the literature and use key conceptualised meanings from the literature to support my subjective interpretations.

This chapter presents my reflexive engagements with my positionality of both a doer and a learner of development practice throughout the research. While I don't see reflecting on this positionality as a privilege, it is somehow a call for

knowledge in terms of my cross-cultural working and learning atmosphere of which many have referred to as part of hyper-self-reflexive development practice coming out of powerful development discourses (Kapoor, 2004). On one hand, the constructivist epistemology bolsters this recognition by allowing me to analyse the participants' perspectives in the previous chapter. On the other hand, it also enables me to include my own stories using subjective interpretations. Bringing this positionality into consideration, I contextualise my interpretations based on the findings analysed in the last chapter as substantial background information.

This choice of method draws on what I have experienced as an individual and professional in pursuit of an understanding about participation and participatory development. This chapter, my auto-ethnography, therefore can be regarded as my subjective perspectives, a personal introspection, which does not necessarily engage with how I "nail" my understandings on the subject matters of the thesis (such as being reflexive) but how my learning process evolves out of myriad reflections. Comprised of my field notes and passages I have written since the planning stage of my fieldwork, this chapter provides my subjective perspectives into the following:

- An effect of Vietnamese bureaucracy on participation
- The negotiation of empowerment in participation
- My practice of reflexivity
- Reflexivity as a collective practice

I have considered these facets essential in highlighting how participation is negotiated because they permeate my professional aspects of being a development practitioner. That participation is negotiated is brought into even starker reality because of the specific circumstances surrounding participatory development practices in Vietnam. To be more specific, one circumstance has been when project beneficiaries are often chosen, not based on their needs for project interventions but on their familiarisation with participatory approaches

from previous projects, as unveiled by a government official's story in the last chapter. For this reason it is important to consider the effects of bureaucracy on participation.

II.   An effect of Vietnamese bureaucracy on participation

As Mosse (2001) points out, any useful discussion of the meaning of "participation" requires a context. Despite culture as the contextual focus of participation in this thesis, in this section I would like to focus specifically on the socio-political characteristics of culture and participation. I would like firstly to address that, although participatory approaches in Vietnam have been widely advocated since the Đổi Mới as noted in Chapter Three, a firm grip on the centralised, top-down approach is still maintained by the government. In general, the level of top-down decision making has generally been reduced, but this highly-centralised managerial style still differs significantly from that of international development agencies whose development programmes and projects often employ a bottom-up approach in order to represent the most marginalised groups in society.

The experience of working as an interpreter and facilitator in Vietnam automatically assigned me to the role of liaison between governmental and non-governmental development partners. This role enabled me to observe that, generally, bureaucracy gives rise to certain dilemmas seen clearly in the negotiations undertaken by individual development practitioners or groups of project players, especially during the planning activities. The most obvious is the constraint of hierarchical bureaucracy on participation. Normally, the delivery of each intervention in the case study project needed to go through various layers of administration for approval before the implementation. I have encountered such a constraint when required to translate an enormous amount of paperwork and attend numerous meetings in order to facilitate project activities. Regardless of its existence elsewhere and in other countries

with similar political backgrounds to Vietnam, bureaucracy means that the negotiation of how participation will take place is unavoidable, especially when participatory approaches have been introduced and are mainly applied by many development agencies and professionals (Hickey & Mohan, 2004).

Yet it is not surprising that the highly-centralised decision making and power exercising plays a considerable part in shaping how participation is facilitated. In the case study, most international consultants have had experiences in delivering development interventions throughout Asia and the Pacific, therefore they shared with me about having the space to reflect upon how this managerial style in Vietnam has had side effects on participation, among other concerns about cultural barriers such as how to establish and maintain trust with participants. Nonetheless, regarding an "operational" type of space for international consultants, my observations from the case study also illustrate this type of space has been limited for them, apart from their main assignments as facilitators and trainers. The project's target groups have dealt with development interventions on numerous occasions in the past, while implementation with strong government involvement reduces the possibilities of a more bona fide type of participation. As for the context of Vietnam, this is largely because of the heavy administrative workloads posing obstacles to undertaking development fieldwork and massive bureaucratic procedures required by international development agencies, researchers and professionals (Scott et al., 2006).

Also from the participants' perspectives, I have come to realise that many local community members emphasised how "being authorised to participate" is important. In another example, almost every Vietnamese participant I interviewed preferred to translate the term I used for "power" into "voice" when responding. By doing this, I understood them to be saying that, the power to participate in the project was evident in how the voice of a certain project player was heard and turned into project interventions. The participants did not regard the hierarchy in its comprehensive form as simply a

matter of governmental hegemony in project design and implementation. Rather they noted how hierarchy was an aspect of local culture in Vietnam, how development projects enrolled people with the rhetoric of improving local livelihoods, how participation was achieved through an internalised exercise of power; and how the reflective practices through which power was exercised were extended but also hindered. Although this might be a linguistic phenomenon in terms of how interviewees expressed themselves and meanings of power, I would relate it to a consequence of the persistent bureaucracy which restricts participation as self-mobilisation of these project players (Pretty et al., 1995).

Most development practitioners acknowledged that self-mobilisation of any project was ideal but difficult to ensure in practice. Stories from the case study prove that it can be hard to get local participants, both farmers and officials, to guarantee their involvement along the project timeline, and especially to ensure participation of diverse target groups because for many of the groups, their daily livelihoods influence their ability to participate. From a local development worker's point of view, I think the idea of "authority to participate" does not mean having the real opportunity to shape decisions.

I might have thought, to overcome this constraint of hierarchical bureaucracy and enable informed decision-making, an enhanced managerial style needs to be negotiated to aim for a healthier reciprocity. However, this reciprocal managerial discourse used in aid delivery and development interventions has become so extensive that every community development project has to represent it: having project beneficiaries included and empowered (in other words, having their voices heard and their power recognised). This has more or less become the contemporary trend of participatory development.

My question is: should others and I, as development workers and researchers, consider this trend as a professional fulfillment and success? Many professionals, myself included, might have worked hard to advocate

community participation and empowerment, "handing over the stick" to the voiceless, but the realities within which this development discourse are employed might also stay unchanged. In practice, regardless of the obligation to comply with bureaucratic procedures as we facilitate participatory development work, we are also under pressures of reporting and meeting certain principles of development assistance within the same realities.

I also wonder: what are precisely the roles of cultural values and bureaucracy as reflected within this development context? Local communities are first and foremost the target groups of any development interventions and practice, but the practice cannot guide participation regardless of the coalitions of interest, identities and relationships between and within development agencies and individual practitioners. The meaning of participation, if framed within reciprocity, should also emphasise the significance of the development practitioners' individual values, feelings, disillusionments, professional styles which are all surrounded by their power relations with others.

In this way, the notions of empowerment and participation seem to refer to a greater extent to the self-contained spheres of development projects. Issues of contextualised bureaucracy, hierarchy, cultural and socio-political differences to bring significant impacts to the success of the projects tend to fade from the idealistic views and (mis)conceptions of participation. Under this circumstance I have been tempted to say, it seems fair for my participants to address power as being authorised and having a voice to participate within an administrative or bureaucratic system which is changing eventually but not anytime too soon.

III.   The negotiation of empowerment in participation

At the core of this research is not the issue of participation itself but the idea that how power is perceived and exercised will determine whether empowerment is taking place as a desired product of participation or whether

it is a precondition to participation (Lozare, 1994). While the literature on power relations has been reviewed and discussed earlier in this thesis, negotiating participation means that the discussion on that subject needs to be situated in the culturally-embedded development context of Vietnam. This discussion is meaningful to me (and my pathway toward a broader understanding of power) with particular reference to the observations during my fieldwork and thereby speaks for the context of this research.

First I need to note that my reflections are based on the understanding that the delivery of development interventions occurs in a context of evident as well as hidden power relations. Of power and knowledge, Foucault (1980) suggested that this context can be the space for further production and reproduction of relations of power.

Being aware that this research was undertaken in the context and reality that is partly my own involvement in development work in Binh Dinh meant I had to be careful in presenting my reflections and how the voices of participants as my work colleagues and local community members could be incorporated into the research without being subject to and dominated by my own interpretation. The choice of presenting in an auto-ethnographic way came out of this awareness as to reinforce the more narrative form of story-telling in Chapter Five. This is because researchers cannot recognise value in ways of operating that are outside the paradigm underpinning the work of the researcher.

Not until I became a student of development studies had I learnt about the academic debates around power as a key subject matter in participatory approaches. I have also become more familiar with various definitions of the terminology and its impacts on development. I learnt that the meaning of power is extended beyond a "voice" of development actors, it further involves having a share or access to resources essential to development such as land, labour, investment, and knowledge. Reading about Foucault's links between

power and knowledge and the way he saw power as a feature of human relations (Foucault, 1988) intrigued me and helped me to look back at my previous community facilitation career which involved influencing the actions of others and facilitation as an effective use of power.

And at the gist of power issues discussed in this research? At the early stage of developing research questions, my reflection process centred around the following inquiries: (1) How development practitioners become aware of exercising their power over recipients of development interventions when the package they bring contains their own challenges, varied positionalities and ideas that may underpin the development discourse; (2) How these components allow development practitioners to work alongside local communities in a reflexive way toward reciprocity given the imbalanced power relationship; (3) How project stakeholders realise their power when development agencies and practitioners arrive to "enable" them to participate in their own development; and more to the point of this section, (4) Why local participants refer to power as an authorisation to participate.

The Dictionary of Human Geography (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts, & Whatmore, 2009, p. 575, Fifth Edition) defines power as the "ability of one agent to affect the actions or attitudes of another". Attempting to comprehend the meaning of power in the Western landscape of the practice of project facilitation, I took another current Western and inclusive definition of power: "the capacity to act, the strength and courage to accomplish something. It is the ability and the desire to make choices and decisions" (Covey, 1992, p. 23). Both definitions entail an aftermath of change-making. But what interested me most in these definitions was the connotation of the ability and capacity, kinds of "resources" associated with behaviours of change-agents.

In the first trimester of my Development Studies programme, I became attentive to understanding power this way: bringing about changes and being resource-based and behaviour-based. One day we were undertaking a paper on

young people and participatory development[15], our instructor introduced us to a rapport-building activity where we had fun "passing on our power", whether by signaling the power transmission to the person immediately standing nearby or in a multi-directional way so that anybody else in a circle might also get the power. Then we were asked to write down our reflections on this exercise, and to me, the whole idea of empowerment was implicit within this practice. Being a facilitator and change-maker promoting balanced power relations in participatory development practice is not different, and it is important to learn to conduct transformative power in multiple directions so that it influences and can be shared.

The two above definitions of power in Western academia offer some understandings on a general level and make power more concrete and measurable in the development paradigm. However, I also found the Eastern definitions of power helpful and, perhaps because I was working as an interpreter/translator for several years, became more aware of the socio-linguistic versions of the terms. At this point, the concept *de* (德 in Chinese, or *đức* in Vietnamese) of Eastern philosophy drew much of my attention. In the tradition of Confucianism, Waley (1958) translated *de* as power, whereas Boodberg (1953) suggested that *de* could be translated as virtue.

Added to the somewhat twenty ways in which *de* is translatable, rendering *de* into another language is problematic and controversial (Laozi, 1990; Rodney, 2005). Being humbled by the intricacy of spiritual and philosophical metaphors to reach agreement on a translation the concept, I had no better idea but to ponder on a passage detailed by Boodberg (1953) which reads as follows:

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[15] GEOG 404: Geography of Development Studies – Young People and Participatory Development, School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington (2014). GEOG 404 involves training in research design, analysis, facilitation and cross-cultural communication through experience in a "real-world" project.

"The standard translation for it [de] is "virtue", both in the sense of inherent quality and in that of moral excellence, but with the validity of the traditional rendering somewhat shaken by Arthur Waley's insistence on interpreting it as "power." Indeed, it is believed by many scholars that the term originated in the mytho-magical period of Chinese speculation when de was conceived as a kind of mana-like potency inherent in substances, things, and human beings, a potency which, on the one hand, made them true to their essence, and on the other, made possible their influencing of other entities".

But to frame the discussion around the themes listed at the beginning of this chapter, particularly with a focus on empowerment, what I have extracted from the linguistic spectrum of development concepts is that, to describe power either in the Western or Eastern traditions, there are as many ways as there are to translate *de*. Since a singular understanding about power seems futile, it has been more helpful to consider myself as a development worker who exercises my power on and over others, through my positionality. In other words, it was like looking at myself in the mirror and realising that, at one stage I was working towards change-making, by promoting balanced power relations with others and being aware that I had access to and control over project resources or the agenda. At another stage, I saw myself as a Vietnamese individual aware simultaneously of maintaining ethics and cultural values when using my power to exert the influence I expected through influence, respect, authority, control of resources or of the development agenda.

Reflecting on myself within the context of the case study left me with a justification that, both individual community members and development practitioners also had their power or voice grounded by their positions in the project. Regardless of positionality, these power dynamics were related to a number of factors, namely personal qualities (appearance, gender, age, family background, education, etc.), having control of or access to project resources

and other work competence (technical expertise, professional reputation and confidence in communicating, etc.). How these components enabled reciprocal participation depended on the power dynamics, given that trust had already been built.

Restrained by numerous factors, the issue of power was extremely difficult to deal with in practice. Who could guarantee that my changing positionalities as an insider and outsider weren't misleading my desire of "doing-good"? As many other colleagues and students in development, while I reflected on the importance of maintaining balanced power relations and obeying the 'do no harm' principle, I was also complicit in upholding the existence of imbalanced power relationships. Examining the power dynamics in participation critically strengthens, I am convinced that participation in a development project can be a practical skill, both a means and an end to balancing power, because power resides in every sort of social interaction (Kenny, 2006). According to Hugman, Pittaway, and Bartolomei (2011), to avoid exercising power is impossible, as 'do no harm' is not good enough and the virtuous practitioner is not to avoid power but to promote participation.

I also think that acknowledging that empowerment might possibly be a reciprocal process to benefit those who deliver development interventions as well as those receiving them, could challenge the traditional perspective on empowerment. This way suggests that participatory approaches, although arising from growing dissatisfaction with top-down approaches led by experts, will inevitably continue to empower those already within more structurally-powerful positions. Yet empowerment invites so much space for negotiation.

In fact this observation is not new because the dilemma of "who is empowering whom?" has been broadly and specifically addressed in participatory methodology for decades. Four and a half decades ago Freire discussed it in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, then later, the power dilemma was labelled "empowerment", a defiance to the Western way of perpetuating

colonialism and imperialist development thinking. Multiple facets of participatory development have been examined and the discussion on empowerment has flourished in nothing flat. The discussion is ongoing (in a similar way that no intellectual and spiritual debates can end), but I would add, the discussion is still problematised by the fact that power and knowledge related to empowerment are situated and negotiated. The hindrance is in the context in which empowerment is facilitated, or is the context itself, considering that a context involves all indigenous matters of culture, knowledge and emotions.

IV. My practice of reflexivity

Critically reflecting on power issues makes it possible to challenge and deconstruct assumptions about development practice. Although as a development practitioner and researcher, at times I would like to believe that I have worked toward balancing power relations, there is often an absent part of looking back that prevents me from undergoing the emotional and reasoning process of confronting my frequently changing positionality. Critical reflections do not necessarily mean I am becoming negative about power issues. Instead, as a researcher, I have related the purpose of this practice to building insights beyond the taken-for-granted assumptions or looking beyond the obvious occurrence (Williamson et al., 1982). For example, during my fieldwork, I was trying to explain to my participants that the focus of the practice of reflexivity is on changing unhelpful power dynamics that might perpetuate a sense of powerlessness.

Every so often within the case study project, I noticed that my role oscillated like a clock pendulum because of my changing positionality in this cross-cultural context. This awareness, however, toughened the existing biases, it did not remove them. To the extent that I have been pursuing my development

career motivated both by earning a livelihood and also "doing good" for "my" people, I have seen myself as an indirect stakeholder.

Why have I defined my positionality like this? Because, like a link in the chain, my work is placed within the bounds of personal and professional values (including ethical practice) and emotions, all embedded in local culture as a setting for my power relations with others. Sometimes before I knew it, I was unquestionably involved in a self-negotiation process to become aware of uncertainties and the taken-for-granted assumptions of everyday reality. As a Vietnamese development worker, I held the responsibilities of facilitating participation of local communities in the planning and delivery of project interventions, while also assuming the role of cultural broker working with international development agencies and professionals at the same time. To achieve fulfillment of these responsibilities, I have needed to be aware of numerous factors: the degree to which I can promote local culture and knowledge to enable participation; my ability to build a network of trust and partnerships among project partners; the use of available resources and project timeframe so that I can be realistic about my work; and more closely related to the focus on participation, my acknowledgement of power relations in the project.

Having said the above, I would also consider my positionality as that of a neutral participant who has a relative command of both local and outside knowledges and was able to undertake mediation of cultural and linguistic matters. At times when the political climate allowed, I also had a say in improving the technical aspects of using participatory approaches, considering my mediating role between the project management and local beneficiaries; the local government bodies and local/international consultants; the consultants and local beneficiaries; and between the donor and project stakeholders. The success of my contribution to delivering project interventions depended on how I bore in mind this web of inter-relations to navigate my work through different knowledges, cultural and language

barriers and other conflicts. And this adds up to another responsibility which is facilitation of the negotiation of the above players in the terms of participation.

From a different surface of reflexivity, the assumed role of the facilitator – broker in Vietnam also requires generating knowledge for "looking back", or distilling some lessons learnt as being popular circulated in the country's requirement of planning and reporting. Particularly for me as someone trained in the West, I foresee that this role adds more depth to facilitation and brokerage, which is to inform locals regarding contemporary approaches in development theories and practice which may affect the local approaches. To be more specific, as local stakeholders are empowered, their voice in decision-making should be heard, and to make this happen, they must have adequate information about the world out there, with which they will communicate. In short, this role carries with it a meaning of equity in knowledge integration. In the next section, I will continue to reflect on the "self", to see if whether or not it may influence the learning process through the practice of reflexivity.

V.   Reflexivity as a collective practice

I think naturally and traditionally in Vietnam, all participants are often reflecting. So it can be either a collective or individual way of reflection. In the past when learning from lessons was only a requirement for reporting, to be reported at meetings, it has become more genuine recently with a better understanding of participation. (LC2, Interview, June 26, 2015)

The above story of a local consultant has provoked me to explore the collective characteristic of reflexivity in development practice in Vietnam. Perhaps it is as thought-provoking as when I read about the notion that, development must be "embedded in culture" in the work of Pieterse (2001), which points out that any development strategy is based on culture and unable to operate outside

culture. From this notion arises the necessity to acknowledge that culture is a resource for development and that development practice is not culturally-neutral (Schech & Haggis, 2000). This discourse of culture and development also introduced cultural reflexivity and incorporates participatory methods such as PRA and RRA. But most of all, the perspectives of my research participants have made the theme of reflexivity as a collective practice clear, based on the fact that the local cultural dimension of collectivism in Vietnam has shaped how project beneficiaries participate in the case study project.

1. The "self"

First, I think it is important to differentiate how the "self" is presented in different cultures, especially with a focus on "Eastern" culture as it manifests and is embedded within the specific context of Vietnam. During my fieldwork I was aware that, unlike the international consultants, other Vietnamese participants, mostly local farmers, were likely to give more "modest" responses and often related the theme of actions to group actions. The story below reveals the characteristics of collective actions, either in planning or reflecting on every circumstance of participation.

> *In general our voice is always heard by others. As soon as we speak of something, the project [management] will have it in consideration. But in fact, before we speak, there is always a step of group discussion, exchanging ideas and nursing the ideas in a collective way. After the action is taken, we look back to see if any lessons are to be learnt, also in a group, a collective way (CM5, Interview)*

Rooted in Confucianism, the concept of collectivism in East Asian culture is about making salient connections, self-effacement, and modesty as ways of fitting individuals in social relationships (Heine, 2007). Within this cultural

conceptualisation, the two significant characteristics of the "self" are being modest and not bragging and avoiding offending others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Heine, 2007). The above example and the two characteristics reinforce the evidence that local community members are not often too positive in presenting the "self". It is not that they underestimate the effectiveness of each individual's presentation as a contribution to the project, it is instead the Confucian-based thinking that participation only works when it arises from collective actions. Likewise, even though local consultants strongly described the positionality arising from the facilitator – broker role to promote participation and how important it was to be reflexive about presenting the "self", they often spoke of their personal contribution in a modest way. Uskul et al. (2010) identified this as an empirical trait of Confucian-based collectivism, often studied and compared with other forms of collectivism from Western Europe and Latin America to form the bulk of the empirical cross-cultural literature.

In a Confucian-based culture, there is also a strong causal relationship between the perceptions of "self-face" and collectivism (Vu & Napier, 2000; Nguyen, 2015). I think this link is important because it expresses the consequent concern of "face-saving" in building trust as a prerequisite to reciprocal participation. This importance suggests to me that, because these cultural characteristics, such as "face-saving", are collective in focus, a different kind of reflexivity may be shaped by collective cultural norms and traditions.

For example, when thinking of who I have been working with in the field, it is always an urge to reflect on who I am and how my presentation of the "self" might shape my relations with others and lead me to effective interactions. I believe many local colleagues are also aware of this, as there is a very common saying in Vietnamese which describes this as: "to know one's self and also

others" [**Biết người biết ta**]" [16]. This saying suggests that knowing the "self" is also to know "others" in a collective way perhaps in an academic sense, reflecting the practice of inter-subjective reflexivity (Pedwell, 2002).

2. Collective reflexivity as reciprocal learning

A precondition for collective reflexivity is that, the development practitioners and community members being interviewed for this research are all actively engaged in various development projects of participatory nature in their areas. All have spent extended periods of time during the case study project timeline working together. Their stories to a large extent bring to the fore their positionalities in the field in the way that their subjective gazes and the "self" are perpetually questioned as much as they are concerned about the representations of "the others" and the importance of "learning from experience". Towards being reflexive, these players do not hold themselves back from reflecting on the mistakes they make and the rewards that can be gained from critical reflections.

At this stage of writing, I want to build on the definition given by Giddens (1991, pp. 36, 99), that reflexivity is "a defining characteristic of all human actions" in the first sense, "a methodology of practical consciousness by which human beings routinely keep in touch which the grounds of what they do as an integral element of it". For me, reflexivity is therefore collective: a constant reflection performed by one or several target groups of development interventions on their performance to reproduce or reform the power dynamics in development, no matter how slowly or rapidly the change happens. "Bridging the gap between East and West" was actually the key role of the facilitator – broker as mentioned by several local participants in the case study.

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[16] Actually this saying in Vietnamese was derived from the original statements in Sun Tzu's The Art of War which said, "One who knows the enemy and knows himself will win a hundred battles" [知彼知己，百戰不殆]

In a similar way I would say, when most individuals from the target groups share the same understanding about reflexivity, then this understanding has an inter-subjective basis which implies a process of self-learning and mutual learning. The Vietnamese saying of "nine people, ten ideas" [**chín người, mười ý**] can also be used to illustrate the notion of collective reflexivity and how it is culturally-embedded. It emphasises the importance that reflexivity should also be explored from more than just a Western perspective.

From Western academia perspective, I learnt about the concept of reflexivity as a methodological and philosophical reflection on development. As a development worker, I have seen that this academic way of looking at reflection is limited, because no or very few daily practices in development can be purely explained as an intellectual process. On the other hand, as those involved in various development interventions have their positionalities constantly changing, they learn different lessons every time. Reflexivity and positionality in this way become more fluid than ever, because they concern social awareness of ongoing social changes.

The methodology of reflexivity derives from an academic perspective as elaborated by practitioners. A limitation of this is that it does not confront power directly, but skirts around it as local perspectives are not necessarily reflected in such an approach. While much academic interest and literature seems to be "privileging the reflexivity that emphasises the individual identity" (Nagar & Geiger, 2007, p. 269), collectivism and other cultural characteristics tell us that being reflexive can go beyond the bounds of individual reflections. In the domain of learning, all stakeholders in participatory development practice should mutually learn from each other, thus they understand reflexivity as a more dialogic and participatory way to present the "self" in relation to the "others" and vice versa.

From an operational perspective, collective reflexivity might be beneficial to shaping development policies when collective responses are integrated to

reflect the target groups' changing expectations and (possibly improved) knowledge. But this might be too ideal, because project resources and timeframes are often limited for every response to be heard in the nick of time. Despite this challenge, examining reflexivity as a collective practice poses a new way to look at the concept, making it more applicable and practical. Framed collectively, it contests the distortion arising from institutionalising an abstract concept, posited as a privilege for individual deliverers of development interventions only.

VI.   Summary

Writing these auto-ethnographic reflections has helped me understand power, and my reflections help me to acknowledge my relationship with my colleagues and people. To conclude this chapter, my consistent persistent viewpoint remains unchanged: participation and participatory approaches in development practice are ideal, but are likely to fail if power dynamics are left unfathomed. By switching the "self" back and forth, between an "insider" and an "outsider", as well as a doer and a learner, during the whole course of research, my understanding on reflexivity and positionality as changing notions and practices has become fuller.

I have tried to illustrate my reflections apropos the existing literature. It is important for me to keep in mind that this exercise of reflection does not only mean reflective writing in my journals and auto-ethnography; it also means a critical self-examination. The importance of reflexivity, to me, is not emphasised through my positionality as a development worker working in the field; it is rather "blended" with the positionality of a learner when doing development research.

I have somehow observed that the boundary seems to blur between the two kinds of knowledge: personal experiences and academic theory. Using the

reflective method of auto-ethnography, I can see that my personal experiences can also enrich possible academic discussions around the collective characteristics of reflexivity that might be helpful for development practice. Furthermore, academic knowledge I have gained when reviewing relevant literature has provided me with a theoretical standpoint needed for my own practice of reflexivity.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and suggestions

I.   Summary of research progress

This chapter draws conclusions and re-addresses the key question investigated throughout the research: What are the effects of different understandings of reflexivity on the negotiations of power within participatory development practice? To address this question, I have taken a more "bottom-up" research pathway, which clearly reflects my choice of an interpretative research framework. That means, before studying this central research question, I have sought possible answers for the guiding questions first, then made my way up. As soon as different interpretations of the practice of reflexivity were unveiled by local aspects of local culture through the participants' perspectives, power relations in participation were elaborated to lead to the conclusion that participation is at times negotiated because it is strongly embedded in the cultural and socio-political development context.

I, as the learner/researcher, question the link between reflexivity and participatory approaches in development. At the outset, I would regard this research project as my learning process, and even when the learning is "about" a topic about participation carried "by" a research project "on" some participants, my work is undertaken "with" them, hoping that the outcomes will be "for" some people's interest in the subject matter. This reference is problematic in two ways.

First, it contends to the unsettled question of researcher – respondent relationships, ethically placed before a pursuit of knowledge which might or might not be perceived as an "organisation of the connections between self, other and world, and reflection on what is right to do and good to be as a social inquirer" (Schwandt, 1995, p. 134). Second, it suggests that I am

exercising my power on colleagues and community members when the data I collect comes from my long-term relationships with them to enrich my own understanding of development practice. Koepping (1994) called this dilemma "the abuse of trust" and suggested that the fieldworker should give back more than before to others as the source of the researcher's own knowledge and success.

From a methodological perspective, the choice of research methods such as doing semi-structured interviews gave me, an outsider at the time of employing the method, the space for discussing different understandings about participatory approaches and reflexivity with participants. Both the participants and I have gained new insights into the concept which has not been thoroughly put into phrases and formal practice because of the lack of a proper and agreed translation for the concept.

Finally, the amalgam of qualitative and interpretative methods (semi-structured interviews and auto-ethnography) has provided me the most opportune moments during this self-learning journey to revisit the literature on participation and reflexivity and to make sense of the recurring themes and issues. However, when it came to applying the insights from the academic knowledge to the day-to-day reality of uncertainties as shared by many development practitioners in their stories, the themes and issues became much more complex. In reality, empowerment as one important keyword in participatory community projects is fraught with obstacles, as a result of negotiation and dilemmas rooted in culture and the power-centralised context of Confucianism and a socialist legacy in the country. Despite this complicated context, I hope this thesis will succeed to show that it is possible for development practitioners to improve their understanding and knowledge of the culturally-embedded development practice and facilitate participation more appropriately.

II.   Concluding reflection: Is negotiating participation possible?

In the conclusion of this research lies a question: Is negotiating participation in culturally-embedded development practice in Vietnam possible? I cannot answer this question myself just yet, but can only say I have made much of this writing exercise and subjective introspection, becoming more reflexive in pursuit of an understanding about participation and participatory development. Pronk (2001) said, upon reflecting on development as catalysts, it is difficult to attach meaning to something if one does not know why one is doing it.

Specifically looking into the case of BDSRLP, this study set out to establish a deeper insight into the implications of participation. This has been carried out through analysis of the central themes of: participation, power, cross-cultural development work and reflexivity. In addition to the existing literature on participation, the research was supported by observations made during fieldwork and the stories of the participants. Through the case study, negotiating participation has been discussed and clarified as a useful practice which offers potential contributions to the overall picture of participation in development work in Vietnam.

Regarding the nature of today's development interventions, van Ufford, Giri, and Mosse (2003) suggested that there is a shift from critical understanding to moral reflection and development should be conceived as a daily route and relationships that cope with disjunctures. This shift entails the keyword "power". Although extensively explored in the 1990s in a Foucauldian sense, the theme of power in participation nowadays rather reveals the relationships between differently positioned development actors (Groves & Hinton, 2013).

The idea of development as a discourse of power with cultural or political influence seems to resolve when questioning whether or not power is negotiated. In fact, it relies on the Foucauldian view that development

interventions do not necessarily have to be delivered to developing countries using the negative power of compulsion or domination, but through a positive power that wins legitimacy and empowers action so that individuals can decide the action for individual and household interests (Watts, 2003b). Ideally, this view gives way to exploring newly-adopted development practice in a more liberal framework, with a better focus on local cultural and political facets where local actors come to negotiate between internalised disciplines and the responsibility for externally designed development interventions. Given the large amount of literature and critique on the matter, this negotiation does not happen in a vacuum.

I argue, this negotiation can happen once the predicament of viewing the disciplines of development practice, such as reflexivity and positionality, as institutionalised and static disciplines is removed. In other words, the power dynamics of development practice work through negotiations to improve the equality of relationships so that even a top-down approach in the context of Vietnam could enable participation, making it collective and thus reciprocal.

Different understandings about empowerment have led to the conclusion that positionality is changing rather than static. In the reflections of my participants, their positionalities seemed to be embedded in culture, and the local political practice seemed to inform many professional challenges. While local factors such as culture and the hierarchical bureaucracy may supplant the exercise of power, what remains to be seen is whether or not key players, both development agencies and professionals and target groups are willing to change.

This research provides an example of an alternative approach that could aid practitioners in reflecting upon their own and others' conceptions of participation in theory and practice. The subjective interpretations on reflexivity might imply a deviceful use of reflective practice based on self-

understanding and self-reflections to stress a cross-cultural experience of "bridging" Western and non-Western lifeworlds of development.

III.   Suggestions for further research

Based on the two key limitations of the research approach, possibilities for further research are recommended. Firstly, the most challenging part I have encountered is to translate several specific terms including reflexivity, positionality and power into Vietnamese when I explained these concepts to participants or developed interview questions in Vietnamese. This challenge exists as a gap due to a linguistic "lag" when adopting development theories and concepts of its practice in Vietnam. Therefore a further study should endeavour to critically address this gap and explore the social-linguistic and cross-cultural aspects evolving around the translations of development concepts.

Secondly, a purely qualitative approach has been adopted for undertaking this research. Although the consequent qualitative methods for data collection and analysis are used as the most appropriate means for creating the depth of analysis, a further study using a more mixed methodology would be advantageous, beyond the selection of only one case study, other dimensions of power and participation in development practice.

Finally, a more thorough rumination over the existing precepts of reflexivity could be applied to a critical analysis of the terms and its application in the different social interfaces of development practice. A comparison between the Western and non-Western precepts could also prove complimentary to examine the possible aspect of collective reflexivity, and what this, if being conceptualised, means to development professionals working in development contexts similar to Vietnam's where collectivism in culture is noticeable. In doing so, the recently dominant Western development discourses would

become more adaptable to address issues of power imbalance in the lands and fields that need development.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Participants information sheet for community members

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

**Participant Information Sheet
for Community Members**

Research Title: **Reflexivity in the negotiation of participation: insights from a culturally-embedded community project in Vietnam**

Hello! My name is Nguyen Hai Duy Nguyen, and I am a Development Studies student at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As part of my Master degree, I am writing a thesis on "Reflexivity in the negotiation of participation: insights from a culturally-embedded community project in Vietnam". The main objective of this research is to examine how Participation can be negotiated based on different understanding of key stakeholders of a community project in Vietnam on Reflexivity. This project also aims to create a discussion of how we understand ourselves and are understood in relations to others in development projects (my case study) and the assumed links between those different understandings and better Facilitation through Participation in Vietnam's development context and local cultures. Research findings will be disseminated to local development partners, NGOs and government to promote community development and effective partnerships between stakeholders.

I would like to invite you, as a representative of …………………………….. to participate in an interview in which you will be able to share your experiences and stories of (1) how your participation in the current community project and other similar ones you have recently been involved is influenced by local culture; (2) how you think international and local development facilitators negotiate power in the participatory development project.

Our conversation will be conducted in a semi-structured questions that I have prepared in relation to this topic. It will take around 45 minutes.

Victoria University requires all students conducting research with people to undergo ethics assessment and approval. As part of this process there are several things that you need to be aware of before you consent to participate in this research:

If you give me your permission, the interview will be recorded to support my notes in case any ideas have been missed. Following our discussion, you have the right to check the interview notes. I will take all necessary steps to keep interview information safe during time in the field. All interview materials will be destroyed one year after the completion of the thesis. Written and electronically recorded material made during the interview will be safely stored and will only be seen by my supervisor and myself.

It will be your decision as to whether you and your organisation will be identified or will remain confidential in the published thesis. The interview material will not be used for any other purpose without your written permission. As a participant, you do not have to answer all questions. If you agree to take part in the interview you are free to withdraw at any stage without having to give a reason. You are free to withdraw any information you have provided before data collection and analysis of the research is complete on 1st October 2015.

Upon completion of my thesis, a copy of this thesis will be lodged in the Victoria University Wellington. The summary findings will be made available to you, if you are interested. The final research may also be published in academic or professional journals and/or disseminated at academic or professional conferences as the opportunity arises.

I hope you will agree to participate in this research and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Nguyen Hai Duy Nguyen   **Associate Professor Sara Kindon (Supervisor)**
nguyennguy@myvuw.ac.nz   Sara.Kindon@vuw.ac.nz
Ph (VN):
Ph (NZ):

Appendix B. Participants information sheet for local and international consultants

**Participant Information Sheet
for Local and International Consultants**

Research Title: Reflexivity in the negotiation of participation: insights from a culturally-embedded community project in Vietnam

Hello! My name is Nguyen Hai Duy Nguyen, and I am a Development Studies student at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. As part of my Master degree, I am writing a thesis on "Reflexivity in the negotiation of participation: insights from a culturally-embedded community project in Vietnam". The main objective of this research is to examine how Participation can be negotiated based on different understanding of key stakeholders of a community project in Vietnam on Reflexivity. This project also aims to create a discussion of how we understand ourselves and are understood in relations to others in development projects (my case study) and the assumed links between those different understandings and better Facilitation through Participation in Vietnam's development context and local cultures. Research findings will be disseminated to local development partners, NGOs and government to promote community development and effective partnerships between stakeholders.

I would like to invite you, as a representative of …………………………….. to participate in an interview in which you will be able to share your experiences and stories of (1) how your participation in the current community project and other similar ones you have recently been involved is influenced by local culture; (2) how Western and local development facilitators negotiate power in the participatory development project; and (3) how Western and local development facilitators understand themselves and are understood in relations to others in participatory development.

Our conversation will be conducted in a semi-structured questions that I have prepared in relation to this topic. It will take around 45 minutes.

Victoria University requires all students conducting research with people to undergo ethics assessment and approval. As part of this process there are several things that you need to be aware of before you consent to participate in this research:

If you give me your permission, the interview will be recorded to support my notes in case any ideas have been missed. Following our discussion, you have the right to check the interview notes. I will take all necessary steps to keep interview information safe during time in the field. All interview materials will be destroyed one year after the completion of the thesis. Written and electronically recorded material made during the interview will be safely stored and will only be seen by my supervisor and myself.

It will be your decision as to whether you and your organisation will be identified or will remain confidential in the published thesis. The interview material will not be used for any other purpose without your written permission. As a participant, you do not have to answer all questions. If you agree to take part in the interview you are free to withdraw at any stage without having to give a reason. You are free to withdraw any information you have provided before data collection and analysis of the research is complete on 1st October 2015.

Upon completion of my thesis, a copy of this thesis will be lodged in the Victoria University Wellington. The summary findings will be made available to you, if you are interested. The final research may also be published in academic or professional journals and/or disseminated at academic or professional conferences as the opportunity arises.

I hope you will agree to participate in this research and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Nguyen Hai Duy Nguyen   **Associate Professor Sara Kindon (Supervisor)**
nguyennguy@myvuw.ac.nz   Sara.Kindon@vuw.ac.nz
Ph (VN):
Ph (NZ):

Phiếu cung cấp thông tin cho người tham gia

Tên đề tài: Phản thân trong thương lượng sự tham gia: Góc nhìn từ một dự án cộng đồng gắn liền với văn hóa ở Việt Nam

Xin kính chào Anh/Chị! Tôi tên Nguyễn Hải Duy Nguyên, hiện theo học ngành Nghiên cứu Phát triển tại Đại học Victoria, Wellington, New Zealand. Hiện tôi đang thực hiện đề tài nghiên cứu "Phản thân trong thương lượng sự tham gia: Góc nhìn từ một dự án cộng đồng gắn liền với văn hóa ở Việt Nam". Mục đích chính của đề tài là đánh giá xem sự tham gia của các bên có thể được thương lượng như thế nào dựa trên những cách hiểu khác nhau về sự Phản thân. Người thực hiện còn mong muốn, theo một chừng mực nào đó, tìm hiểu về cách chúng ta tự hiểu về bản thân mình cũng như được người khác hiểu khi cùng tham gia làm việc trong các dự án phát triển. Ngoài ra, đề tài còn đánh giá sự liên quan giữa những cách hiểu khác nhau này với việc tổ chức cộng đồng có hiệu quả trong bối cảnh phát triển và văn hoá của Việt Nam. Nếu có điều kiện, người thực hiện đề tài mong muốn được phổ biến và chia sẻ các kết quả nghiên cứu của đề tài đến các đối tác phát triển ở địa phương, các tổ chức phi chính phủ và các cơ quan nhà nước có liên quan để thúc đẩy các dự án phát triển cộng đồng và các mối quan hệ phát triển giữa các bên có liên quan.

Tôi mong muốn Anh/Chị sẽ giành thời gian tham gia vào một buổi phỏng vấn nhỏ để chia sẻ kinh nghiệm và những câu chuyện về:
(1) Sự tác động của văn hoá địa phương lên việc tham gia của Anh/Chị vào các dự án từ trước đến nay;
(2) Nhận xét của Anh/Chị về việc thương lượng quyền hạn của những người làm công tác phát triển và tổ chức cộng đồng cho các dự án, kể cả các tư vấn nước ngoài.

Buổi nói chuyện thân mật của chúng ta sẽ diễn ra dưới dạng **hỏi và đáp** dựa trên một số câu hỏi đã được tôi chuẩn bị sẵn. Thời gian dự kiến là 45 phút.

Trường ĐH Victoria yêu cầu tất cả các sinh viên thực hiện đề tài nghiên cứu tuân thủ các quy định về đánh giá đạo đức nghiên cứu cũng như phải được nhà trường chấp thuận về mặt đạo đức nghiên cứu.
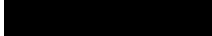
Theo đó, khi đồng ý trả lời các câu hỏi để giúp sinh viên có thông tin thực hiện đề tài, Anh/Chị nên đọc và hiểu một số điểm như sau:

Nếu được Anh/Chị cho phép, sinh viên sẽ ghi âm cuộc nói chuyện và một số điểm chính sẽ được ghi chép (nếu cần) để tránh sai sót khi phân tích số liệu về sau. Anh/Chị có thể xem những ghi chép hoặc nghe lại đoạn phỏng vấn. Sinh viên sẽ đảm bảo rằng đoạn ghi âm cũng như các ghi chép được bảo mật trong suốt thời gian nghiên cứu tại thực địa. Tất cả các số liệu và tài liệu có liên quan sẽ được huỷ sau 1 năm kể từ ngày đề tài nghiên cứu được hoàn tất. Thông tin lưu trữ dưới dạng ghi chép hoặc ghi âm sẽ được lưu trữ an toàn và chỉ được sử dụng bởi sinh viên thực hiện đề tài và giáo viên hướng dẫn.

Anh/Chị hoàn toàn quyết định việc liệu Anh/Chị hoặc cơ quan/tổ chức của Anh/Chị sẽ được nêu tên hoặc không được nêu tên trong đề tài. Các thông tin mà Anh/Chị cung cấp sẽ không được sử dụng cho bất kỳ mục đích nào khác mà không được sự cho phép bằng văn bản của Anh/Chị. Khi tham gia, Anh/Chị có quyền trả lời hoặc không trả lời toàn bộ các câu hỏi. Anh/Chị có thể từ chối tham gia cung cấp thông tin cho sinh viên bất cứ lúc nào. Trước khi sinh viên tiến hành phân tích thông tin để viết bài, Anh/Chị có thể liên hệ với sinh viên để "rút lại" các thông tin mà mình đã cung cấp trước ngày 1/10/2015.

Khi đề tài được hoàn tất, một bản copy của đề tài sẽ được lưu trữ tại ĐH Victoria, Wellington. Một bản tóm tắt đề tài sẽ được gởi cho Anh/Chị nếu Anh/Chị quan tâm. Đề tài có thể sẽ được đăng hoặc trích đăng trên các tạp chí học thuật hoặc chuyên ngành hoặc trình bày tại các hội thảo học thuật hoặc chuyên ngành nếu có cơ hội.

Kính mong Anh/Chị tham gia. Xin cám ơn!

Nguyễn Hải Duy Nguyên
nguyennguy@myvuw.ac.nz
Ph (VN): ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Ph (NZ): ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

PGS., TS. Sara Kindon (Giáo viên hướng dẫn)
Sara.Kindon@vuw.ac.nz

Appendix D. Consent to participation in research

Consent to Participation in Research

Research Title: Reflexivity in the negotiation of participation: insights from a culturally-embedded community project in Vietnam

Researcher: Nguyen Hai Duy Nguyen, School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand the purpose of this research project.
- I understand I will have an opportunity to correct a summary of the interview.
- I understand that all information I provide will be safely stored accessed only by the researcher and research supervisor.
- I understand I may withdraw myself, and any information I have provided, from this research project without explanation at any time before 1st October 2015.
- I understand the results of this research will be included in a thesis and may be used for publication in academic or professional journals, and for dissemination at academic or professional conferences.
- I understand the interview will be electronically recorded and any notes or recorded material from interviews will be destroyed one year after the completion of the research process.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Please select one:

I ◯ would like ◯ would not like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

I ◯ consent ◯ do not consent to my name being used when my comments or opinions are used in this research.
If not, please use the pseudonym: _____

I ◯ consent ◯ do not consent to the name of the organisation I work for being used in this research.
Please use the pseudonym: _____

Name: Date:
Organisation   :
Phone: Email (if any):
Signed:

Appendix E. Consent to participation in research in Vietnamese

Phiếu cam kết tham gia

Tên đề tài: **Phản thân trong thương lượng sự tham gia: Góc nhìn từ một dự án cộng đồng gắn liền với văn hóa ở Việt Nam**

Người thực hiện: Nguyễn Hải Duy Nguyên – trường đại học Victoria, Wellington

Tôi đã đọc nội dung trong Phiếu Cung Cấp Thông Tin Cho Người Tham Gia và hiểu mục đích của đề tài nghiên cứu này.

- Tôi hiểu rằng tôi được tham gia sửa nội dung tóm tắt của cuộc phỏng vấn này.
- Tôi hiểu rằng tất cả thông tin mà tôi chia sẻ sẽ được lưu trữ an toàn và chỉ được tiếp cận bởi người thực hiện đề tài và giáo viên hướng dẫn.
- Tôi hiểu rằng tôi có thể rút tên và các thông tin mà tôi chia sẻ khỏi đề tài này mà không cần đưa ra lý do trước ngày 1/10/2015.
- Tôi hiểu rằng kết quả của đề tài này sẽ được trình bày trong một luận văn và có thể được sử dụng cho mục đích xuất bản trong các tạp chí học thuật hoặc chuyên ngành, hoặc được trình bày tại các hội thảo học thuật hoặc chuyên ngành.
- Tôi hiểu rằng cuộc phỏng vấn này sẽ được ghi âm và các ghi chép sẽ được huỷ sau 1 năm kể từ khi hoàn thành quá trình nghiên cứu đề tài.
- Tôi chấp thuận tham gia vào đề tài này.

Vui lòng lựa chọn:

Tôi ⭕ muốn ⭕ không muốn nhận một bản tóm tắt kết quả nghiên cứu.

Tôi ⭕ chấp thuận ⭕ không chấp thuận công khai tên mình khi người thực hiện đề tài trích dẫn nội dung thông tin mà tôi cung cấp trong đề tài.

 Nếu không, hãy dùng tên thay thế là: _____

Tôi ⭕ chấp thuận ⭕ không chấp thuận sử dụng tên của cơ quan/tổ chức của tôi trong đề tài.
Nếu không, hãy dùng tên thay thế là: _____

Tên   :   Ngày:
Cơ   quan hoặc tổ chức (nếu có):
Số   điện thoại: Email (nếu có):
Ký tên:

Appendix F. Interview questions

(including original questions designed in English for community members, local government officials/consultants and international consultants)

Interview Questions

Research Title: **Reflexivity in the negotiation of participation: insights from a culturally-embedded community project in Vietnam**

Participants include 3 international development practitioners, 5 provincial government officials and local development workers/facilitators, and 5 community members who are key stakeholders of Binh Dinh Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Project and have previously been engaged in other participatory development projects in Binh Dinh Province, Vietnam.

Central research question: What are the effects of different understandings of reflexivity on the negotiations of power within participatory development practice?

Interview questions for community members

1. How long have you been involved in the current project?
2. What is your role in the project?
3. Why did you decide to be involved in the project?
4. How do you define your power in this project?
5. What are features of local culture that allow you to exercise your power in the project?
6. How would you describe the major impacts of local culture on the level of participation demonstrated by local project stakeholders (i.e. your local peers, local development workers and government officials)?
7. How would you describe the major impacts of local culture on the level of participation demonstrated by project stakeholders from overseas (i.e. international consultants, volunteers, evaluators)?
8. How well do you think local and international facilitators negotiate their power in the project?

Interview questions for government officials/local development workers

1. How long have you been involved in the current project ?
2. What is your role in the project?
3. Why did you decide to be involved in the project?
4. How do you define your power in this project?
5. What are some features of the local culture that allow you to exercise your power in the project?

6. How would you describe the major impacts of local culture on the level of participation demonstrated by local project stakeholders (i.e. community members, local development workers and government officials)?
7. How would you describe the major impacts of local culture on the level of participation demonstrated by project stakeholders from overseas (i.e. international consultants, volunteers, evaluators)?
8. If reflexivity is about "how emotions and cultures might shape development practice", how do you negotiate between different sets of cultures to enhance project implementation?
9. Please tell me about your reflections on how power is exercised in the project.
10. Please tell me about a time in the project when you felt a sense of powerlessness.
11. When do you feel most empowered within the project?

Interview questions for international development workers

1. How would you describe your experience of working cross-culturally in Vietnam?
2. What strategies do you employ to navigate your cross-cultural work?
3. What are some features of the local culture that allow you to exercise your power in the project?
4. How would you describe some major impacts of the local culture on the level of participation demonstrated by local project stakeholders?
5. Please tell me about your reflections on how power is exercised in the project.
6. Please tell me about a time in the project when you felt a sense of powerlessness.
7. How would you define reflexivity?
8. How do you practice reflexivity in your work?
9. What are some of the benefits or challenges associated with being reflexive?
10. Do you think being reflexive is about an individual or collective exercise of power?

Appendix G. Interview questions for community members in Vietnamese

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Câu hỏi

Tên đề tài: Phản thân trong thương lượng sự tham gia: Góc nhìn từ một dự án cộng đồng gắn liền với văn hóa ở Việt Nam

Theo dự kiến, người thực hiện đề tài sẽ liên hệ và tiến hành phỏng vấn với 3 người làm công tác phát triển là người nước ngoài, 5 người là cán bộ nhà nước và những người làm công tác phát triển/tổ chức cộng đồng ở địa phương, và 5 thành viên từ cộng đồng. Các đối tượng được phỏng vấn là các bên tham gia chính của dự án Sinh kế Nông thôn Bền vững tỉnh Bình Định **hoặc** đã từng gắn bó với các dự án phát triển có sự tham gia tại tỉnh Bình Định, Việt Nam.

Câu hỏi nghiên cứu: Các tác động từ những cách hiểu khác nhau về Phản thân lên việc thương lượng quyền hạn khi tham gia vào các dự án của các bên là gì?

Câu hỏi giành cho cộng đồng

1. Anh/chị đã tham gia vào dự án được bao lâu?
2. Vai trò của anh/chị trong dự án?
3. Điều gì làm anh/chị quyết định tham gia vào dự án?
4. Anh/chị hiểu nhận xét như thế nào về tiếng nói của mình trong dự án?
5. Các yếu tố văn hoá địa phương nào có ảnh hưởng tiếng nói của anh/chị trong dự án?
6. Anh/chị có thể chia sẻ một (vài) câu chuyện hoặc trường hợp trong dự án khi anh/chị nhận thấy tiếng nói của mình không được các bên ghi nhận?
7. Anh/chị có thể chia sẻ một (vài) câu chuyện hoặc trường hợp trong dự án khi anh/chị nhận thấy tiếng nói của mình được các bên ghi nhận mạnh mẽ nhất?
8. Anh/chị nhận xét như thế nào về sự tham gia của mình trong dự án? (ví dụ như: khó khăn, thuận lợi…)
9. Anh/chị nhận xét như thế nào về sự tham gia của người dân trong cộng đồng của mình trong dự án? (ví dụ như: khó khăn, thuận lợi…)
10. Anh/chị có thường xuyên rút kinh nghiệm về việc tham gia của mình trong dự án để làm tốt hơn cho các lần sau hay không?
11. Anh/chị nhận xét như thế nào về cách tổ chức các hoạt động dự án? (ví dụ như: các cuộc hội họp, hội thảo, tập huấn… đã được tổ chức ra sao, cộng đồng tham gia ra sao, các tư vấn trình bày vấn đề có dễ hiểu hay không, anh/chị có cơ hội chia sẻ kiến thức, kinh nghiệm và tham gia trực tiếp vào các hoạt động này hay không…)?
12. Anh/chị mô tả các ảnh hưởng chính của văn hoá địa phương lên sự tham gia của các bên phối hợp thực hiện dự án ở địa phương ra sao (ví dụ như tác động lên sự tham gia của các người dân khác, các cán bộ địa phương…)?
13. Anh/chị mô tả các ảnh hưởng chính của văn hoá địa phương lên sự tham gia của các bên phối hợp thực hiện dự án từ nước ngoài ra sao (ví dụ như tác động lên sự tham gia của nhà tài trợ, các tư vấn quốc tế, các tình nguyện viên, những người làm công tác đánh giá dự án…)?

Appendix H. Interview questions for local consultants in Vietnamese

Câu hỏi

Tên đề tài: Tên đề tài: Phản thân trong thương lượng sự tham gia: Góc nhìn từ một dự án cộng đồng gắn liền với văn hóa ở Việt Nam

Theo dự kiến, người thực hiện đề tài sẽ liên hệ và tiến hành phỏng vấn với 3 người làm công tác phát triển là người nước ngoài, 5 người là cán bộ nhà nước và những người làm công tác phát triển/tổ chức cộng đồng ở địa phương, và 5 thành viên từ cộng đồng. Các đối tượng được phỏng vấn là các bên tham gia chính của dự án Sinh kế Nông thôn Bền vững tỉnh Bình Định **hoặc** đã từng gắn bó với các dự án phát triển có sự tham gia tại tỉnh Bình Định, Việt Nam.

Câu hỏi nghiên cứu: Các tác động từ những cách hiểu khác nhau về Phản thân lên việc thương lượng quyền hạn khi tham gia vào các dự án của các bên là gì?

Câu hỏi giành cho các cán bộ nhà nước/những người làm công tác phát triển ở địa phương

1. Anh/chị đã tham gia vào dự án được bao lâu?
2. Vai trò của anh/chị trong dự án?
3. Điều gì làm anh/chị quyết định tham gia vào dự án?
4. Anh/chị hiểu về quyền hạn/tiếng nói của mình trong dự án như thế nào?
5. Các yếu tố văn hoá bản địa/địa phương nào có ảnh hưởng đến việc thực hiện quyền hạn/tiếng nói của anh/chị trong dự án?
6. Anh/chị mô tả các ảnh hưởng chính của văn hoá địa phương lên sự tham gia của các bên liên quan ở địa phương ra sao (ví dụ như tác động lên sự tham gia của các người dân, các cán bộ địa phương…)?
7. Anh/chị mô tả các ảnh hưởng chính của văn hoá địa phương lên sự tham gia của các bên liên quan là người nước ngoài ra sao (ví dụ như tác động lên sự tham gia của các tư vấn quốc tế, các tình nguyện viên, những người làm công tác đánh giá dự án…)?
8. Nếu sự Phản thân là về "sự ảnh hưởng của các yếu tố tình cảm hoặc văn hoá lên thực hành phát triển", các yếu tố văn hoá địa phương nào thường được anh/chị sử dụng để làm cho việc thực hiện dự án thêm hiệu quả?
9. Xin anh/chị vui lòng chia sẻ những quan sát/kinh nghiệm của mình về việc thực hiện quyền hạn/tiếng nói trong thực hiện dự án.
10. Xin anh/chị vui lòng chia sẻ một câu chuyện/kinh nghiệm về một thời điểm khi anh chị nhận thấy mình bị mất quyền hạn/tiếng nói trong thực hiện dự án.
11. Thời điểm nào anh/chị thấy mình được trao quyền nhiều nhất trong thực hiện dự án?