

Gendered Territorial Regimes of Work and Everyday Provisioning: Regional Responses to Uneven Development in Coastal Vietnam

Kimsa Maradan, University of Neuchâtel, ORCID: 0009-0003-6534-3426

Email: kimsa.nguyen@unine.ch

Introduction

Regional science has long documented that development trajectories unfold unevenly across space, concentrating opportunities, infrastructures, and labor market dynamics in some territories while leaving others structured by endogenous economies and differentiated access to resources. Yet the gendered dimensions of these spatial inequalities remain systematically underexplored. More specifically, the ways in which contrasting sub-national development trajectories reorganize women's work, care, mobility, and temporal regimes have received limited attention, despite their direct relevance to debates on social cohesion, inclusive growth, and the sustainability of territorial transitions. This paper addresses this gap by proposing the concept of *gendered territorial regimes of work* and by examining empirically how differentiated development trajectories, at an infra-provincial scale, reconfigure the organization of work, domestic arrangements, and mobility patterns in ways that reproduce rather than reduce gender hierarchies. The central argument is that economic development does not mechanically erode gender inequalities: it reorganizes them through territorially situated configurations in which families absorb a decisive share of transition costs in time, availability, and unrecognized care labor.

Conceptual Framework

The notion of *gendered territorial regimes of work* is defined as the set of economic, domestic, and institutional arrangements that, within a given space, organize access to activities, the distribution of paid work and care time, modes of remuneration and recognition, and the possibilities of mobility available to women and men. This concept draws on three intersecting bodies of literature. Feminist development scholarship has shown that market integration tends to reconfigure gender hierarchies through situated institutional and domestic arrangements rather than dissolving them (Kabeer, 1999; Cornwall et al., 2007). Political economy perspectives emphasize that these transformations unfold unevenly across space, as investments, infrastructures, and labor market opportunities concentrate in certain localities while others remain shaped by economic endogeneity and relational dependence (Meagher, 2010). Ecological economics of work further broadens the analysis by embedding labor within time use, mobility, and the material infrastructures that shape everyday provisioning, showing that economic gains often come with intensified temporal and relational constraints whose costs are unequally distributed (Gómez-Baggethun, 2022; Gerold et al., 2023).

By combining these perspectives, the framework moves beyond conventional oppositions between formal and informal work, or between market and family, to focus on the concrete conditions under which people enter, remain in, and move across activities. Territory is treated not as context but as a differentiating mechanism that structures access to resources, the value of temporal trade-offs, and the possibilities of mobility in gender-specific ways.

Methodology

The empirical analysis draws on a comparative ethnography conducted in Kiên Giang province, southern Vietnam, between 2022 and 2025, spanning nearly ten months across two geographically proximate but developmentally contrasting sites. Hà Tiên is a small mainland coastal town organized around fishing, local commerce, and diffuse tourism, where productive activities remain deeply intertwined with domestic space and neighborhood sociability. Phú Quốc is an island that within a decade became one of Vietnam's foremost tourism destinations, marked by rapid urbanization, large-scale resort investment, and the diffusion of externally driven organizational norms. This controlled territorial variation makes it possible to treat development trajectories not as background context but as a central differentiating mechanism in gendered relations of work, while holding the provincial institutional framework constant.

Data collection combined 126 semi-structured interviews conducted in Vietnamese, 67 with women and 59 with men engaged in diverse productive activities, with extended fieldwork observations in workplaces and spaces of local sociability. Interviews were complemented by trajectory reconstruction across both sites, with particular attention to the sequencing of daily activities, the intensity and predictability of constrained time, and the spatial and relational resources mobilized to sustain mobility. The analysis proceeded iteratively, organized around transversal categories including forms of activity, domestic organization, mobility, temporal regimes of work, remuneration types, and recognition registers.

Findings

The analysis identifies two distinct gendered territorial regimes of work, each producing specific configurations of occupational segmentation, remuneration, mobility, and temporal availability.

In Hà Tiên, women's trajectories remain deeply embedded in domestic and neighborhood economies. Productive activities extend competences developed within the household, unfold in hybrid spaces where production and reproduction are tightly interwoven, and depend on intergenerational support that makes work sustainable without requiring geographic rupture. Mme Hai (45), who transforms part of her husband's morning catch into fermented fish soup sold in front of the house, captures this logic: "I earn less than if I worked elsewhere, but I can stay home, take care of the house, and sell when people pass by without losing time going back and forth." Mobilities are predominantly short and incremental, grounded in the activation of family resources rather than sectoral breaks. This regime affords women a relative control over their daily rhythms, but at the cost of limited monetary remuneration and weak institutional recognition.

In Phú Quốc, tourism-led integration diversifies opportunities and opens access to formalized employment, but under conditions that institutionalize demanding expectations of temporal availability, emotional performance, and continuous self-presentation. Women remain concentrated in client-facing and hospitality roles while technical, logistical, and supervisory positions remain predominantly male. Trinh (22), a receptionist in a large resort, describes the centrality of emotional labor: "Here you always have to smile, even when you're tired or when a guest is unpleasant. That's the job." Higher nominal income often coexists with intensified coordination burdens. Thùy (29) captures the daily cost of this regime: "I leave very early, ride to the resort, work all day, and then ride back home to cook and take care of everyone. Doing these four and a half hours of back-and-forth every day exhausts me." The

burden of aligning professional demands with domestic responsibilities is largely absorbed within households, effectively shifting a decisive share of provisioning costs onto women's time and adaptive capacity.

Across both sites, the analysis reveals a pattern of *temporal extraction* through which territorial development sustains local economic dynamism by drawing on women's time, availability, and coordination work while leaving these contributions largely invisible in conventional regional indicators. In Hà Tiên this operates through the embedding of productive activity in unpaid domestic labor; in Phú Quốc through the externalization of coordination costs onto workers whose availability and emotional self-regulation become central to sustaining tourism-driven provisioning systems. What appears as regional growth rests in both cases on a hidden redistributive mechanism, a gendered subsidization of territorial dynamism that reproduces rather than reduces spatial and social inequalities.

Discussion and Conclusion

These findings contribute to regional science debates on the social inclusiveness of territorial transitions in several ways. They show that inclusiveness cannot be evaluated through employment outcomes or income levels alone. The temporal, reproductive, and relational conditions under which participation in development is made possible constitute a structurally significant dimension of regional inequality that standard indicators do not capture. Place-based development strategies risk displacing transition costs onto households when they are not accompanied by adequate care infrastructures, housing support, and labor market protections. The *refamilialization of transition costs* observed in both sites illustrates how the absence of these provisions silently shifts developmental burdens onto women, reproducing rather than transforming the gendered foundations of territorial dynamism.

The concept of gendered territorial regimes of work offers a transferable analytical framework for examining how sub-national development trajectories produce differentiated configurations of gendered work across diverse regional contexts, including post-socialist economies undergoing tourism-led or market-integration transitions. More broadly, this paper argues that evaluating regional responses to global challenges requires attending not only to aggregate economic performance but to who bears the invisible cost of sustaining it.

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