

Transformations of the food retail environment and dynamics in food consumption of low-income urbanites: evidence from Vietnam

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Webinar series:

Drivers of food choice in low and middle-income countries: a synthesis of evidence

1. Food choice

2. Food safety

3. Changing values

4. Changing livelihoods



Webinar 1 - Understanding how and why people make food choices in LMIC for promotion of sustainable healthy diets (14 Jan 2021)



Hanoi, Vietnam



Urban modernization and food safety concerns

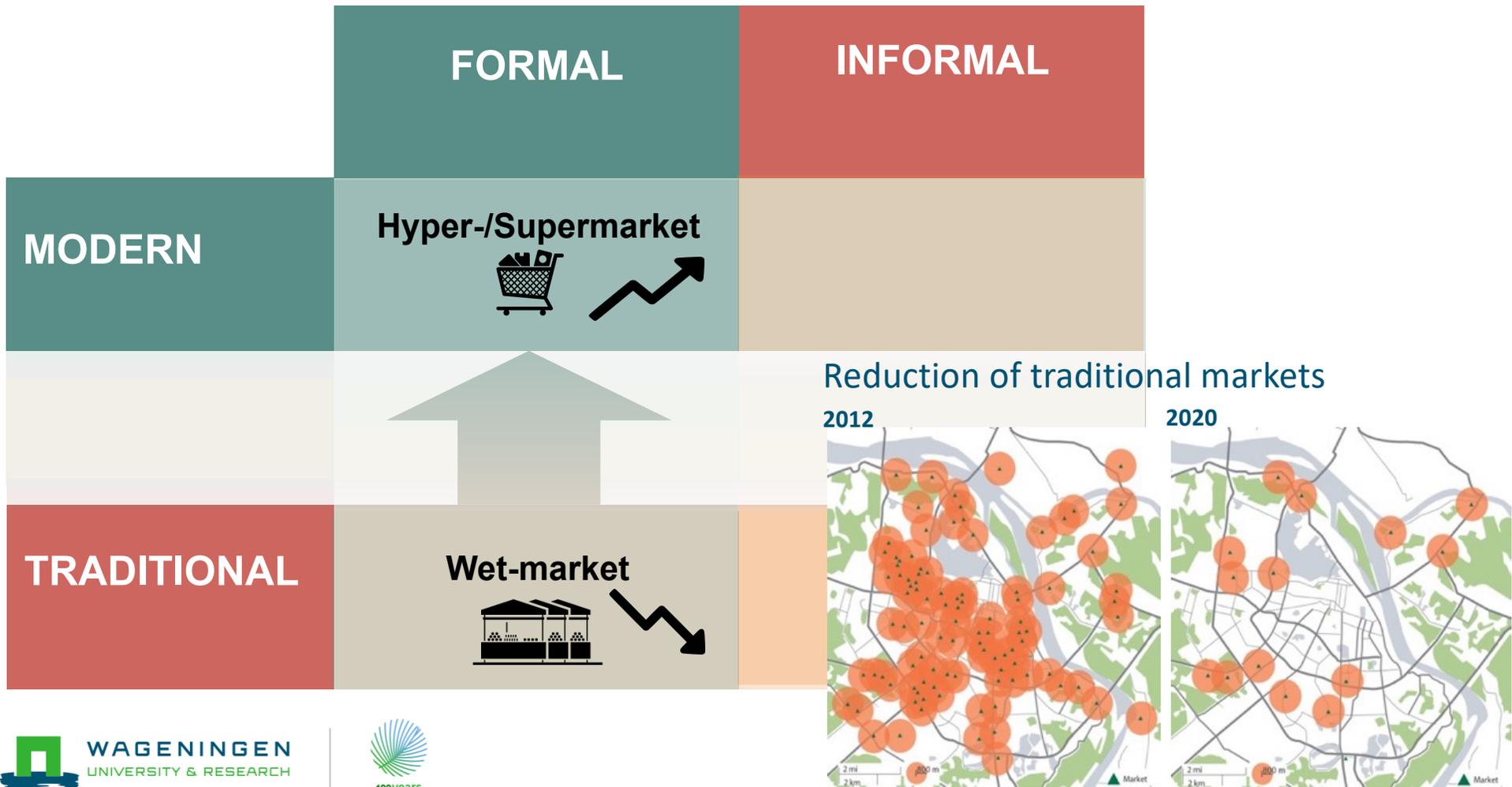


Transformation of the food retail environment

	FORMAL	INFORMAL
MODERN	<p>Hyper-/Supermarket</p> 	
HYBRID	<p>Convenience & Specialty</p> 	<p>Relations</p> 
TRADITIONAL	<p>Wet-market</p> 	<p>Street vending</p> 



Retail modernization policy



Policy and practices

Questioning: the ability of policy to steer consumption into aimed for directions

Retail Diversity for Dietary Diversity (RD4DD)

Focus on low-income urbanites:

- 2050: 70% world population is urban
- 50% urban world population in Asia
- Many urbanites will be poor
- Hanoi, Vietnam, is case in point



QUESTION 1 - open question

What percentage of Hanoi citizens has a low-income?

Low-income urbanites in Hanoi

≤ 5 USD / cap / day



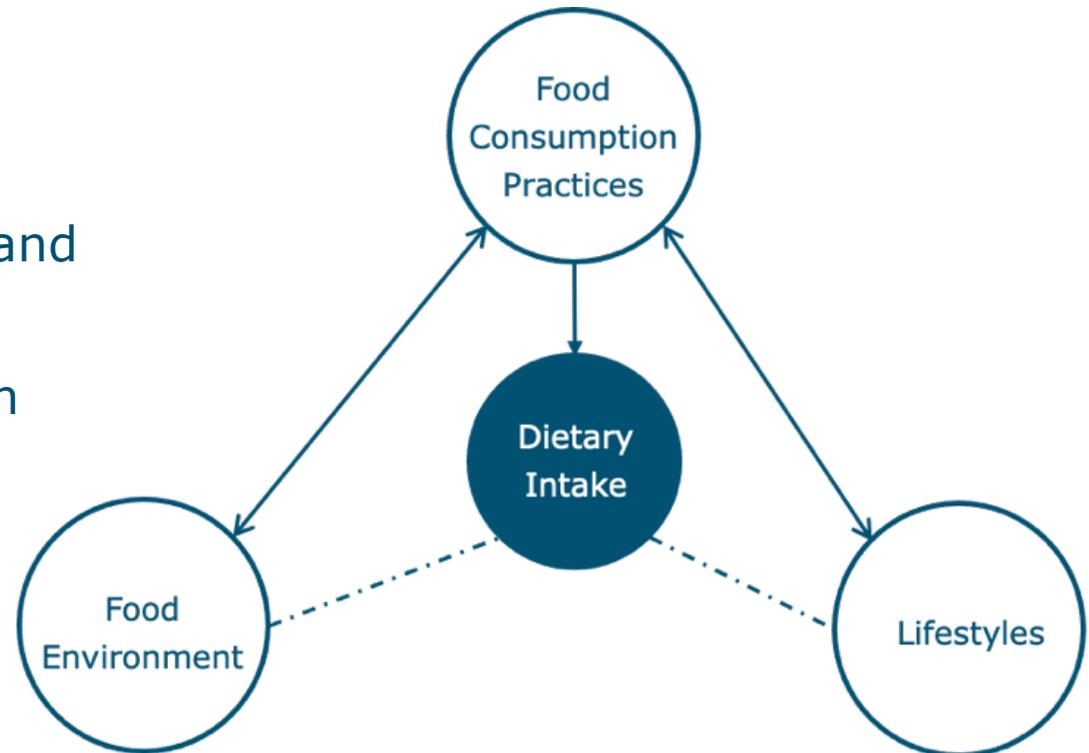
Research questions

- How do the **urban poor**, within the organization of their daily lives, cope with progressing **food retail transformations**?
- How and to what extent does this **impact** their daily **dietary intake** in terms of **nutrition**, **diversity** and **food safety**?



Studying food consumption practices

- **Dietary intake** is assessed as dependent variable of primarily **food consumption practices** and secondary food retail transformations and dynamics in urban lifestyles



Dynamics in food consumption



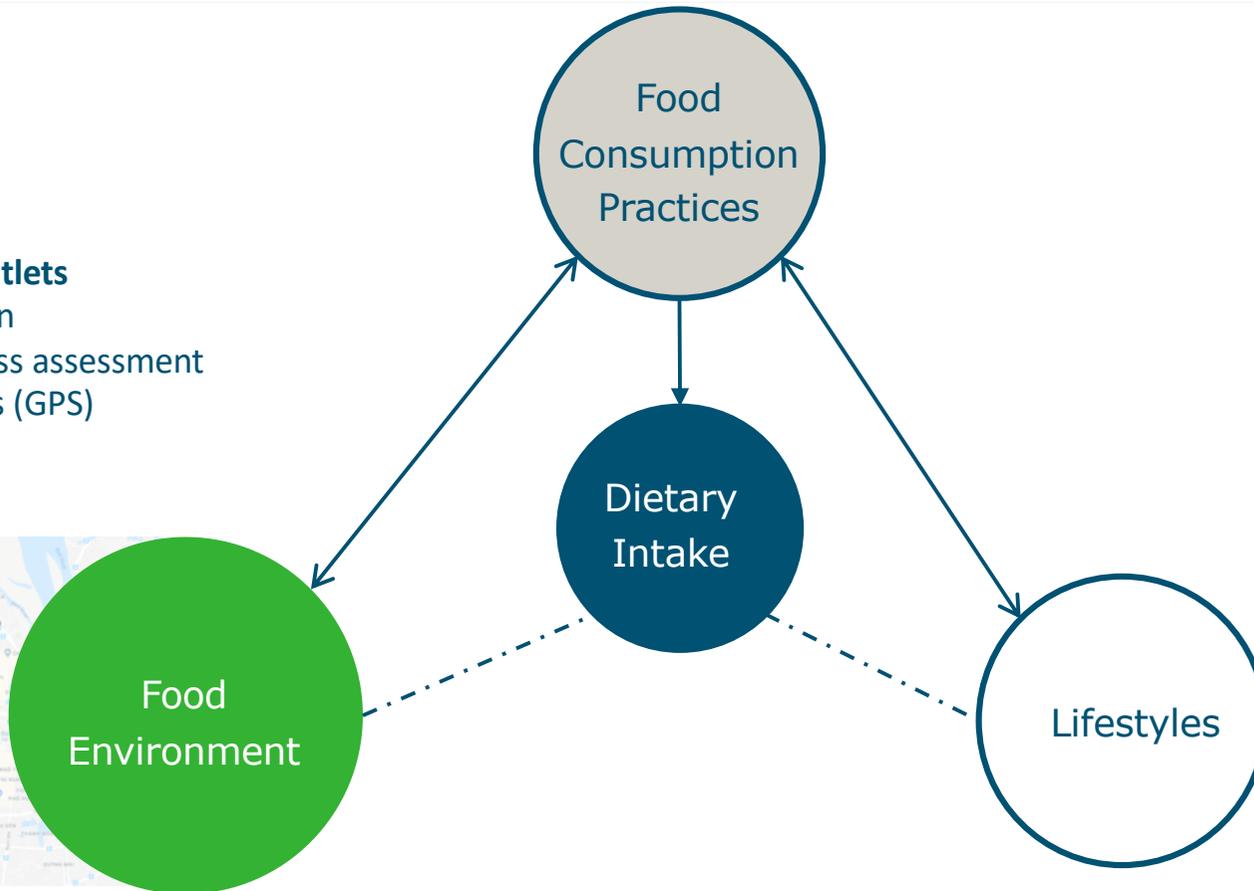
Methods: food environment

QUANTITATIVE yr1

Census food retail outlets

- Outlet classification
- Outlet healthfulness assessment
- Mapping of outlets (GPS)

Price data collection

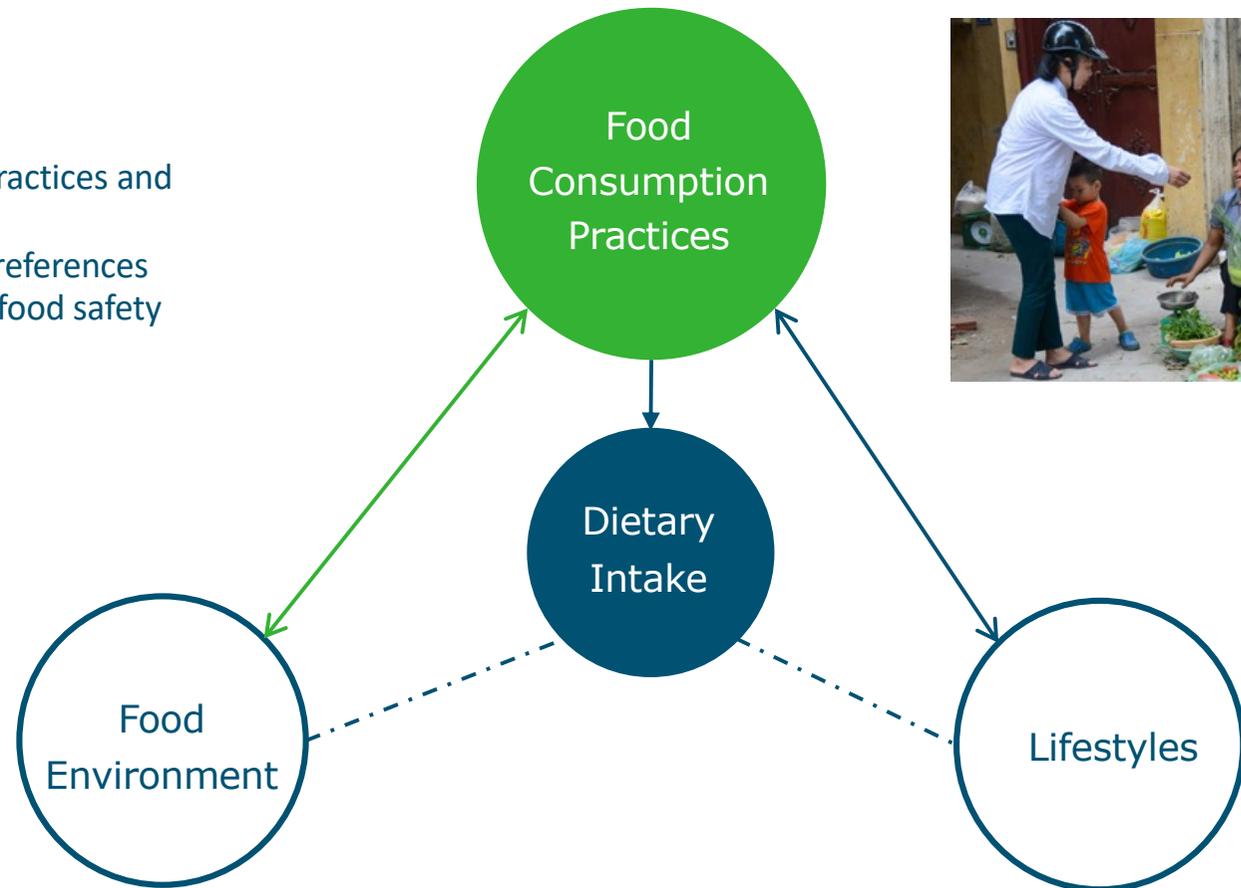


Methods: food practices

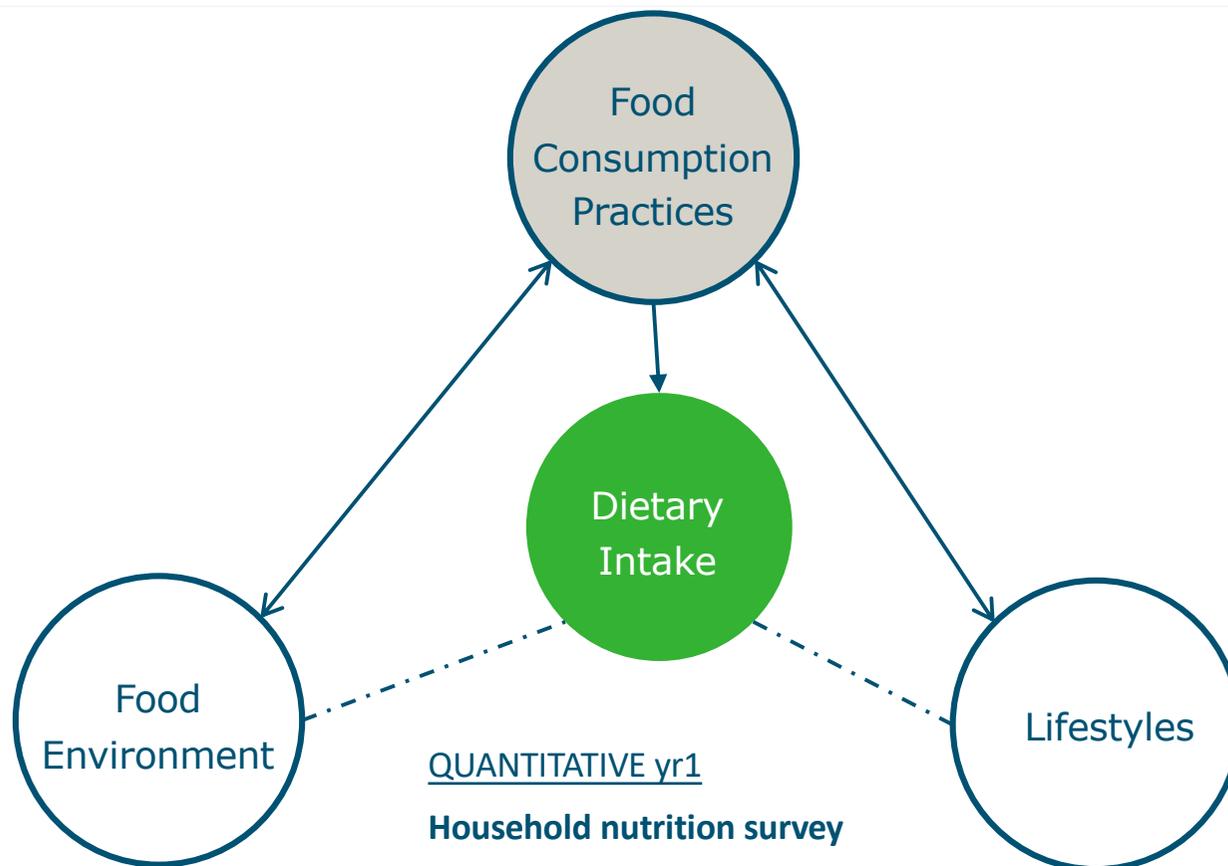
QUANTITATIVE yr1

Household survey

- Household Food shopping practices and preferences
- Food choice practices and preferences
- Risk perception and trust in food safety



Methods: food intake (nutrition research)

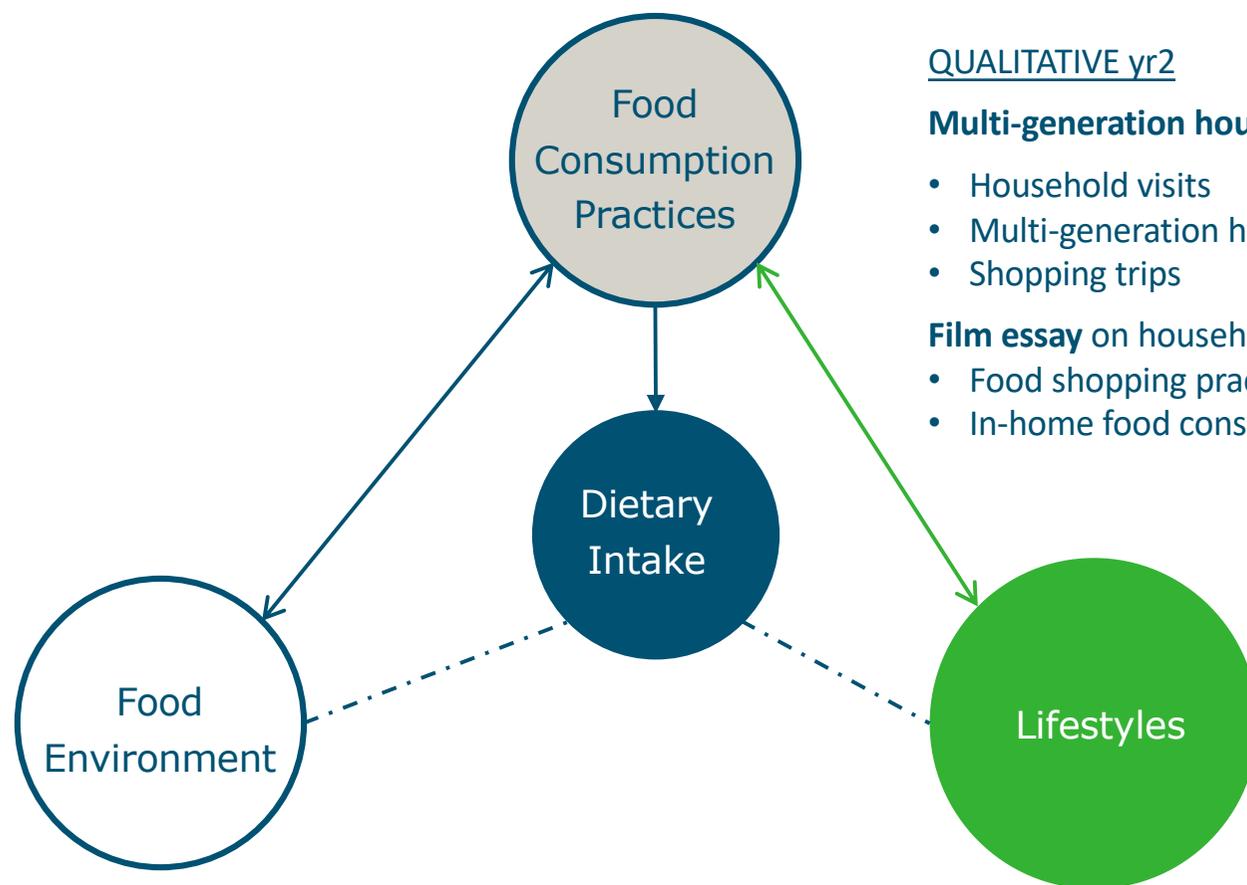


QUANTITATIVE yr1

Household nutrition survey

- 24-hour dietary recall
- Place of purchase
- Nutrition knowledge and attitudes

Methods: lifestyles & food practices



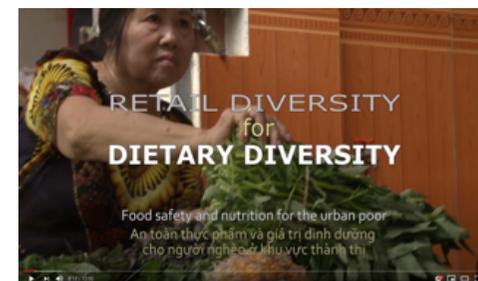
QUALITATIVE yr2

Multi-generation household study

- Household visits
- Multi-generation household interviews
- Shopping trips

Film essay on household food practices

- Food shopping practices
- In-home food consumption



Results

Methods



A cross-disciplinary mixed-method approach to understand how food retail environment transformations influence food choice and intake among the urban poor: Experiences from Vietnam

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ARTICLE INFO

Appetite
Nutrition
Social justice
Food security
Consumption
Food safety
Food environment

ABSTRACT

Nutrition insecurity among urban poor in modernizing Asian metropolitan is a critical issue. It is well recognized that in urban Asia the poor are food insecure. Access Asia's food retail environment is transforming rapidly, in which supermarkets increasingly replace traditional food vendors, like markets and street vendors that the urban poor depend upon. The question is, how these transformations impact the diets of the urban poor? What drives their food choice? What are their daily shopping practices and how does that affect their dietary intake? To investigate this, we developed a cross-disciplinary method and social practices study with a sequential quantitative qualitative mixed-method design. Building on empirical evidence from Hanoi, Vietnam, the study tests (i) food choice and associated dietary intake, with (ii) food retail environments, through (iii) food shopping practices and preferences of 400 women of reproductive age within the context of (iv) their transformative urban design. Methods included an in-store census with 200 households to map the food retail environment, a household survey, a 24-h diet recall, semi-structured household interviews and shopping tips. We demonstrate that integrated sociological and nutritional perspectives are productive in rapidly generating evidence to understand the complex trade-offs between food safety and nutrition in everyday food consumption practices. We describe and reflect on our limited sets of dietary intake and social practices research, and use holistic mixed method approach which includes combining quantitative and qualitative methods, also across the urban poor food.

1. Introduction - food retail transformations and the urban poor

Building food and nutrition security for the poor is an increasingly tough challenge in urban Asia. More than half the global population currently lives in urban areas, and is expected to grow to 68% in 2050 and 70% by 2050 (UN, 2013). By 2050, 50% of the world's urban population will reside in Asia with the majority being poor (Gibson, 2010; Brundage, Winters, & Potts, 2007; UN, 2014). Among the toughest challenges confronting policy makers in the developing process to ensure adequate, safe and nutritious food intake, and specifically ensuring the food and nutrition security of the urban poor, it is well recognized that in urban Asia the lower income classes are food insecure (Diet & Food, 2006; Mckelvey, Phipps, & Waters, 2012). Access Southeast Asia (SEA) food retailing systems are transforming rapidly (Diet, 2012; Brundage & Tinner, 2012; 2014; Wiggley & Lwin, 2013) in which modern supermarkets increasingly replace

traditional food vending structures such as open markets and street vendors. It is important to uncover how these food environment transformations in SEA impact food intake and dietary quality of the urban poor. Research has demonstrated how the effect of income on dietary consumption is modified by the food environment, including how food and nutrition insecurity may be attributed to food position interventions (Olivier & Almond, 2013; Popkin, 2007). Thus, the Asian food and nutrition security of the growing number of urban poor depends on food system transformation decisions made now, or preparation for the anticipated urban growth.

1.1. Almost a case in point

Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, provides a case in point regarding the food and nutrition security implications of rapid urban population growth and food system transformations. In Vietnam the national urban

Quantitative research



Food safety and nutrition for low-income urbanites: exploring a social justice dilemma in consumption policy

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ABSTRACT Equitable access to healthy food is a critical challenge in urban Asia. Food safety governance promotes modern supermarkets over more traditional markets, but supermarkets are associated with unequal access to food. This study investigates how retail policies driven by food safety impact the diets of the urban poor in Hanoi, Vietnam. We do this by linking food retail infrastructures with the food shopping practices and measured dietary intake of 400 women. Our results reveal sub-optimal dietary diversity and reliance on foods sourced through traditional markets, which do not provide formal food safety guarantees. Modern channels supply formal food safety guarantees, but are mainly frequented for purchasing ultra-processed foods. The paper uncovers a conflicting duality governing food security and suggests that the public responsibility for ensuring access of the poor to nutritious and safe foods requires a more diverse retail policy approach.

KEYWORDS food access / food retail environment / Hanoi / healthy diet / social justice / urbanization / Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

"Of course, it is important for me to eat nutritious foods, but what is the point when they are not safe for consumption?"¹

This quote illustrates a prevalent dilemma in food health behaviour among urban low-income consumers in Asia. Over the past few decades there have been two notable shifts in the debate on food security. First, the focus has moved from quantity (mainly sufficient food energy) to the inclusion of quality in terms of safety, nutrition and (cultural) preferences.² Second, where food security and nutrition have long been a primarily rural agenda, rapidly progressing urbanization and food system transitions now pose urgent challenges for sustainable, safe and nutritious food provisioning; food security has entered the urban agenda.³ This is most prominent in emerging economies of the global South, particularly Asia, where the rapid rate of urbanization results in a simultaneous rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs)⁴ and urbanization of both poverty⁵

Qualitative research



Food policy and the unruliness of consumption: An intergenerational social practice approach to uncover transforming food consumption in modernizing Hanoi, Vietnam.

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ABSTRACT

Global food policy aims to drive citizens in specific directions, however consumption remains largely unruly. This is also the case in Hanoi, Vietnam, where the food safety driven modernization policy is only marginally successful in driving consumers from traditional markets. Previous research demonstrated that low income urbanites do not shop at supermarkets and maintain their traditional shopping diet quality through market shopping. Nevertheless, shifts in diets are occurring. The traditional food plant based diet, which may be considered a 'planetary health diet', is shifting towards an increased intake of animal proteins, ultra-processed foods and sugar sweetened beverages. This begs the question of how dietary shifts are shaping up. This paper aims to uncover emerging dietary trends by understanding the socio-cultural dimensions of food consumption in the everyday life of low-income urbanites. We use an intergenerational social practice approach to household food security, focusing on food access and utilization in shopping diet quality and food safety practices within the context of Hanoi's changing food retail environment. The qualitative methods, consisting of multi-generation household interviews and shopping tips, uncovered: (i) younger women prefer traditional food acquisition and preparation practices for market consumption; (ii) the changing food environment is mitigated by cultural attitudes and attitudes that are increasingly unfavourable; and (iii) the food is serving the house through poorer poor. The results demonstrate food security is a dynamic interplay of food environments, food acquisition and preparation practices, and consumer agency, whereas food security aims different from within changing systems. We discuss the usefulness of our approach and recommend policy makers consider with population diversity impacted by planned food policies to ensure they are relevant and leverage the creative agency demonstrated by the population.

1. Introduction

"In the past we didn't have enough to eat, but we didn't have to worry about food safety. Nowadays food is available everywhere, but it is also less healthy, and we have to worry whether the food is safe or not."¹(2019:82)

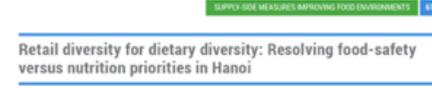
What constitutes food security is subject to change over time. Definitions are sensitive to interpretation, but overall becoming increasingly complex by integrating conditions, such as 'affordability' and 'social acceptability' (Dowling, 2003; Gibbon, 2013). Moreover, in light of global economic depletion, climate change and world population growth, definitions are linked with a need to shift towards more sustainable diets (Dowling et al., 2019; Willett et al., 2019). As expressed in SDG 2, meeting food and nutrition security is interlinked with how to produce, where and consume food sustainably. Although food security has long been primarily a rural agenda focused on self-determination, rapid urbanization and food system transition present urgent challenges to providing safe, nutritious and sustainable food to cities (Diet et al., 2017). Emerging economies are experiencing this most acutely, particularly in Asia, where the urbanization of poverty coincides with a rapid rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (Dowling et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2015, 2018; Willett, 2017). Urbanization and modernization are leading to fundamental lifestyle changes, including shifts in household composition and occupation, and

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Policy



Retail diversity for dietary diversity: Resolving food-safety versus nutrition priorities in Hanoi

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ABSTRACT

Amid rapidly transforming urban food environments, Asian cities are faced with the dilemma of ensuring food and nutrition security for their populations while also combating food safety concerns.

The current food environment in Hanoi, Viet Nam, only provides a minimal level of diet quality for the urban poor. Modernization policies aim to improve food safety by promoting the closure of open-air markets in favour of supermarkets and convenience stores. Traditional open air markets are the urban population's main source of food and ensure a healthy diet, but they do not offer formal food safety guarantees. In contrast, modern retail outlets, such as supermarkets and convenience stores, provide foods with safety guarantees, but are not utilized by the urban poor for myriad reasons, including cultural shopping preferences, habits and convenience (hours of operation, formality, cost and perceived freshness). Though designed to increase the consumption of safe foods in Hanoi, these modern outlets may also stimulate the consumption of unhealthy ultra-processed foods and reinforce food access inequality. The continued closure of traditional open-air markets in favour of modern retail outlets may be jeopardizing the future diet quality of Hanoi's urban poor. We recommend that food safety policies embrace the existing diversity of local food retail systems and identify opportunities to improve food safety at open-air fresh food markets.

FOOD SAFETY AND NUTRITION IN TRANSITIONING URBAN FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

Food and nutrition security have long been primarily a rural agenda. However, rapid urbanization and food system transitions present urgent challenges when it comes to the provision of safe, nutritious and sustainable food to cities (Liu et al., 2017). Emerging economies of the Global South are experiencing this most acutely, particularly in Asia, where the rapid rate of urbanization has resulted in a concurrent rise in (i) non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (Alonso-Gomez et al., 2017; Boone-Boor et al., 2017; Do et al., 2017); (ii) the urbanization of poverty (Asian Development Bank, 2014; Ravallion et al., 2007; Karbu and Zhang, 2012); and (iii) malnutrition (Makhlouf et al., 2012). For emerging Asian economies, food safety concerns not borne by developed regions and western societies (Miyata et al., 2018) complicate these issues (Dietz and Tackling, 2017; World Bank, 2017).

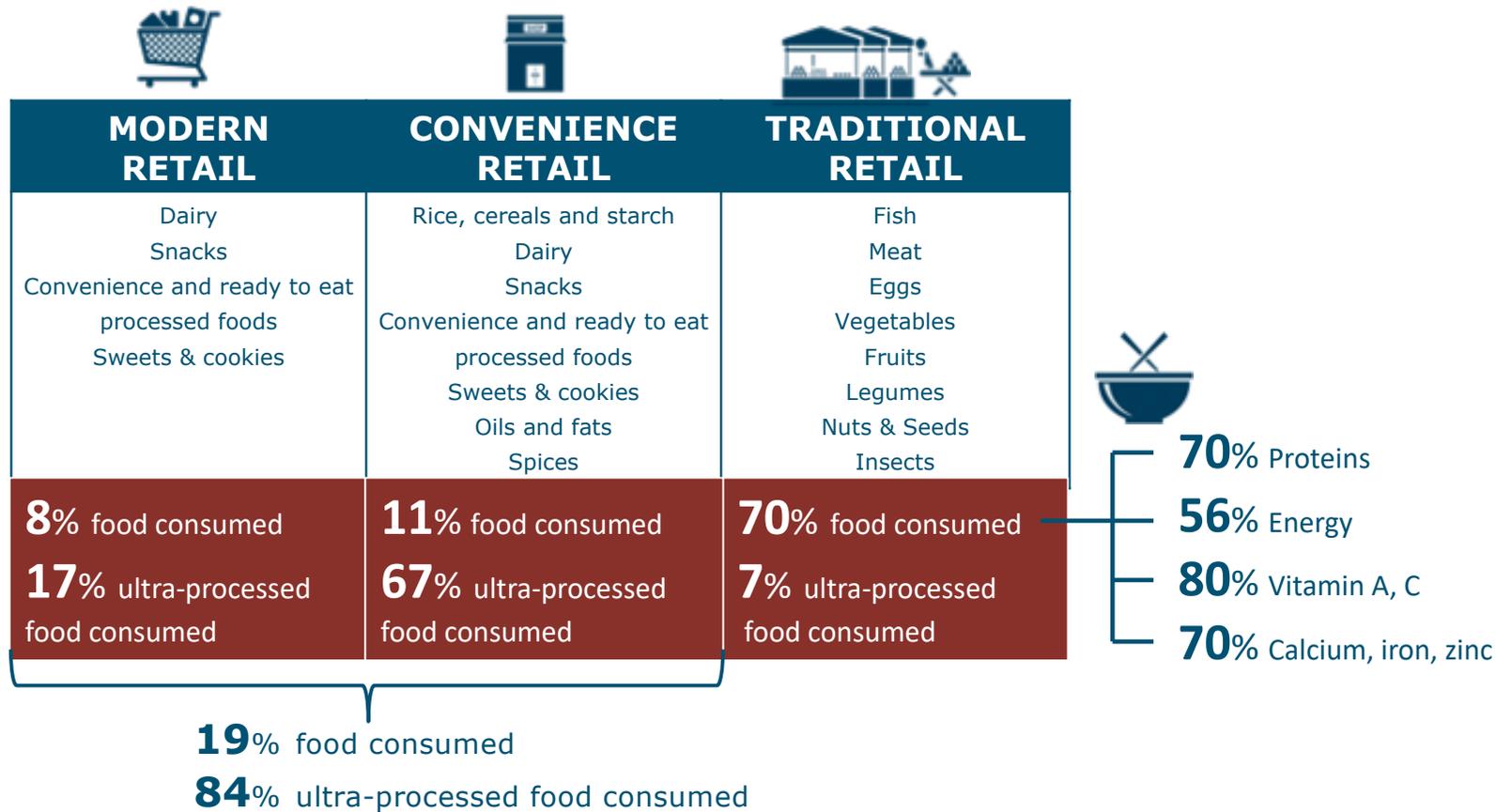
These food safety concerns are affecting food retailing policies. Across Southeast Asia, rapid economic development, accelerated by foreign direct investment, has resulted in the 'supermarketization' – the closure of open-air markets in favour of modern retail outlets – of urban food environments (Heard and Tanner, 2012, 2014).

Results: Buying from markets



Walking distance to outlets		STRATUM 1	STRATUM 2	STRATUM 3	STRATUM 4
					
Practice: Where do you buy most foods for your household?	Hyper-/supermarket (SM)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
	Formal wet market (WM)	57.1	22.1	63.0	14.7
	Informal street market	39.3	76.8	35.9	82.9
	Convenience store	2.4	1.1	0.0	1.6
	Specialty store	1.2	0.0	1.1	0.0
	Street vendor	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Results: Nutrition from markets



Results: Food environment transformations do not necessarily lead to changes in food practices

- Supermarkets not fully trusted to offer better food safety than traditional markets

*“Recently it was in the news that **supermarkets erased all the dates on expired products and relabelled them. Also, supermarkets sell vegetables that are sourced from informal markets. The supermarket model and all their packaging make it seem safe, but I don’t believe it. ...***

*I buy at the market from **familiar vendors**. They live around here and **the whole neighbourhood buys from them. If their food would cause food poisoning or an accident, the whole neighbourhood would know that immediately.***”

Results: quality-affordability dimensions

- 44% income spent on food



Results: Food environment transformations do not necessarily lead to changes in food practices

- Supermarkets not fully trusted to offer better food safety than traditional markets
- Mitigation of food safety risks by everyday fresh food consumption

“When we eat vegetables in the evening, we buy them that day fresh. I buy fish when it is still swimming, meat from vendors that are quickly sold-out, vegetables from people who bring their veggies directly from the countryside.”

“To avoid cancer, we do not eat left-over food and eat every day fresh foods.”

Results: Food environment transformations do not necessarily lead to changes in food practices

- Supermarkets not fully trusted to offer better food safety than traditional markets
- Mitigation of food safety risks by everyday fresh food consumption
- Traditional vending provides convenience in time-constrained lifestyles

“I buy all vegetables at the market. It is convenient, for example: on my way to work I go to the vendor and ask her to clean and cut the vegetables. Then the vender will wrap it in a plastic bag and give it to my mom later. The vegetables can also be delivered to my home.”

Results: Informal creative agency

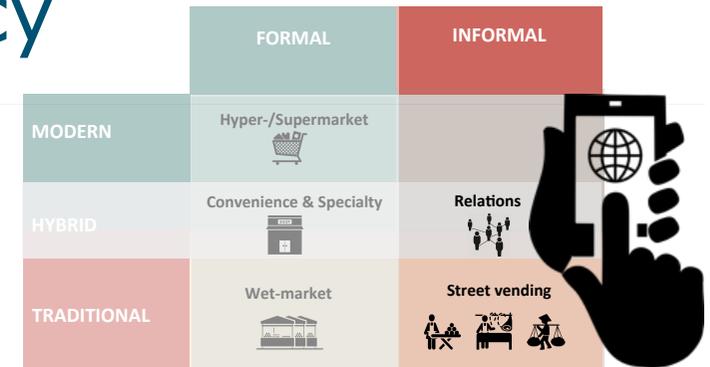


- Self-organization

“People start selling in their house or rent other’s ground floor, to evade selling on the streets.”

“I am a teacher, and I have some colleagues with relatives in the countryside. Once a week, the relatives send vegetables to the school to be sold to all of us.”

Results: Informal creative agency



- Self-organization
- Online

“At my academy there is an online market, so called ‘countryside market of the Academy’, Many teachers sell their homemade foods there.”

“I buy online, via Facebook. I joined a community of farmers.”

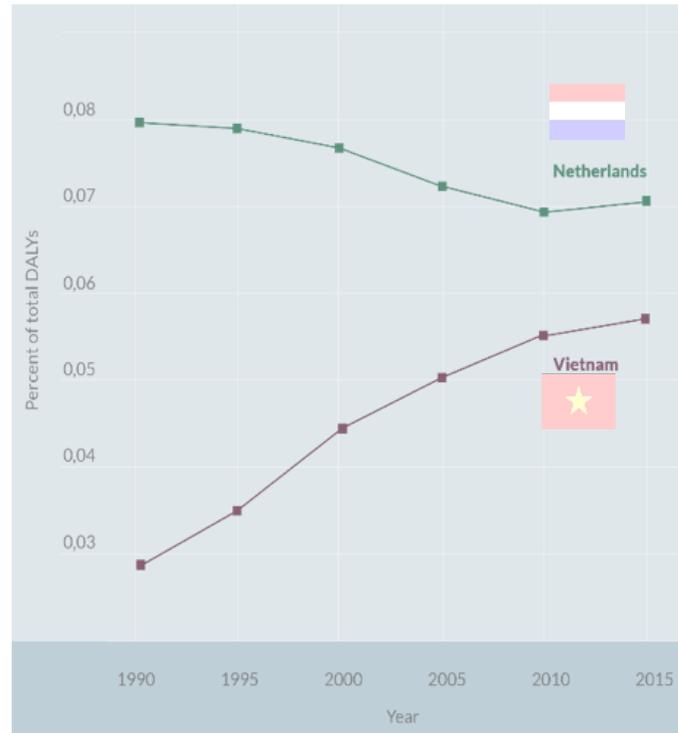
“I buy fish mostly from people on the internet. They are from the coastal, fishing areas.”

Though not measured: consumption patterns are shifting

Diet high in processed meat*



Diet high in sugar sweetened beverages*



QUESTION 2 - open question

What percentage of children (5-12 years old) is severely overweight or obese in Hanoi, Vietnam?

Shifting consumption patterns

Answer: 36.2% children (5-12 yrs) in the inner-city districts of Hanoi*



Results: Shifting diets



- Decision making shifting towards children preferences

“When I was young, we had nothing to eat. I tell the children that they nowadays live happier than I was during the subsidy period.”

“The ‘70–80’s period was very miserable ... Life is much better now.”

“I have to change the food so the children can eat it.”

“Our family menu is tailored to the children.”

“My kids will not eat what they don’t like. If they don’t eat their health and development is not guaranteed.”

Results: Shifting diets



- Decision making towards children preferences
- Unhealthy choices influence children's preferences

"My children love KFC fried chicken. I don't let them eat at KFC but fry it for them at home, with potato chips also."

"My kids love pizza, and on promotion day I also buy pizza."

"I know it is not good, but my oldest son drinks Coke, Red Bull and Sprite."

"We always have cakes, sweets and cookies for the kids."

"I restrict soft drinks, but serve homemade lemonade from water, lemon and sugar."

Results: Shifting diets

Child obesity soaring in Vietnam with urban youngsters at highest risk

By Lester Wan LP
27 Feb 2018 • Last updated on 21 Feb 2018 at 03:00 GMT



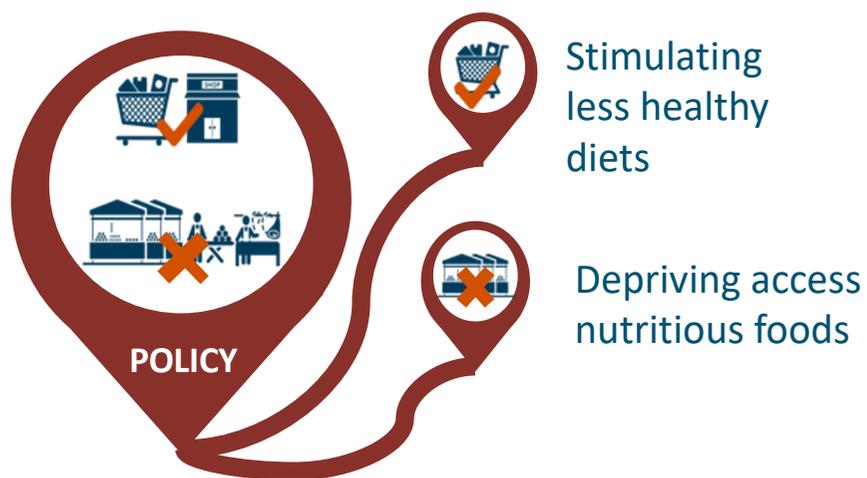
- Decision making shifting towards children preferences
- Unhealthy choices beyond retail influencing children's preferences
- Non-communicable disease consequences

"My grandson weighs 40kg but just 8 years old."

"My 6 year old son weighs nearly 40kg, so he should be on a diet. But he eats a super big bowl of rice and donuts, cookies, sweets...It is called obesity."

Policy challenges

Unintentional consequences



Conflicting duality in governing food security



Sharing responsibility with citizens

Citizen co-creation:

- Problem articulation
- Solution development



Thank you for your attention!

For more information:

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Watch the project documentary:

