Although the agricultural sector continues to define the landscape and provide livelihoods for the majority of the Mekong Delta, industry is increasing its share in the local economy. The process of industrialising the Mekong Delta is an interesting study of the interface between deliberation and spontaneity. On one hand, the provincial governments have taken an active role in enhancing economic growth through trade promotion and creating spaces for industrial activity, such as industrial zones. On the other hand, diversification of rural non-farm activities has also contributed to the socio-economic transformation apace in the Delta.

Using this analytical divide, industrial activities in the Mekong Delta can be viewed as occurring in two types of spatial arenas; the first type represents the planned aspect while the other is a manifestation of rural diversification. Common to both spatial arenas is water, an important factor of production. Yet, water use and water management are governed not just by monetary cost-benefit analyses, and this research focuses on the institutional environment within these spatial arenas that the various actors find themselves in.

Some of the factors which collectively form this institutional environment include the physical and material conditions of sites of industrial activity, the community attributes, and rules. Together, they affect the operation of rules, influence the perceptions of the actors, and structure their interactions. Of particular interest to this research is whether spatial concentration of industrial activities has provided coordination and cooperation advantages for enterprises.