

Street vendors: a popular economy

The management of street vendors is a challenge in the developing world in general and Vietnam in particular. The aim of this Sociological research is to improve the knowledge of street vendors in order to apply appropriate policies to them. This research was conducted within the limits of the town of Hanoi, the capital, and focuses on the answers to this question: What are the factors that lead individuals to start street activity and to keep to it in this urban area?

Combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, it has been possible to show that the process of urbanization and the decay of earnings from agriculture are the reasons why farmers participate in street trade: to escape from poverty. The urban habits of living and of spending are also responsible for the demand for street vendors. Besides, the study also points out that street trade is a long-standing commercial business that has always been there from the feudal period on to the present day. There are a considerably high number of street vendors in Hanoi and their portraits are diverse depending on the criteria chosen to evaluate them: migration patterns, types of goods, mode of operation, etc. Compared to the rest of the informal sector, street trade stands out inasmuch as most of the vendors are women, their activity goes on a small scale and aims at keeping oneself out of need, so the embarking on this kind of trade results more from coercion than choice. Everyone in the population becomes involved in street hawking at one time or another (it is a popular economy), however this branch of activity is being unfairly treated by the government. This is why street vendors can be considered as less advantaged people in the "sidewalk economy". They always have to use "tactics" and find loopholes in the social space to operate.

Keywords: street vendors, hawkers, informal economy, urbanization, Hanoi.