

Intra-urban mobilities in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi (Vietnam)

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Introduction

Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) and Hanoi (respectively 4.2 million and 1.5 million inhabitants living in urban districts at 1999 Census) are the two largest cities in Vietnam concerning population and economic potential.

Population growth is an important factor of economic growth.

However, in both cities, the population increase raises crucial problems in the development process concerning infrastructures, environment and soon employment.

The population growth generates a geographic widening, partially due to intra-urban migration; it enlarges living space and it increases temporary mobilities to which the cities are poorly prepared.

Methodology

The research project on Intra-urban mobilities in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi is one of the 32 projects implemented in the frame of the Urban Development Research Program (PRUD) funded by French Foreign Office, and managed by ISTED and GEMDEV (2002-2004).

It is a project in partnership between Institute of Research for Development (IRD), Paris; Institute for Economic Research of Ho Chi Minh City (IER); Population Centre, National Economic University, Hanoi.

Six “permanent” researchers took part: Patrick Gubry (IRD), Le Van Thanh, Le Thi Huong, Tran Thi Thanh Thuy (IER), Nguyen Thi Thieng, Pham Thuy Huong, Vu Hoang Ngan (Population Centre), and several other colleagues participate to the analysis.

Intra-urban migration (residential change) has been studied through a complementary analysis of the results of the 1999 Census.

Temporary and commuting movements have been studied through a specific household sample survey. All administrative units (*Districts*, and *Phuong* or *Xa*) are divided into blocks (*Tô dân phố*) of around 100-150 households only in the centre of the cities. A two degrees draw has thus been implemented: blocks have been drawn at the first degree and households in the selected blocks at the second degree. This minimizes the cluster effect compared to the previous surveys. The sample is thus representative of the population of both cities.

A total of 2,000 households in Ho Chi Minh City and 1,500 households in Hanoi have been surveyed

Lessons from Census

The sliding of population towards the suburbs

The census is an irreplaceable tool for the study of migration (change of residential place), at the lowest geographic level, because it is by vocation exhaustive.

In Vietnam, the immigrants move very clearly preferably towards the districts located in the nearest suburbs, as well in Ho Chi Minh City as in Hanoi (figures 1 and 2).

The existence of a positive migration balance from the centre towards the suburbs in both cities is confirmed, leading to a "relaxation" of the population. This movement is mainly due to the increase of the land prices in the city centre generated by the development of market economy; it is locally strengthened by the policies of "relaxation" or "decentralization" implemented by the municipalities to clean up some central zones very densely populated and unhealthy.

In Ho Chi Minh City, the population of the most densely populated districts of the centre is even decreasing.

[Figure 1: HCMC: Intra-urban migrations 1994-1999]

[Figure 2: Hanoi: Intra-urban migrations 1994-1999]

Survey findings

Population and households characteristics

The population of Ho Chi Minh City and that of Hanoi began both a process of ageing, stronger in Hanoi.

The sex ratio of the children in the age group 0-14 in Hanoi is abnormally high. It could be the result of selective abortions in favour of boys, but a detailed study of this phenomenon is necessary.

The migrants towards Ho Chi Minh City come from the whole country, while the migrants towards Hanoi come rather from the North, showing the national influence of the "economic capital".

The inhabitants of Hanoi have a higher education level than those of Ho Chi Minh City and that of the migrants is higher than that of the non migrants.

The same proportion of people is employed in Ho Chi Minh City and in Hanoi. But the inhabitants of Ho Chi Minh City are rather employed in private sector and individual companies, while those of Hanoi are employed in the public and collective sectors.

Better living conditions following migration

In Hanoi, compared with the situation before the migration, we observe that the migrant households often left a flat, notably in a KTT (*Khu Tap Thê*, a kind a social housing), for a more spacious adjoining house (called also "compartment").

The living surface strongly increased after migration, especially in Hanoi, from 56.5 m² on average by household to 89.4 m². The increase of the surface of the flat induces that of the number of rooms.

Kitchen and toilet show an improvement in the migrant households. Altogether, the households more often use tap water after their move and take advantage of the garbage collection network. The equipment of the households improves appreciably.

Finally, we note an increase of the motorized means of transportation (motorcycles and even cars) after the migration, to the detriment of bicycles.

The improvement of the living conditions is confirmed by the opinions of the concerned people.

Commuting and temporary movements

Temporary movements were analyzed according to their type, hours and durations, as well as the involved distances, whether it is to go to work, go to school or follow supplementary lessons; a typology was realized concerning shopping and leisure activities.

It is interesting to notice that many persons continue to move inside the cities during the weekend with the purpose to work showing that economic activity doesn't stop. Public transports thus must work every day of the week to satisfy the demand.

The analysis of the times of movements (figure 3) confirms the peaks of the traffic and shows that many people now have lunch near their working place.

The individual means of transportation, especially motorcycles, are largely dominant in both cities and only a few people already take the new buses.

Horaires des déplacements tous motifs confondus

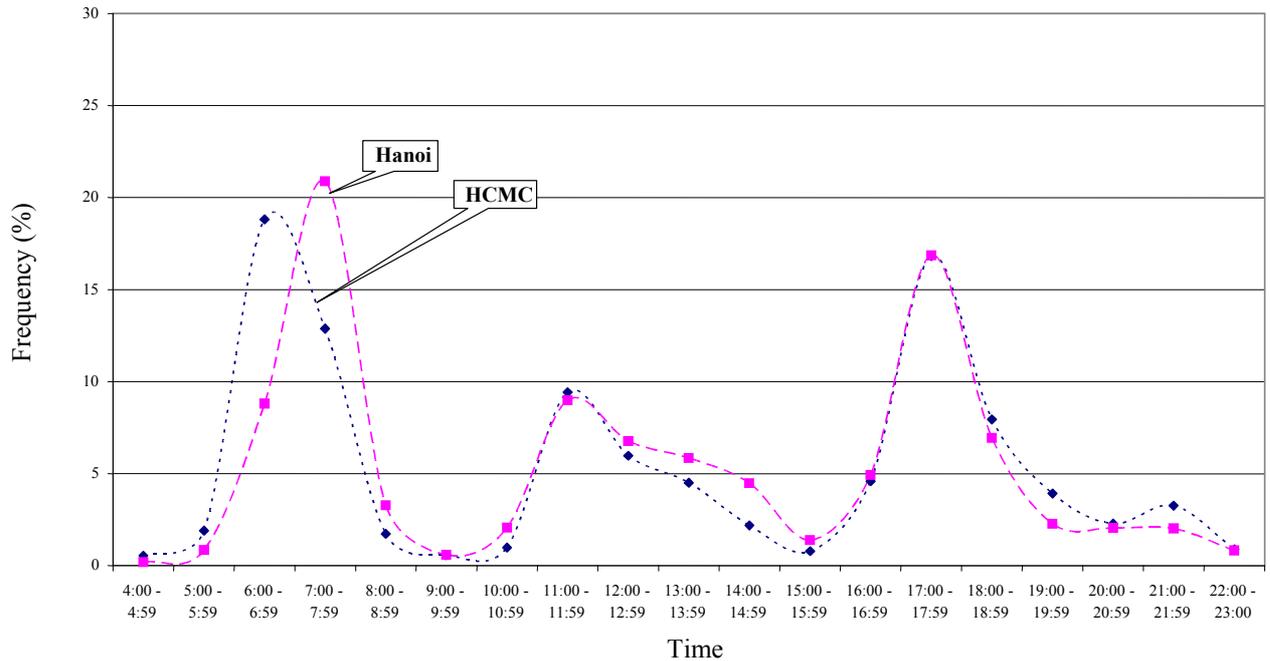


Figure 3: Time of movement (all reasons merged)

Opinions about the current movements and wishes about future moves

Open questions have been asked about the difficulties and costs of movements, the quality of roads, the activities of police and the quality of public transports.

The two main difficulties in both cities are traffic jams and risks of accidents (until now, the wearing of a helmet is not compulsory in urban areas in Vietnam and in fact very few people wear it on their motorcycle).

In general, the opinions of people are rather positive.

Several measures have been suggested to improve public transportation: increasing of the number of buses (the only current mean of public transportation), opening of new bus lines, increasing of frequencies, diversification of means of transportation...

Few people wish to move. While those who already moved are rather satisfied with their last move, they logically do not want at all to move again.

Conclusion

In the recent urban growth process, the intra-urban migration in the two Vietnamese largest cities increases, mainly from the centre towards the suburbs. This widens the living space and thus the temporary and commuting movements.

Intra-urban migration generates in general better living conditions, which can be measured by better housing and better equipment in the migrant households.

The reason to move for work remains important every day, even during weekend, showing that economic activity doesn't stop.

Concerning their movements, people have generally positive opinions but suggest a development of public transportation which should necessarily replace in the future the dominant motorcycle currently used.

The situation is surprisingly very similar in Ho Chi Minh City and in Hanoi, despite a very different history. The study especially emphasizes the pressing need to improve infrastructures in the suburbs.