

# CHANGES OF COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES OF URBAN RESIDENTS IN THE RENEWAL PERIOD - A CASE STUDY IN THAI NGUYEN

**Ta Thi Thao**

University of Science - Thai Nguyen University

Email: [thao\\_tt@tnus.edu.vn](mailto:thao_tt@tnus.edu.vn)

Received: 31/3/2022

Reviewed: 04/4/2022

Revised: 08/4/2022

Accepted: 23/5/2022

Released: 30/5/2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55988/2588-1264/78>

*The process of urbanization, modernization and industrialization has created great changes in socio - economic life in general. This has led to the changes in the lives of individuals and social groups. The survey showed that there was a great change on the participation of urban residents in social community activities during the past 10 years (2010 - 2020). Many people tended to participate more actively in local community activities such as residential meeting, kin meeting, longevity celebration, birthday celebration...*

**Key words:** Social community; social change; community activities; renewal; social community activities;

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## **1. Introduction**

With the change in economic structure (increasing the proportion of industry, decreasing the proportion of agriculture), it leads to a change in the occupational structure; With its specific and diverse nature, non-agricultural economic activities have attracted a large number of labor forces in urban areas, making all aspects of households' lives change markedly, especially in income, expenditure, and richer and more diverse cultural life. Households invest more in both time and material for educational activities and political-community activities. In the history of development, man always tends to gather to exist together. K.Marx affirmed that *“Human nature is not an abstraction inherent in the individual. In its reality, human nature is the sum total of social relations”*. Therefore, people must be placed in social relationships in order to become fully developed human beings. No

one can exist separately. One of the activities of an individual when he or she exists in society is to form social interactions with surrounding individuals, participate in social networks to satisfy communication needs, self-development needs, as well as to cope with changes in one's life. Participation in social community activities can be observed through specific activities such as meeting of neighborhood groups, meeting at People's Committee, participating in cultural festivals in the community, participating in socio-political organizations, or voluntary social organizations in order to promptly grasp the developments, as well as the changing trends of social networks in urban society, thereby make timely plans to renew the operation mode of socio-political organizations; promote its role as a spiritual fulcrum for the citizen; and organize and manage community activities to ensure the implementation of democracy and satisfy the needs of the people in the new context.

## **2. Research overview**

Minh, Nguyen Huu et al. analyzed the career change, income structure of households in the suburbs of Hanoi in the period 2000 - 2003, resulting in changes in housing and infrastructure and socio-cultural life in the article "Socio-economic changes in the suburbs of Hanoi in the process of urbanization" with results from a survey conducted on two industrial zones, Sai Dong and Nam Thang Long, including 4 localities of Sai Dong town, Co Nhue commune, Gia Thuy commune, Thach Ban commune. This is a large-scale study on socio-economic changes in communes in the suburbs of Hanoi, in which the author has shown the difference in socio-economic changes between localities surveyed. However, this study has not specifically mentioned people's participation in social community activities. It only generally analyzed some aspects of social and cultural life such as education, health, and entertainment. Moreover, the above study is limited to the peri-urban area and has not extended to the areas surrounding it.

The article "Research on issues of social change in our country in the current period" by Luan, Trinh Duy has mentioned views on social change in general, and social change in Vietnam in particular through a few indicators such as changes in social structure, in family institutions, in businesses, in psychosocial, in the social welfare system and the social safety net, in value norms, in behavioral patterns in everyday life. Regarding the changes in behavioral patterns in daily life, the author only illustrates the change in housing and food consumption patterns of urban residents. The article has not shown the social change in the countryside, especially the participation of people in community activities as well as socio-political organizations, while this can also be considered as a behavioral pattern in everyday life.

The author Bao, Hoang Chi with an article "Social changes in Vietnam through more than 20 years of renovation" has identified social changes in Vietnam over 20 years of innovation in terms of theory, status and policy. Changing economic structure in the market economy has led to a change in social structure - one of the most typical changes in Vietnam in the renovation. That change in social structure has led to the disparity in wages and

income, which led to the gap between the rich and poor. As a consequence, social institutions and social relations, needs and lifestyles have been changed. However, the article has not mentioned the change in people's participation in social community activities as an aspect of social change in general.

The article "Changing social structure in Vietnam in the renovation process" written by the author Tan, Nguyen Dinh refers to the change in social structure of classes; socio-demographic structure, territorial social structure and other basic social structures such as religious social structure, ethnic social structure. However, the article only discusses the general problems of the changes of social structure without mentioning the changes in the economic structure, as well as the changes in lifestyle and community activities.

The article of Hien, Tran Ngoc with the title of "Vietnam's social changes under the impact of WTO integration" has pointed out opportunities in development as well as many risks and challenges in the integration in developing countries. For Vietnam, the risks and challenges may be heavier, especially in the economic field, which leads to social changes. The article analyzes economic changes - the source of social changes, and social changes in Vietnam, including the development of civil and professional organizations in the form of non-state associations, centers and institutes to protect members' interests and provide services in terms of production, social consumption, and environmental protection. The article also presents the advantages as well as the inevitable consequences when civil society organizations appear in social life.

"Renovation and Development in Vietnam - Some Theoretical and Practical Issues" by the author Trong, Nguyen Phu (editor) has made an important contribution to the formation of the "Summerizing report of some theoretical and practical issues over the past 20 years of innovation" (1986 - 2006). The main issues of this report have been filtered and included in the document of the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. The content in the book has highlighted the process of forming and developing the innovation path; analyzed the socialist-oriented market economy, the development of culture and people, social structure and a number of pressing social issues; promoting the strength of great national unity in the new situation; renewing the political system; promoting socialist democracy, and foreign policy in the renovation period; defending the socialist Fatherland in the new situation. The author also emphasized the renovation of the political system in our country, namely building and gradually perfecting the socialist democracy, in which power belongs to the people; democracy is both the goal and the driving force of the renovation; citizens' participation in the management of the country's affairs is expanded; the people's inspection and supervision over Party and State organizations are strengthened; the activeness of unions and social organizations is enhanced.

The authors of the "20-year renovation project in Vietnam" have focused on researching, analyzing and explaining the important achievements in various fields of social life over the past 20 years of implementing the country's renovation, and the book "Some socio-economic issues after 20 years of renovation in Vietnam" are the initial research results

of the above project. Social changes in Vietnam in the renovation period viewed from today's youth's social participation, employment and migration issues. Researchers believe that the State needs to create conditions for young people to participate more in social activities because there are many limitations in encouraging youth participation in reality. Many organizations and unions have not really operated in the interests of young people.

In Vietnam, a large number of studies on social changes in various fields and dimensions of social life have been carried out. In which, sociological investigations have shown the characteristics and nature of social changes in recent years; however, the survey results on this issue have not been generalized to find out the trends of social changes from micro to macro social levels. This is the main purpose and content of the article "Levels and trends of social changes in Vietnam today: from a sociological perspective" by Hung, Le Ngoc. In this article, the author has introduced the concept and levels of social changes from the perspective of sociology and given some trends of social changes in Vietnam today such as changes in attitudes towards occupation and income, changes in personal value systems - the inner driving force of social changes, changes in the division of labor in society, changes in living standards and social stratification structures.

Some other articles such as "Cultural life of Vietnamese people after 20 years of the renovation", "Changes in culture and lifestyle in Vietnam", "The change of cultural values in the context of building a market economy in Vietnam today" by other authors, mainly present the changes in spiritual and cultural values, material culture, cultural symbols and direction of building an advanced culture imbued with national identity in the context of international economic integration, and in the renovation period.

Thus, the research on social changes always plays a very important role in contributing to the completion of theoretical studies on theoretical generalization, perfecting the conceptual system, raising new awareness about social changes. Meanwhile, in practice, it will provide managers with a database of social status; thereby, propose forecasts about changing trends and the results of social changes.

### 3. Research approach and methods

In order to generalize the research problem, the article mainly uses the following methods of information collection: (1) Document analysis (research works on social changes and community activities); (2) Interview by questionnaire (300 households in urban areas). The author uses random sampling method of households in 5 wards/communes within Thai Nguyen city, including 3 city center wards (from 3 to 5km from Thai Nguyen city center), 2 communes (about 10km from Thai Nguyen city center). The structure of the interview sample using a specific questionnaire is as follows:

**Table 1: Interview sample structure**

	Percentage	Percentage
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	(%)		(%)
<b>Gender</b>		<b>Occupation</b>	
Male	46.6%	Agriculture	16.6%
Female	53.4%	Trade and services	30.3%
<b>Academic level</b>		Workers and officials	38.3%
Unlettered	0	Others	14.8%
Primary school	22.9%	<b>Age</b>	
Secondary school	33.9%	Under 27 years old	15.4%
High school	25.7%	27 - 36 years old	23.4%
College	7.7%	37 - 46 years old	25.6%
University	8.9%	47 - 56 years old	18.1%
Post-graduates	0.7%	Over 56 years old	17.5%

#### **4. Research results**

##### ***4.1. Participation in social community activities***

One of the activities of each individual in a social community is the participation in the activities of that community. The level of participation in these activities shows the attachment and integration of that individual with the place where they are residing.

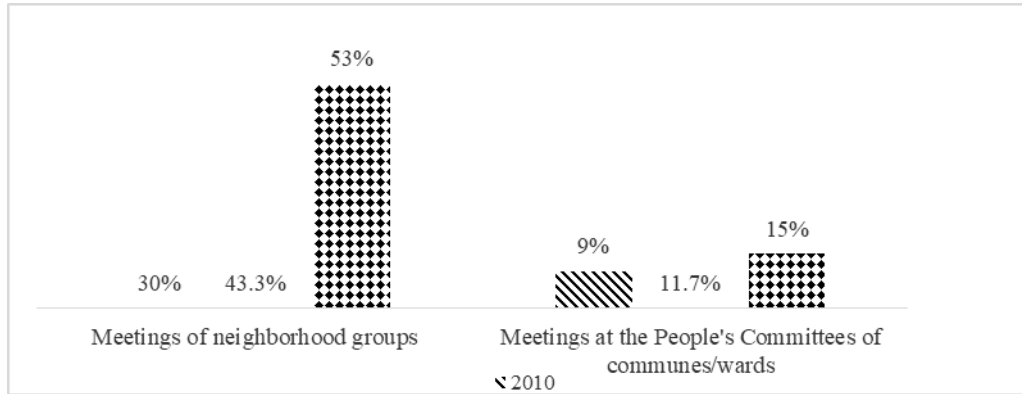
*- Participation in meetings of neighborhood groups, meetings at People's Committees of communes/wards*

According to the Ordinance on the Implementation of Democracy in Communes, Wards and Townships approved by the National Assembly Standing Committee on April 20, 2007, meetings of neighborhood groups, meetings at the People's Committees of communes/wards are held to propagate to the public on the content of the State's documents, policies and laws, and at the same time collect opinions and exchange opinions of the people publicly on the content of those decisions. People's participation in these meetings is a way to show their attitude and sense of their rights and obligations.

It is shown in the data that there is a clear change in meeting participation after 10 years. Whether people actively participate in meetings of the neighborhood group or meetings at the People's Committees of communes/wards is an evidence of their relationship with public authorities at all levels. In a study on socio-economic change in general, 34.8% of urban households and 32.2% of rural households have contact with local authorities. On average, each urban household and each rural household contact 1.2 times and 1.0 times a year respectively with local authorities [4]. The number of people who regularly attend residential group meetings mainly falls in the age group of 37 - 46 years old and over 56

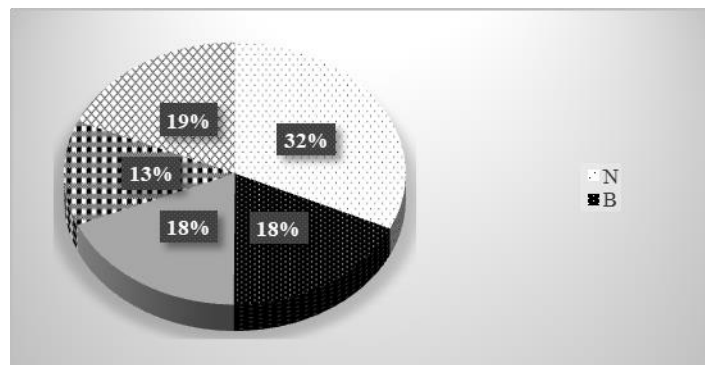
years old, that is, the majority are middle-aged and elderly (35.2%) while this rate in young people (under 36 years old) is 7.5%.

**Figure 1: Level of participation in meetings of neighborhood groups, meetings at the People's Committees**



The survey results show that the majority of respondents who work in agriculture regularly attend meetings at their residence, and the agricultural occupation group almost accounts for a higher proportion of the respondents than other occupational groups (Table 2).

**Figure 2: Level of participation in meetings of residential groups and meetings at People's Committees by occupation**



The faster the society's development speed is, the more people's individuality has been promoted. Community activities, including meetings of neighborhood groups/villages, meetings at the People's Committees of communes/wards are rare activities for people to tighten solidarity and self-governance in residential areas.

*- Participation in birthday celebrations, relatives meetings*

Nowadays, when life is better off, people pay more attention to activities that meet their spiritual and emotional needs. Activities such as holding birthday celebrations, meeting relatives are interested and performed relatively. Up to 11% of the respondents said that they

regularly participate in birthday celebrations in compared to the past (only 8.5% 5 years ago). With this activity, there are also differences between different occupational groups. There is an increase in trade and service from 12.6% to 13%; in the group of workers and officials from 15.3% to 24.3%; and a slight increase in the group of agricultural occupations from 10.6% to 11.0%. Besides the occupation, the living area is also a factor affecting the tendency to participate in this activity. Although this study was surveyed in urban areas, there are 2 communes in urban areas in terms of administrative boundaries still have a high proportion of the population engaged in agriculture, which creates the differences. When being asked about the level of participation in birthday celebrations, 35.9% of respondents said that they never participate in this activity, and this percentage belongs to the population group residing in the above mentioned communes while this rate in 3 wards in the city center is 24.5%.

For relatives meeting, there has been a change in the past 10 years (from 31.4% to 41.5%). The rate of participation in relatives meeting is different among age groups, in which older people tend to participate in these activities more than younger people. Only 21.6% of people under 27 years old participate in this activity, while in the group of over 56 years old it is 50.3%. Agricultural workers are more involved than other occupation groups, but the difference is not significant.

#### ***4.2. Participation in socio-political organizations***

It is very difficult to analyze and evaluate the level of participation in socio-political activities of individuals as well as the variation in their participation in these activities due to objective reasons such as limitations on purposes, criteria, activity content which are suitable for a certain group of people. In other words, Not everyone can join any socio-political organization they desire. For example, the Youth Union only admits young people (from 15 to 30 years old) while the Elderly Union only admits seniors, or the Women's Union only admits women... Therefore, the analysis and evaluation below are only approximate.

##### *- Participation in official organizations*

Formal associations in this study include the Youth Union, Communist Party, Fatherland Front, Women's Union, Farmers' Union, Elderly Association, and Veterans' Association. Among the respondents, up to 70% said they joined at least one union or association. And on average, the number of associations/unions they join is 3. It can be seen that, over time, the number of respondents who don't join any associations/unions has decreased from 47.2% to 33.1%. The number of respondents participating in 2 or more associations/unions have steadily increased over time. Thus, it can be seen that the number of associations/unions that the respondents participates in does not change significantly, but instead there is a change in the official associations/unions they join. In terms of the participation in the Communist Party, it can be seen that there are clear differences in age groups, gender, academic level. Specifically,

16.2% of men join the Communist Party while the percentage of women is only 7.8%. People with higher education are more likely to join the Communist Party (99% of illiterate people do not join the Communist Party, and 58.3% of those with a graduate degree joining the organization).

The Youth Union is an organization specifically for young people (from 15 to 30 years old), so there is no difference between age groups, in which over 40% of young people aged 15-24 are youth union members. The higher the education level is, the higher the participation rate is. Moreover, men are more involved than women (15.6% of men join the Youth Union, while this rate among women is only 9.5%).

*- Participation in voluntary organizations*

Civil society and professional organizations in the form of both governmental and non-governmental associations, centers have appeared since Vietnam started joining the WTO. These organizations were established and developed for the purpose of democratic development in socio-economic life, greatly contributing to the management of the state and social stability. Historical experience shows that the emergence of civil society organizations is an inevitable result of development. The more the State attaches itself to civil organizations, the more it ensures stability and development, and isolates anti-national elements [2]. In fact, in recent years, civil society organizations in our country have developed quite quickly and are very rich and diverse. These organizations operate on the voluntary basis of the people, self-managing, independent of the state, non-profit, and self-financed. Currently, there are more than 400 associations operating nationwide, about 6,000 associations operating within the province/city and tens of thousands operating in communes/wards/towns.

The survey results show that the percentage of respondents participating in voluntary associations is not high at all times, but the increasing trend of joining these associations can be easily seen. In the past, the percentage of people participating in volunteer associations was low because these organizations were not popular at that time, mainly appeared in large urban areas. Another reason is that *“...currently, there are still a number of state agencies, civil servants as well as people who are not fully aware of the importance and effects of the civil society sector in social life. Besides, the associations have not fully promoted their function of representing the interests of the masses and their members. Some people's mass organizations and associations are still formal, operate inefficiently, and have not met the aspirations and interests of members. Therefore, the ability of these organizations to attract the masses is still limited; the participation in the provision of public services has not been implemented in accordance with the principles and purposes, even in some cases running after purely economic profits...”* [5].

On average, there is only 01 voluntary association per respondent at all time. The percentage of respondents participating in a voluntary association within 10 years ranges from

9.3 to 15.4% with an increasing trend over time. There are differences between genders, academic levels, positions in the family, and age in participation in voluntary associations.

## **5. Discussion**

Based on the survey results from the changes in the community activities of urban residents during the renovation period, in order to increase the participation of urban people in these activities, some recommendations are suggested as follow:

- Local authorities need to propagate and ask the masses to implement the democracy so that they can realize their roles, responsibilities and obligations towards the community.

- In all activities, people working as leaders of residential groups must be close to the people and understand the aspirations of the people. Commune/ward level officials, leaders of residential groups need to improve their knowledge and skills in community organization and management so that meetings can attract the participation of the people.

- Nowadays, with the rapid development of a developing market economy, the lifestyle of people somewhere has changed towards commercialization. Longevity ceremonies, birthdays are the beauty of Vietnamese culture, showing the respect of the following generation to the previous generation; however, they have been organized in a commercial way. These ceremonies are held to invite guests and receive gifts from them, which makes the attendees themselves feel heavy mentally. Most localities hold longevity ceremonies for the elder in a new way. However, it is necessary to propagate to households that these ceremonies must be organized in a cozy and simple way so that those who attend will no longer feel burdened.

- Socio-political organizations need to renovate their operation methods so that they are close to reality. Each meeting should raise specific issues such as economic development, family education, etc. to attract members to attend. If these associations can promote their role as a spiritual fulcrum for people, they will not hesitate to spend time participating in these activities.

- It is necessary to expand and diversify forms of people's gathering, strengthen the role of mass organizations, residential communities and associations in realizing national unity and

promoting socialist democracy, participating in production and business management activities, protecting the legitimate rights and interests of members. It is also essential to enhance the role of associations and NGOs in the following aspects: participating in State management; consulting and giving social criticism to the guidelines and policies of the State; supervising the activities of State agencies and civil servants; consulting and criticizing professional fields; exploiting resources for socio-economic development; serving the members' interests; providing a number of public services in the fields of health, education,

culture, environmental sanitation...; contributing to hunger eradication, poverty reduction and disaster recovery.

- Continue to build and perfect institutions, create a legal environment for the operation of the civil society sector. First of all, it is urgent to issue the Law on Associations and documents guiding the implementation of the Law to create a unified, synchronous, and highly effective legal corridor on state management of associations and non-governmental organizations; meanwhile, facilitate the establishment and operation of such organizations.

- Implement the principles of democracy, voluntariness, self-management and self-finance of associations and non-governmental organizations within the framework of the law. Create an appropriate environment and legal framework to promote mass organizations, social organizations and associations to innovate contents and modes of operation, to overcome the situation of "stateization", "administration"; ensure the publicity and transparency of financial activities and expenditures of mass organizations, associations and non-governmental organizations.

- Each citizen himself needs to raise awareness in participating in community - social activities. Because the participation in social community activities is the way each person shows his or her consciousness to the collective. Humans are the sum total of social relationships, so each citizen must be self-aware of his role and responsibilities. Individuals need to actively understand the policies on implementing democracy at the grassroots level, and contribute ideas to local authorities for socio-economic development. Each citizen also need to raise awareness in preserving the cultural values of traditional festivals; carrying out community activities according to a new, simple and civilized lifestyle.

## **6. Conclusion**

The activities of unions are an important factor that unites members of the community. In general, it is not easy to assess the level of participation in socio-political activities of individuals as well as compare the variation in their participation in these activities because their opportunities, conditions and desires in participating these activities are not the same. There are organizations that are limited by the purpose and criteria of operation based on the individual's age group, gender, occupation, etc. Therefore, the above assessment is for general purposes only. However, it somehow shows the variation in the statistics. Currently, people tend to actively participate in social-community activities, although the change is uneven across groups, regions and ethnicities.

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