

Ethnic Economy

Case Study of Vietnamese Commercial Zone “Sapa” in the suburb Praha – Libuš

Summary

In 1989 the Czech Republic opened to immigrants from the whole world. Nowadays, as a result of transformation, the Czech Republic faces a new phenomenon – international migration. More than fifty years ago the first Vietnamese students and gestworkers came to Czechoslovakia. Now Vietnamese form a clearly visible community in the Czech Republic: first, they have been generating the third biggest group of foreigners in the Czech Republic, second, they are creating the space-bounded ethnic commercial zones (so called tržnice).

Till now, there has been little reserch on Vietnamese in the Czech Republic, but there is no research on their ethnic economy and ethnic economy enclaves in the Czech Republic.

The biggest of them – the warehouse called Sapa situated in Praha – Libuš – has been a main focus of my research. My analysis draws on secondary sources and press reports, but especially on in-depth interviews with 13 Vietnamese entrepreneurs, and five key informants. The in-depth interviews were obtained through non-representative sampling (snowball data sampling method).

This research brought several findings. First of all, although the Sapa’s main purpose is business, it fulfils other functions as well: it provides protection, safety and job oportunities for newcomers and a link to the ancestral culture for the already integrated Vietnamese and their childern. Isolation of the ethnic enclave contributes to „protection“ of both the illegal immigrants and illegal business. Second, there is a high concentration of Vietnamese immigrants living near Sapa and the level of their separation is increasing. On the other hand we can speak about good integration or even assimilation of the foreign childern. Third, it is clear that foreigners (and Vietnamese especially) in the Czech Republic are struggling to overcome widespread xenophobia and discrimination in the majority society. Forth, ethnic and family networks as well as labour of the women are very important factors in ethnic economy.

This study's qualitative research findings lead to the following recommendations: combat discrimination and xenophobia in the majority population; install integration components in the so called foreigners law; make better and greater use of foreigners' human capital; involve local governments in the integration process (provide active and pasive vote).

This study represents the first attempt to penetrating more deeply into the new phenomenon of ethnic economy enclaves created by Vietnamese in the Czech Republic. Additional studies should be carried out soon to contribute to developing both awareness and practical knowledge in the field.