



The Strategy of Street Vendors in Attaining Household Economic Resilience: A Micro Spatial Analysis of a Case Study in East Jakarta

Beti Nurbaiti^{1*}, Mohamad Axel Putra Hadiningrat², Chotib Hasan³

¹ Bhayangkara University Jakarta Raya, Indonesia

² Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

³ Urban Studies Program, School of Strategic and Global Studies,
Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

bettysigit@gmail.com*, mohaxelhadi@gmail.com,

Chotib@hotmail.com

Abstract. The purpose of this research is to analyze the strategies used by street vendors to achieve household economic resilience based on micro-spatial analysis. The micro-spatial analysis refers to how street vendors manage to survive within limited living spaces, which are often multifunctional—used both for residence and for trading. This approach is adopted to minimize daily expenses in order to sustain their livelihood as migrants in Jakarta. A qualitative approach was employed through in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that most street vendors, who are predominantly migrants, are able to endure daily life despite limited space. By doing so, they manage to reduce expenses for electricity, water, house rent, and stall rental fees, enabling them to save, cut costs, and ultimately survive in Jakarta.

Keywords: Micro Spatial Analysis; Economic Resilience; Street Vendors; East Jakarta

1. Introduction

The natural tendency of individuals to migrate, often from rural to urban areas, stems from the desire to improve their standard of living (Nurbaiti, 2017). Migration contributes to city population growth and affects socioeconomic dynamics. Many rural migrants move to urban centers like Jakarta in search of better opportunities but face intense challenges, including separation from family, harsh competition, and limited resources (Chotib & Nurbaiti, 2018). Those with minimal capital, education, and skills often enter the informal sector as street vendors, living frugally in small rented houses and sacrificing comfort to survive in the city. During the COVID-19 pandemic, street vendors faced severe economic instability, especially in East Jakarta, and even after the pandemic, their financial conditions remained strained due to job losses and reduced purchasing power.

This study aims to apply a qualitative micro-spatial analysis to explore how street vendors achieve household economic resilience. Over a four-month period, three informants participated in in-depth interviews using a participatory approach. The central research question is: **How do street vendors develop a series of strategies related to micro-spatial analysis to achieve household economic resilience?**

2. Literature Review

According to Todaro (2000), the rural-urban wage gap is the main driver behind continuous migration flows. Migration occurs as long as the perceived marginal utility or benefits of moving to the city outweigh the costs. Most migrants move to Jakarta due to push factors, where their places of origin fail to provide adequate job opportunities, often caused by market failures (Engidaw et al., 2024). These migrants face significant sacrifices, such as long-term separation from their families while sending remittances to their hometowns. However, many are compelled to bring their families to Jakarta despite limited living conditions (Todaro, 2000). Nurbaiti (2016) further reveals that migrants tend to remain in cities even when working in the informal sector due to limited options, with many becoming street vendors. Since they cannot afford costly stall rentals, street vendors often occupy public spaces such as sidewalks, road shoulders, pedestrian bridges, and city parks (Matamanda et al., 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, they played a crucial role as an economic buffer for marginalized urban communities (Catacutan, 2023), a trend commonly observed in developing countries (Crush, 2023; Moosvi, 2023).

Henri Lefebvre (1991), in *The Production of Space*, explains that humans need social spaces to conduct their social activities. For street vendors, public spaces become essential areas for sustaining their livelihoods. While urban spaces are often dominated by capitalist forces, street vendors create their own social spaces as a form of resistance and survival within the city (Del Giudice et al., 2023). Economic resilience among these vendors relies not only on financial capital but also on social capital, such as networks, solidarity, and mutual support among fellow migrants, which naturally develops within their communities (Chavas, 2024).

Lefebvre's triadic analysis highlights three dimensions of urban space: (1) Spatial Practice—daily experiences and social interactions within a given space; (2) Representation of Space—how authorities designate space for specific activities; and (3) Space of Representation—how marginalized groups reclaim and redefine space symbolically over time. In this context, street vendors' occupation of public areas reflects their symbolic dominance for economic survival. However, their informal use of urban space also creates challenges for city governments, as they are simultaneously vital to society yet viewed as a burden due to their encroachment on public spaces (Carteau, 1988; Phaceco, 2017).

3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews (Cresswell, 2016). Informants were selected through purposive sampling to obtain relevant and comprehensive data (Cresswell, 2019). The research aims to explore how street vendors develop strategies based on micro-spatial analysis to achieve household economic resilience.

4. Results and Discussion

Three street vendor informants participated in this qualitative study: Mrs. Rahayu (pseudonym), a mobile chicken porridge seller; Mrs. Yati (alias), a warteg (rice stall) owner; and Mr. Didin (fictitious name), a blended coconut ice vendor. These vendors operate under the protection of concealed entities, allowing them to sell without fear. To sustain themselves, they rent affordable terraced houses and minimize daily expenses for gas, water, and electricity. Mrs. Yati and Mrs. Rahayu live in semi-permanent houses built on public land, converting their small homes into multifunctional spaces for production, sales, and daily living. Despite poor ventilation, low ceilings, and high heat from asbestos and zinc roofs, the confined spaces also serve for prayer, study, family gatherings, and recreation, divided only by plywood and fabric partitions. Limited access to affordable formal stalls forces them to sell in public areas, as in the case of Mr. Didin, who has sold coconut ice in a city park for decades.

Street vendors' everyday use of public spaces—both for selling and daily activities—illustrates their integration into the urban social space, aligning with Henri Lefebvre's (1991) concept in *The Production of Space*. The findings show that social space is shaped through street vendors' activities and interactions to sustain their livelihoods. Most vendors occupy open public areas such as sidewalks, roadsides, junctions, parks, and green spaces, where pedestrian and vehicle flows intersect. This spatial distribution reflects Kevin Lynch's (1960) theory in *The Image of the City*, wherein street vendors align with three urban elements: paths (roads and walkways used for activities), districts (sub-city areas such as housing complexes), and landmarks (distinctive sites like parks and forests that guide orientation).

Building on Lefebvre's triadic analysis—spatial practice, representation of space, and space of representation—the study highlights how street vendors navigate, utilize, and symbolically reclaim public spaces. While their use of sidewalks, parks, and pedestrian zones technically violates spatial regulations, these spaces become essential for their survival and economic resilience. The micro-spatial analysis also reveals coexistence between street vendors and upper-middle-class residents within the housing complex, where government officials predominantly reside. Despite stark social class differences, the vendors' presence is tolerated because they fulfill daily community needs. This interaction between residential and commercial functions demonstrates how street vendors sustain their household economic resilience within constrained urban environments.



Fig 1. Economic Resilience of Mrs. Rahayu, Chicken Porridge Vendor, Based on Micro Spatial Analysis
(Source: analyzed by the author, 2022)

The first informant's micro-spatial analysis focuses on Mrs. Rahayu, a chicken porridge vendor. Her rented two-story house measures only 3 x 5 m² per floor (about 30 m² in total). The ground floor serves multiple functions—living room, prayer area, kitchen, cooking space, and bathroom—while a simple wooden staircase leads to the upper level, used as a resting area for Mrs. Rahayu and her two children. Despite the limited space, she manages her electricity usage efficiently, operating only essential appliances such as a refrigerator, rice cooker, and water pump. Two lamps are strategically used: one illuminates the lower floor, including the living room and bathroom, while the other lights the open kitchen area.

The upper floor lacks partitions and features thick plywood flooring, which also serves as the ceiling for the lower level. There are no beds; instead, fabric-covered plywood provides a resting surface for the family. The bathroom on the second floor has no ventilation or natural light, requiring the use of flashlights and small neon lamps for illumination. These lights are alternated between the stairs and sleeping areas, secured with hooks for practicality. To save on electricity costs, Mrs. Rahayu's children frequently rely on flashlights, similar to traditional oil lamps, allowing her to allocate funds for other essential needs. Through this resourceful management of space and energy, Mrs. Rahayu successfully sustains her family's financial stability despite constrained living conditions.

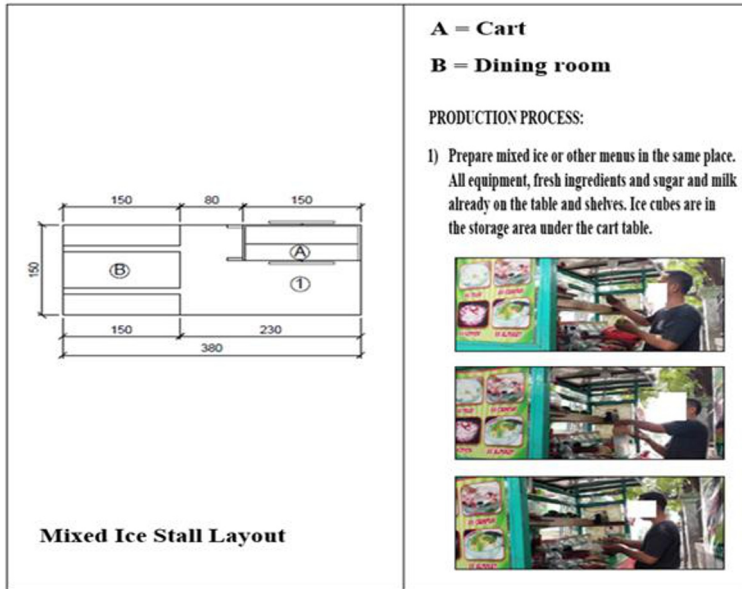


Fig 3. Economic Resilience of Mr. Didin, Vendor of Young Coconut Ice Mix, According to Micro Spatial Analysis
 (Source: analyzed by the author, 2022)

The third informant's micro-spatial analysis focuses on Mr. Didin, a young coconut ice mix vendor. His sales cart measures only 1.5 x 1.5 m², but the surrounding area provides sufficient space for customers to sit and enjoy their drinks. To accommodate them, he carries foldable tables and chairs on his cart. During an in-depth interview, Mr. Didin declined a home visit but explained that his rented house is similar to Mrs. Rahayu's—a compact residence also shared with another street vendor. He prepares his raw ingredients at home and brings them to the cart, mixing drinks based on customer preferences at the point of sale.

Mr. Didin operates six hours per day, from 10 a.m. until completion, rotating shifts with a Madura satay vendor who uses the same selling spot at night in exchange for a monthly fee. Street vendors in the area maintain mutual support networks, sharing electricity costs and rental expenses, which helps them minimize operational burdens and indirectly enhances their household economic stability.

Like many street vendors, Mr. Didin lives under constrained and unhygienic conditions that often compromise health and well-being. This phenomenon is not unique to Jakarta; similar findings are reported in Semarang (Dewi et al., 2023), China (Liu, C. & Liu, 2024; Liu et al., 2025), and Zimbabwe (Tanyanyiwa et al., 2024). Even in developed countries, street vendors utilize micro-spatial spaces due to high rental costs, often living and selling from food trucks (Mai et al., 2021). According to Pervaiz et al. (2025) and Duy & Tien (2024), street vendors demonstrate remarkable adaptability, frequently migrating based on invitations from relatives or social networks. Despite the

availability of designated selling zones, many choose high-traffic public spaces to maximize exposure. This contrasts with organized street vending systems in developed countries, where vendors typically operate in regulated spaces (Romero et al., 2024).

5. Conclusions

The lives of street vendors across major Indonesian cities are relatively similar. To survive, they maximize the use of micro-spatial spaces for both shelter and trading. Most of these vendors are migrants who manage to endure daily life in limited spaces, allowing them to minimize expenses on electricity, water, house rentals, and stall fees. This frugal lifestyle enables them to save money and maintain their livelihoods in Jakarta. The continuous wave of urbanization is driven by limited job opportunities in migrants' hometowns, pushing them to seek better prospects in the informal sector within big cities.

To address these issues, the central government needs to create policies that promote equitable development across regions, reducing overconcentration on Java Island, especially in the capital city of Jakarta. Meanwhile, the Jakarta provincial government should improve the management and organization of street vending areas, particularly for those occupying public spaces. Such measures would help the city remain orderly, clean, comfortable, and safe for all residents.

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