

# Is trade “real” work in Armenia?

## My stay in Armenia

I was in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia from mid-September, 2016 until January, 2017. My research focus was on the Vernissage, a souvenir market, where from October onwards, I spent every weekend learning how to knit socks and crochet coasters.

Being at the market every weekend gave me an opportunity to experience daily life at the market and to find informants more easily.

Moreover, learning Armenian – although all of my informants and I were fluent in Russian – helped me establish a rapport with my informants. They were all happy to correct me and teach me new words.

## The Vernissage

The Saryan Vernissage, an open exhibition space for painters to sell their works, opened in 1986 during the Soviet time, when trade was still forbidden and derogatorily labeled as “spekulyatsiya” (profit-making).

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, trade was allowed again. People, who lost their jobs, came to the Saryan Vernissage to sell their old household items. Within two years, the market expanded significantly that it was moved to a new location, which is now called the Vernissage.

Since 1993, the number of people engaged in trade at the Vernissage has been gradually increasing.

## Trade as not “real” work

Despite the growing number of people engaging in trade in Armenia, trade is generally not considered “real” work. In other words, it cannot be compared to the work of a teacher or a doctor – occupations that are considered respectable and formal.

However, such a view on trade has to be understood as embedded within a longer period, within which the meaning of trade has been continuously changing. First, it was considered a criminal activity during the Soviet time, as an informal activity - not "real" work - after the dissolution of the USSR, and as a business for the younger generation that was born around 1991.



The Vernissage before the reconstruction



The Vernissage after the reconstruction



Alla Sargsyan, a master