

PERCEPTION OF SAFETY OF RESIDENTS IN SELECTED SUBURBAN AREAS (THE EXAMPLE FROM SELECTED ZONES IN PRAGUE OUTSKIRTS)

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Abstract

The paper is focused on a research and findings related to security risks and crisis situations which occur or might occur in suburban areas and whether it is possible to influence them and how. The article also reflects the perception of those risks by local residents. The main aim of the paper is to present the results of a research prepared in two suburban zones on the example of Prague outskirts in Hostivice and Stochov situated in the west part of Prague.

Key words

Territory, suburbanization, suburban area, safety, security situation, perception, Prague outskirts.

Introduction

In recent years, suburbanization has become an often inflected phenomenon in our society. In the Czech Republic suburbanization distinctly appears after 1989 when central planning terminated. Before this year the residential structure grew according to predetermined norms. At the beginning of a suburbanization era in the Czech Republic it meant the construction of new shopping centers and various department stores on the outskirts of large cities. First of all, it was mostly commercial suburbanization, the onset of residential suburbanization can be dated not earlier than from the half of the 90^{ies} of the last century and the process was very striking. Now, suburbanization is understood first of all as *“the change in the displacement of residents, the change in spatial structure of suburban areas and next the change of way of life of these residents”*. [7] The reasons for residential suburbanization are different, basically they are e.g. the “escape” of citizens out of inconvenient environment of a compact town or a panel housing estate with its social problems, or citizens wish to fulfill their dreams etc.

Suburbanization is a process when the number of residents of a town center stagnates or is on decline and the number of residents grows on the outskirts of a suburban zone. In a world-wide scale it is not a revolutionary innovation, this phenomenon started to appear already after the World War II when in the USA the automobile industry started to thrive. Thanks to this fact a so called “American dream” began to come true i.e. having one’s own house with a garden on the outskirts and two cars for one family best. Having one’s own house is considered to be, by most people, the best possible housing. First of all, due to the idea of a high quality of such housing, possibility of private property (including the land), symbolic value of the independence, certainty, liberty and prestige. [3] The Czech Republic, as already mentioned, did not join this trend until the end of the 20^{ie}th century.

Residential suburbanization is, at present, in conditions of the Czech Republic, a widespread phenomenon which results in both positive and negative consequences. This issue has been mentioned in a number of theories and opinions. Each author (Sykora, Pucher, Ourednicek, Temelova, Silhankova and others) take a different opinion on positives and

negatives of suburbanization. [2, 3, 7, 8, 11] The comparison of their opinions quite clearly shows that suburbanization brings rather more negative consequences (risks) than positive ones.

The literature mentions substantially less positive consequences of suburbanization than the negative ones. The positive consequences are e.g. for the residents themselves, the property of a house with a garden, housing in the countryside and the flow of money into budgets of smaller municipalities. Also the requirements to provide or broaden the services for population (schools, preschools, care homes), new job opportunities, infrastructure improvement (gas supplies, sewerage, road repairs, etc.) are positive. New residents are more active in the approach to municipal problems, they abound in more political power and bring new contacts. [8]

Extensive benevolent building has had also a negative impact on an existing town, its residents and also on its surroundings. Negative consequences are for example extensive land appropriation, increased air pollution, higher noisiness and dustiness due to the increased car traffic, and also the increase of social segregation. Suburban residents often meet their needs outside their domiciles, because new suburbia do not offer many services. Residents have to commute daily to work, culture events, the doctor, schools with children, children hobby groups. Most of the planned and already under construction suburbia do not consider a social and natural aspect of a residence. Houses have been built as separate, isolated units without connections to the neighborhood. There are no places for meeting people which might have social consequences regarding relations and communication between residents in newly built quarters. New residential districts are just country towns composed of similar houses without future and potential effective development. [2]

The Objective of the Article and the Method of its Elaboration

One of the topics which have not been appropriately addressed yet is the security issue of these zones. Generally is supposed that suburban zones due to the fact that they are new, are safe and people who moved to these zones feel safe as well. However, the former research proved [12], that security situation in these zone has been often overestimated. The question therefore is, whether the residents of suburban zones feel safe and satisfied in their new environment regarding security situation there.

The objective of the article is to present the results of the research of the perception of safety and satisfaction with security situation of residents of two, randomly selected suburban zones within Prague territory. The research was taken as one of the initiation questions for further research in the area of safety in suburban zones which are specific spatial and social formations.

For the research of perception of safety and satisfaction with security situation of residents in selected zones we chose the method of a survey of a questionnaire type i.e. respondents were suburban residents and were randomly addressed. The data collection was based on a questionnaire inquiry and this questionnaire was personally passed to permanently living residents. Respondents of this survey were residents of suburban housing zones in Hostivice and Stochov. In Hostivice we obtained 52 responses and in Stochov 54. Regarding the fact that the growth of residents in both towns was between 1991 and 2014 (therefore in the period from the beginning of suburbanization processes in this territory) approx. 2.300 residents, the sample of respondents responds to 5 % of new (i.e. mostly suburban) residents. The evaluation of responses was performed by standard statistic methods.

Facts Influencing the Perception of Safety and Satisfaction of Residents in Suburban Zones

The feeling of safety is one of basic needs of man. Together with other needs such as health conditions and creative work, this feeling of safety is indispensable for a happy life. The ideal imagination is then safe housing, work and social environment. Living in a safe environment is required by vast majority of residents. For the feeling of their personal safety and the safety of their families and their property, the residents undertake various steps and apply updated technical means and their combination respecting regulations of safe behavior. They are willing to pay quite high financial means for them. Residents of individual regions are familiar with police statistics which regularly informs about overall crimes of regions of which the general crime is the highest. It amounts to 85 % of a total criminal activity. [5]

Property crime definitely prevails, i.e.:

1. thefts ((vehicle, thefts, bicycle thefts and pick-pocketing);
2. burglary (into a flat, house, shop or weekend house);
3. scams;
4. criminal damage (vandalism, vehicle damage, graffiti etc.).

The type and structure of crimes differ according to regions. For example in Kladno region (where both observed zones belong), the highest proportion belongs to thefts, followed by burglaries into vehicles, vehicle thefts and burglary into other buildings. In a neighboring region Rakovník, the highest proportion belongs to vehicle burglaries, followed by vehicle thefts and cellar thefts. In the Capital City of Prague and its surroundings there are mostly vehicle thefts and thefts of things from vehicles, followed by pick-pocketing, burglaries into „everything“ and robberies. For the regions westwards from Prague the typical crimes are burglaries into weekend houses and newly into houses in new suburban zones. [5]

Information and statistics on crimes obviously influences also the perception of the safety of residents of mentioned zones.

Characteristics of Researched Zones

For the research of the perception of safety and satisfaction with security situation in a suburban territory we randomly chose two zones – new housing area of the towns Hostivice and Stochov.

Hostivice

Hostivice town lies in the district Prague – West where recently a massive construction, especially houses and industrial zones (central store houses) have been made which has resulted in a significant growth of residents. The current shape of Hostivice with the area of 1,460 hectares was made by gradual merging of four villages – Hostivice, Litovice, Brve and Jenecek. At present, in Hostivice there are 6,247 residents of an average age 38.6. [4], in 1991 the number of residents in Hostivice was 4,021 and in 2001 4,586 residents. [9]



Foto: Pavel Moravec

Fig. 1
Residential Zone Hostivice

Public safety is ensured by the policemen from District Department of the Police of the CR in cooperation with patrolmen of Municipal Police Hostivice 24 hours a day.

Stochov

The town Stochov with 5,585 residents is the third biggest town in Kladno District. [10] It lies on the borders of Kladno and Rakovník District, 15 km westwards from town Kladno. The area of cadastral territory is 948 hectares and the town is formed from three originally independent villages – Stochov, Homice and Celechovice. Gradually a Slovanka quarter joined them. [1]



Foto: Pavel Moravec

Fig. 2
New Residential Part of Town Stochov

In the town there are two nursery schools, elementary school, and a special school. Health care for children and adults is ensured there as well. There is also the possibility to do sports and attend cultural events. During recent five years, in the north-west part of this town the construction of houses for young generation has been growing. New residents found the job in the region itself or in 30 km outlying capital Prague. The issue of personal and mass traffic was solved by a smaller bypass around the town. The reason was to calm down the town center, greater safety and preservation of greenery. Several entrepreneurs have their establishments there providing jobs for some residents.

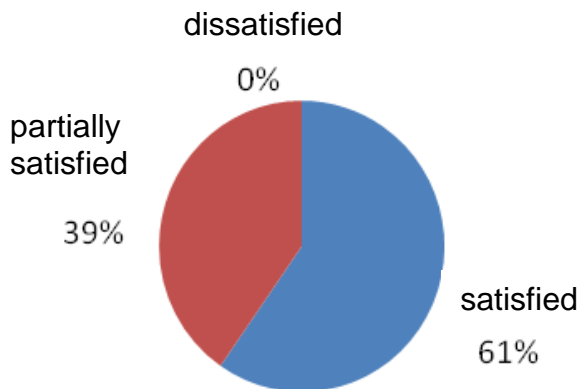
In Stochov, the public safety is ensured by patrolmen of Municipal Police. Regarding the number of patrolmen (6), the duty is not performed 24 hours a day. If the patrolmen are not on duty, the public safety is ensured by the policemen of district department of the Police of the Czech Republic. [10]

Perception of Safety and Satisfaction of Residents in Researched Residential Suburban Zones

Perception of safety and satisfaction with security situation in an observed territory influence not only the life of residents in residential suburban zones which is obvious from the residents’ utterance and feelings in newly built residential zones but it can help us look inside the issue of security in suburban zones more generally.

Survey Results among Residents of Suburban Zones in Hostivice

The first question was focused on the overall satisfaction of respondents with the life in a residential zone. As the analysis of obtained responses shows, general satisfaction prevails; nevertheless almost 40 % of residents are satisfied only partially.



Source: own investigation

*Graph 1
Overall satisfaction of residents in their residential zone*

The question about the perception of security was divided into the following sub-questions:

How do you assess security situation in your residential zone?

How do you assess security situation in your town?

Are you informed about concrete crimes in the vicinity of your domicile?

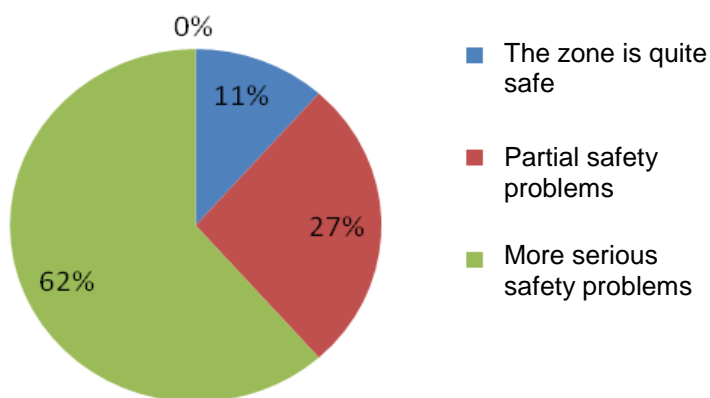
Is there, in your residential zone, according to your opinion, sufficient number or patrols ensured either by the Police of the CR or Municipal Police?

Are you familiar with extraordinary events (e.g. flash floods, etc.) which might occur in your zone?

Are you satisfied with the activities of state authorities and self-administration authorities in the area of public safety?

The analysis of responses results in the following conclusions:

The results of the assessment of security situation in a residential suburban zone are specified in the following graph.



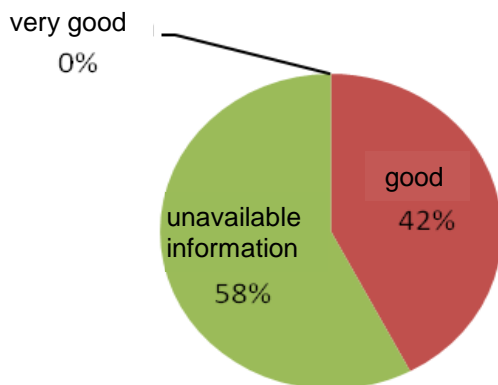
Source: own investigation

Graph 2
Assessment of security situation in residential zone Hostovice

The objective of a question was to find out how respondents assess security situation in their residential zone. 11% of respondents deem that it is quite safe, 27 % of them can see some security problems and 62% of them believe that there are some more serious security problems. None of the respondents assessed the zone as highly dangerous (e.g. violent crime, thefts, etc). The reasons for dangerousness were especially due to the traffic problems.

Another question examined how the residents assess the security situation in their town as a whole. 8 % of respondents said that the town was quite safe, 59 % of them said that there were some partial security problems and the last 33 % of respondents said that the town Hostovice had quite serious security problems. None of the respondents said that the town was highly dangerous. It means that the respondents perceive security situation in their immediate surroundings in a residential zone worse than the security situation in the town as a whole.

The following question examined how much the residents were informed about security situation and prospective crimes in the vicinity of their domicile. The result is in the following graph.



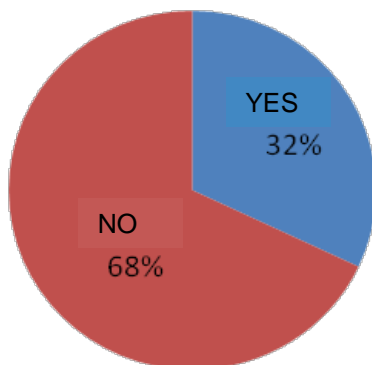
Source: own investigation

Graph 3
Awareness about concrete crimes in the vicinity of the domicile, i.e. in a residential zone

As it is obvious from the result of the investigation, 42 % of respondents believe that they are quite well informed about concrete crimes in the vicinity of their domicile. The rest of respondents, 58 %, deem that they do not have enough information about concrete crimes. None of the respondents mentioned a very good awareness in this issue.

The follow-up question was aimed at sub-problems regarding the police activity, the respondents were supposed to express their opinion whether they believed that the patrolling in a residential zone was sufficient either provided by the State or Municipal Police. The results of the survey say that 48 % of respondents think that patrolling by the State or Municipal Police is sufficient, the rest of them i.e. 52 % consider it insufficient. The same result was found out with the answer to the question whether the respondents were satisfied with the activity of state and municipal authorities in the area of public safety.

The last question was to discover whether the respondents are familiar with the threat of extraordinary events (i.e. flash floods, etc.) which might prospectively occur.



Source: own investigation

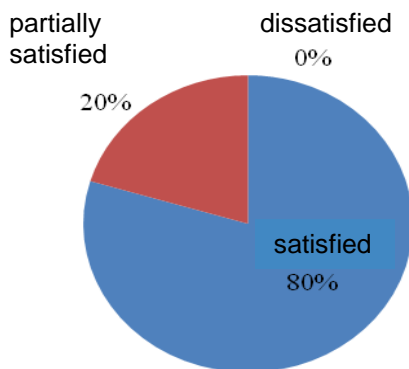
Graph 4
Awareness of the threat of extraordinary events

The situation in this area is worse because only 32 % of respondents said that they were familiar with the threat of extraordinary events. Another 68 % deem that they do not have such information.

By the evaluation of research results we found out that residents of Hostivice are quite satisfied with living conditions in their residential zone. Regarding public safety they think that patrolling by the State and Municipal Police is insufficient. They deem that they do not have enough information about prospective crime in zones and they are not sufficiently informed about the threat of extraordinary events. [6]

Survey Results among Residents of Suburban Zone of Town Stochov

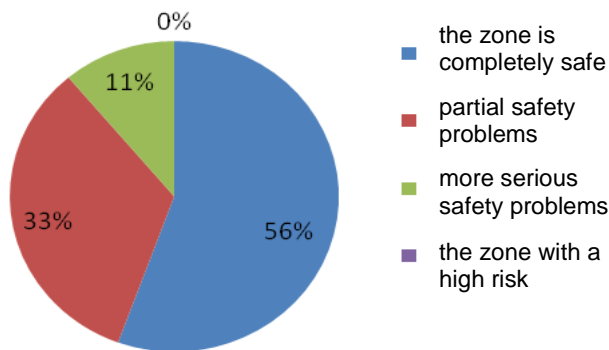
The same survey was accomplished in a new suburban zone of town Stochov. From the survey we chose only principal answers, especially overall satisfaction in a residential zone which is here by 20 % higher than in Hostivice.



Source: own investigation

Graph 5
Overall satisfaction of residents in a residential zone in Stochov

Regarding overall assessment of security in a residential zone, the survey results are quite different in comparison with Hostivice.



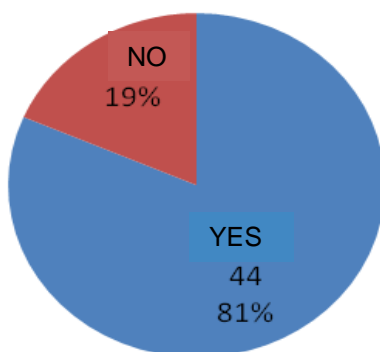
Source: own investigation

Graph 6
Observations on security situation in a residential zone Stochov

56% of respondents assess a residential zone as quite safe (unlike only 11 % in Hostivice), 33 % of them can see some safety problems in a zone and only 11 % deem that the zone has more serious safety problems (unlike 62 % of respondents who can see more serious safety problems in Hostivice). None of the respondents assessed the zone as highly risky (e.g. violent crime, thefts, etc.).

Similarly quite opposite results are when assessing security situation in a town as a whole. 11% of respondents said that their town was quite safe, 56 % meant that there are partial safety problems and last 33 % of respondents deemed that the town Stochov had more serious safety problems. None of the respondents mentioned that the town was highly dangerous.

Regarding awareness of specific crimes in the surroundings, the situation is similar to Hostivice. 43 % of respondents (in Hostivice 42%) deem that it is quite good. Lack of information is mentioned by 57 % of respondents. Quite identical are also results of the assessment of patrolling by the Police. 48 % of respondents think that it is sufficient and 52 % say that it is insufficient. On the contrary, a different situation is regarding the satisfaction of respondents with the activity of state and self-administration authorities in the area of ensuring public safety. Only 72 % of respondents are satisfied with it. This is obviously related to the level of awareness of the threat of extraordinary events which is shown in the following graph.



Source: own investigation

Graph 7
Level of awareness of the threat of extraordinary events in Stochov

When evaluating survey results we can say that the residents of the town Stochov assess overall satisfaction positively. The conditions in a residential zone are quite safe; however, with partial safety problems. According to their opinion, they are not sufficiently informed about prospective crime. Also patrolling by the State and Municipal Police is not sufficient; nevertheless they are satisfied with the activity of state and self-administration authorities in the area of public safety and they think they are sufficiently aware of a prospective threat of extraordinary events.

When comparing residential zones in Hostivice and Stochov, we discovered that the vast majority of respondents of both residential zones were quite satisfied. Security situation is perceived mostly as „with partial safety problems“. They also deem that they are not sufficiently informed about security situation and prospective crime in residential zones. Therefore they believe that patrolling by the State and Municipal Police is insufficient. The issue in which the respondents of both towns differ is sufficient awareness of the threat of

extraordinary events. In observed residential zones, according to respondents' opinions, traffic situation (rush hours, noise, smog) is negatively perceived only with residents in the town Hostivice. [6]

Conclusion

When evaluating a suburban zone of the town Hostivice we found out that 62 % of respondents deemed that in the zone there were some safety problems. These safety problems are related especially to the traffic issue and minor crime. 68 % of respondents in Hostivice believe that they are not sufficiently informed about the threat of extraordinary events.

Regarding the observed suburban zone in Stochov we discovered that 89 % of respondents considered the zone quite or mostly safe; nevertheless, even here, 65 % of respondents feel that they are not sufficiently informed about prospective extraordinary events. Despite the fact that the overall perception of security in this zone is expressively higher than in Hostivice, even here, the survey shows that the respondents would welcome the improvement in patrolling by both State and Municipal Police. The requirement of many respondents is also a higher number of CCTVs of a municipal surveillance system in order to cover as much of the territory as possible.

The survey of selected new residential suburban zones shows that the perception of safety and satisfaction with security situation locally differ. (Hostivice is even perceived as a relatively dangerous zone). When comparing the results of a survey with a real situation we can see that new residential zones are rather susceptible to perceive "dangerousness" by their residents. **The investigated sample did not prove the assumption that suburban zones due to the fact that they were new, were also safe and people who moved to these zones feel satisfied regarding their safety.** This reality is influenced by a number of factors, inter alia, also the fact that residents have moved a residential zone relatively recently, they do not share its „social memory“ and are rather susceptible to perceive threats and they may assess the situation worse than it is in reality. From this perspective it would be, in the frame of a future research, interesting to carry out **the comparison of the perception of safety in these zones from the perspective of original residents and especially to enlarge the research by more zones in order to statistically evaluate a more significant set of suburban zones** than it was in this accomplished probe. This way obtained results should help not only inform the residents about threats of extraordinary events by state and self-administration authorities even in zones where these threats are relatively small, but especially **understand the issue of security of suburban zones as a specific problem which requires specific approaches and suggestions for measures which are to be taken already since the planning phase of their construction.**

Résumé

The paper is focused on a research and findings related to security risks and crisis situations which occur in suburban areas. The article also reflects the perception of those risks by local residents. The main aim of the paper is to present the results of a research prepared in two suburban zones on the example of Prague outskirts in Hostivice and Stochov situated in the west part of Prague.

The analysis in new residential zones in Hostivice shows that real risks in this area are really small. Despite the fact that 68 % of research respondents feel that the situation is problematic mainly due to the low level of information the residents have. The observation in the second locality shows a similar situation – a very low level of real risks, but also a low level

of information about them among local inhabitants. This leads to the conclusion that inhabitants in new residential suburban zones do not have the realistic perception of the situation in their residential area which results in a higher perception of risks. The solution should be the increased level of information about risks provided by the state and self-administration in this type of residential areas.

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