



The state of public space in small towns in terms of its users’ risk groups

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ABSTRACT
At the beginning of the 3rd millennium, the issue of small towns is still a very problematic area in terms of urban planning which lies on the fringes of the interest of the professional public. The issue of the quality of public space in small towns is not tackled and its current development is in some places unprofessional because it is determined mainly by the local community instead of experts. Public space in small towns is massively subordinated to the needs of individual car transport and as a result, this space is aesthetically and functionally degrading, and at the same time, it contributes to the deterioration of the health of a population that does not move enough especially the most commonly used part - walking. The aim of this paper is to approach the needs of adaptation of public space in small towns for risk groups of the population, which are mainly seniors, children, and people accompanying children under 5 years of age.

PUBLIC SPACE AND PUBLIC AREA

In terms of legislation and urban theory, there are two very related terms - public space and public area. These terms are sometimes placed on the level of synonyms, but some professional publications work with them differently.

Based on a survey of professional texts, both terms can be more freely translated into English as public areas = urban area a public space = urban space/open space. As space-type connections are more common in the English-language professional literature in general, it is obvious to assume that foreign experts work more often with a term that includes the whole environment, including surfaces and the space above it, as physical parts. At the same time, the current trend can be stated, which seeks to add to the physical parts mentally and subjectively perceived components, which can be collectively referred to as *genius loci* and which are a very important and integral part for users/residents.

From the previous analysis, it is clear that all definitions are more or less similar, but not identical. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly define what concepts and to what extent further work will be done. From the point of view of user comfort, it is clearly desirable that the problem be solved as widely as possible, that is, from as many aspects as possible, which they perceive as a whole. Therefore, it is more appropriate to continue to operate with the notion of public space than with public areas. From the point of view of legislative aspects, it is appropriate to formulate the definition of the term public area as follows:

***The public area** is a publicly accessible area in the exterior of the city formed mainly by a physical free surface in the exterior of the city. These are areas of sidewalks, streets, squares, embankments, markets, parks, and other public access areas in settlements.*

Public space should then form a concept superior to public space and should, in addition to physical areas, also include intangible aspects of perception that influence the users of space in the evaluation. Its definition should then be:

***The Public space** is a space accessible to the public in the exterior of the city, which consists of the area of public space and free space above it, as physical components and also of intangible components forming the *genius loci*. Its basic characteristic is its habitability associated with usability, i.e. it must serve residents and users to perform various physical activities (mobility from point to point) and residential activities (life, sitting or standing, verbal and non-verbal communication, social contact, ...). These are areas of streets, squares, embankments, markets, parks, and other publicly accessible areas in the headquarters.*

CONCLUSION

The authors of the paper surveyed the current state of the legislative and normative framework of the issue of population mobility in the Czech Republic. They also focused on a survey of the current state of public space in small towns, which was defined by a population in the range of 5,000 - 10,000 inhabitants. A walking survey of the central parts of these cities was carried out in these cities, followed by an evaluation of the quality of the public space, supplemented by a list of the most common shortcomings and problems of this space. Among the most frequently monitored, it is necessary to mention the insufficient width of pedestrian roads in the context of user intensity, a small number of absolute absence of urban furniture (especially benches), which will improve public space and facilitate its use for seniors, the insufficiently designed intersection of pedestrian transport in terms of safety of risk groups, etc.

It was clear from the above that in the Czech Republic, public space in small towns is relatively neglected in terms of quality. This situation can be evidenced, among other things, by the decline in the number of pedestrians from the ranks of the productive population, which can most easily choose between several available modes of transport.

Furthermore, it was found that there is no uniform basis or methodology that would conceptually address the issue of pedestrian movement in public space for the entire country. This is left to the discretion of the municipalities in the individual cities, and where there is a lack of funding, this issue is very neglected.

There is also no normative regulation that would responsibly set minimum requirements for the width and equipment of pedestrian roads in the context of the typological classification of public space (squares, main streets, embankments, side streets, parks, etc.) and responsibly take into account the intensity of the number of users over 24 hours. or at critical peaks during the day.

These facts need to be rectified as a matter of urgency so that municipalities and responsible officials can be given a suitable tool and guidance on how to improve the current unhappy situation and thus make public space not only pleasing but high quality and safe.

Size groups of municipalities - Territorial comparison

No. of municipalities											Period: 31. 12. 2018
	Total	less than 200	200 - 499	500 - 999	1 000 - 1 999	2 000 - 4 999	5 000 - 9 999	10 000 - 19 999	20 000 - 49 999	50 000 - 99 999	100 000 or more
Czech Republic	6,258	1,423	1,997	1,366	769	426	147	69	43	12	6
Praha, the Capital City	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Středočeský Region	1,144	227	370	279	152	75	21	15	4	1	-
Jihočeský Region	624	229	206	87	49	32	14	2	4	1	-
Plzeňský Region	501	163	166	79	49	27	11	4	1	-	1
Karlovarský Region	134	16	45	31	15	16	4	4	3	-	-
Ústecký Region	354	43	127	89	44	26	8	10	5	2	-
Liberecký Region	215	29	64	60	30	17	10	2	2	-	1
Královéhradecký Region	448	99	171	98	36	22	14	6	1	1	-
Pardubický Region	451	106	172	89	48	19	9	6	1	1	-
Region Vysočina	704	324	216	96	37	14	9	4	3	1	-
Jihomoravský Region	673	108	193	178	108	61	15	4	5	-	1
Olomoucký Region	402	47	127	109	74	32	4	5	3	-	1
Zlínský Region	307	19	83	97	53	37	9	4	4	1	-
Moravskoslezský Region	300	13	57	74	74	48	19	3	7	4	1

Code: RS002/17

List of Symbols

- data are unavailable or unreliable
- not applicable
- x no case registered
- 0 figure is less than a half of the unit applied
- i.d. individual or confidential data

Number of municipalities in size groups - territorial comparison

Both definitions deliberately do not mention property rights in the area, because the public space can be a privately owned area, which is accessible to the public for a certain time - for example, the courtyard of the library or the adjacent garden of a private castle.