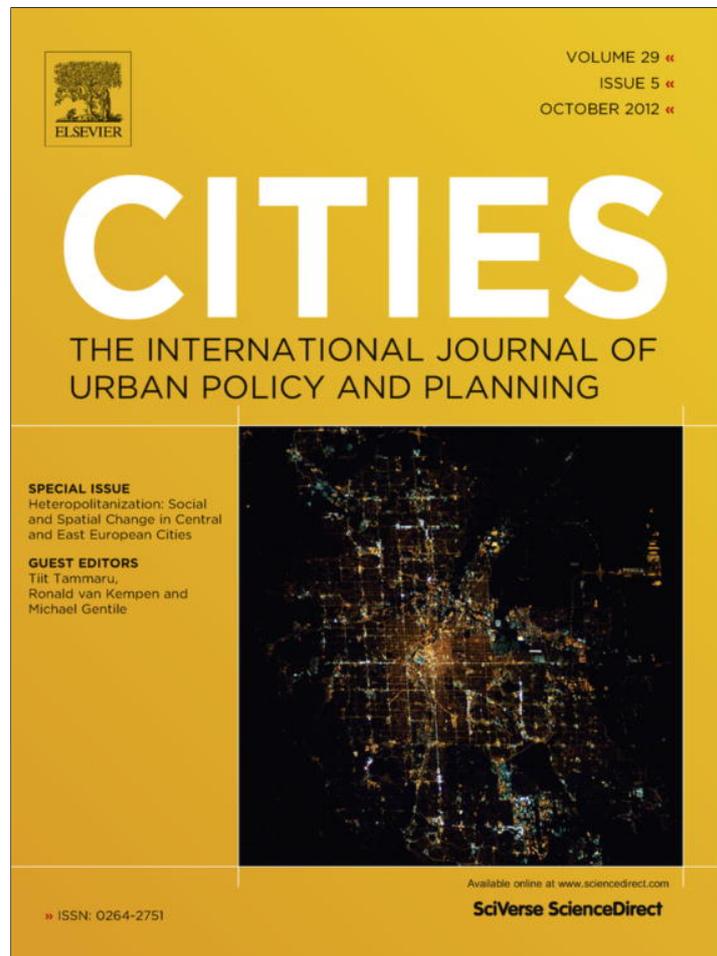


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## Residential satisfaction of elderly in the city centre: The case of revitalizing neighbourhoods in Prague

Jana Temelová\*, Nina Dvořáková

Charles University in Prague, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, Faculty of Science, Albertov 6, 128 43 Prague 2, Czech Republic

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### ABSTRACT

While the historical cores of the post-socialist cities of Central and Eastern Europe are adapting to the invasion of tourism and profitable companies, dynamic regeneration is altering the character of the inner-city neighbourhoods from working class peripheries to modern multi-functional urban sub-centres. Changing residential environments, landscapes and functions affect the daily lives and residential satisfaction of the local population, and especially of the low-income and elderly people facing mobility restrictions. This research evaluates the residential satisfaction of the elderly in two Prague city centre neighbourhoods that experienced dramatic changes in their residential environment during the post-socialist transition: the historical core, which has been exposed to massive touristification and commercialization, and a former working class neighbourhood that has been experiencing rapid regeneration. The local accessibility of services, public spaces, housing and social support was examined through a questionnaire survey. Contrary to our expectations based on the existing literature review, the results show that, despite the rapid revitalization processes, the elderly are fairly satisfied with their residential environment in both neighbourhood types.

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### Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, vigorous changes in the socio-spatial configuration, physical landscape and functional structure of post-socialist cities and urban neighbourhoods have taken place (Enyedi, 1998; Ouředníček & Temelová, 2009; Ruoppila & Kährik, 2003; Temelová, Novák, Ouředníček, & Puldová, 2011). Dramatic transformations have been apparent in central parts of the major CEE cities (Feldman, 2000; Kiss, 2002; Szirmai, 2006; Temelová, 2007). In Prague, rapid regeneration is transforming some of the inner city neighbourhoods from working class peripheries to modern city sub-centres with new offices, shopping malls, entertainment centres and high-end housing (Temelová, 2007). In the historical core, touristification and commercialization, among other forces, have led to the displacement of cheaper stores and to the spread of specific (and often luxury) services aimed at tourists and wealthy residents (Hoffman & Musil, 1999; Musil, 1993; Simpson, 1999). The changing residential environment, landscape and functions affect the quality of life and the residential satisfaction of the local population in their home neighbourhoods. People who are attached to neighbourhoods on an everyday basis, that is the elderly population, are particularly sensitive to these changes. Their daily movements and activities mostly take place in the area

surrounding their homes (Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Musil, 1982). Urban revitalization thus influences the living environment as a place where the daily activities of the elderly take place. Since many seniors grow older in their long-term place of residence, transformations related to urban restructuring are often perceived as stress factors in their lives (Phillips, Siu, Yeh, & Cheng, 2005).

Mostly rooted in the experience of Western cities, there is a body of literature that discusses the harmful influence of urban revitalization on the everyday lives of the indigenous residents. The loss of affordable housing, the displacement of cheaper shops selling daily goods, the privatization of public space and community deterioration have been particularly criticized (e.g. Atkinson, 2004; Cybriwsky, 1978; Madanipour, 1996; Mangen, 2004; Sassen, 1996). Similarly, revitalization processes in post-socialist cities have often been blamed for the generally negative impacts they generate on the original population, and on the elderly in particular (e.g. Musil, 1993; Simpson, 1999; Temelová, Dvořáková, & Slezáková, 2010; Węclawowicz, 1998). Despite the anticipated negative effects of revitalization, however, little empirical attention has been paid to the quality of life and residential satisfaction of the elderly population in these revitalizing neighbourhoods. This is particularly true for the CEE cities. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by evaluating the residential satisfaction of elderly people living in some Prague neighbourhoods which have been exposed to revitalization during the post-socialist transition. Are local elderly people satisfied or not with their daily life in these neighbourhoods? From

\* Tel.: +420 221 951 970; fax: +420 224 920 657.

E-mail address: [janatem@natur.cuni.cz](mailto:janatem@natur.cuni.cz) (J. Temelová).

the elderly point of view, the transformation of neighbourhoods means the loss of familiar environments and the need for adaptation, which can significantly affect everyday lives and independence. In a time of ageing urban populations, the knowledge of their residential perceptions and demands in transforming urban environments is thus a great challenge for age-friendly urban planning and not only in post-socialist cities.

The residential satisfaction of the elderly is investigated using case studies of two Prague city centre neighbourhoods: the historical centre of Prague (Prague 1), an area exposed to mass tourism and intense commercial development, and a former working class neighbourhood (central Smíchov) which has been experiencing dynamic commercial and residential regeneration. Building on the concept of residential satisfaction we designed a questionnaire survey to evaluate elderly persons' perceptions of changing environmental quality. The residential satisfaction of elderly people is discussed against the context of an age-appropriate living environment (e.g. Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Gabriel & Bowling, 2004; Musil, 1982) and the debate on the social and everyday effects of urban revitalization (e.g. Atkinson, 2004; Beauregard, 1990; Cybriwsky, 1978; Madanipour, 1996).

### Residential satisfaction of the elderly and urban revitalization

Residential satisfaction is a conceptual criterion in the evaluation of perceived quality of life in neighbourhoods (Amérigo & Aragonés, 1997). It is formed by the subjective perception of the degree to which individuals' residential needs are fulfilled and is affected by an array of housing, neighbourhood, and individual attributes (Galster & Hesser, 1981). It is one of the ways to evaluate the quality of urban environment, usually by neighbourhood residents. For elderly people, the quality of the residential environment, or a precisely objectively defined environment in the words of Golant (1984), provides the context for their everyday life, inevitable and leisure activities, mobility and social participation. The preconditions of the environment support an independent lifestyle, one of the most important attributes of high-quality life in old age (Föbker & Grotz, 2006).

The activity space of elderly people narrows depending on their physical abilities and on their financial resources. The majority of daily activities and movements of elderly people are undertaken on foot in the immediate surroundings of the house and neighbourhood (Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Musil, 1982). Therefore distance is the crucial dimension of space in the everyday life of elderly people, especially in relation to the accessibility of shops, services and social contacts (Sýkorová, 2008). With the shrinking activity space the conditions within the immediate living environment increase in importance (Golant et al., 1984). The local environment largely dictates the opportunities for daily activities and mobility of the elderly residents and also determines their satisfaction with their neighbourhoods and urban living in general. There is evidence that people in their old age tend to express residential dissatisfaction if facilities intended for their use are not located within a certain critical walking distance of their residence (Golant et al., 1984).

There is considerable literature discussing age-friendly cities and the qualities of neighbourhoods that best meet the needs of elderly residents. Gabriel and Bowling (2004) demonstrated that living in a neighbourhood that is perceived to give pleasure, feels safe, is neighbourly and offers access to facilities and services is one of the central dimensions of the quality of later life. The importance of safe, affordable and well-running public transport has been stressed in many places (Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Gabriel & Bowling, 2004). Age-friendly neighbourhoods also offer public spaces where older people are able to relax, meet and interact with respect to their limited mobility (Musil, 1982). Importantly the sensitivity of the elderly to perceived threats makes safety issues a prime

demand on the residential environment (Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Pain, 1997). Anxiety about crime affects the daily activities and restricts the mobility of the elderly, particularly when places perceived as unsafe are avoided. Further, research findings show that social cohesion, participation and trust increase the residential satisfaction of elderly urban residents (Mollenkopf et al., 1997; Oh, 2003). The importance of friends and neighbours in the social support system of the elderly is particularly important due to their stronger attachment to place and local community (Cantor, 1975; Sýkorová, 2008).

Neighbourhoods in city centres contain both pull factors of the destination areas as well as negative effects on the living conditions of the elderly population. Comparative research by Föbker and Grotz (2006) suggested that central districts provide physically better infrastructure and therefore better preconditions for an independent and active lifestyle in latter age than areas on the urban fringe. On the one hand, traditional urban neighbourhoods with mixed services, short distances between home and facilities and good pedestrian access encourage walking among the elderly residents and protect them from dependency on assistance (Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Patterson & Chapman, 2004). On the other hand, high living costs, crime, traffic, changing population make-up and weak social bonds were perceived as the most serious problems of living in big cities (Fokkema, Gierveld, & Nijkamp, 1996). Obviously, contemporary urban restructuring and revitalization processes alter the living environment of the neighbourhoods in many ways and thus further influence the residential satisfaction of the elderly.

Urban revitalization means bringing new life into cities and upgrading areas for 'higher' social and economic uses (Beauregard & Holcomb, 1981). The invasion of new and progressive functions and of wealthier residents and consumers results in a wide range of neighbourhood transformations, including physical upgrading, land-use adaptations, residential mobility and changes in population composition, rising rents and property prices as well as place image enhancement (Aitken, 1990; Atkinson, 2004; Beauregard & Holcomb, 1981; Cybriwsky, 1978; Temelová, 2009). Yet, in the words of Mangen (2004, p. 174), "positive outcomes, for some elements of the population, may exacerbate the social situation of others". So, while revitalization processes refashion neighbourhoods in the image of newcomers, at the same time they place everyday pressures on the original residents, particularly the low-income and elderly households.

The influence of rising rents and housing prices on indigenous residents has been all too often discussed by urban scholars, particularly in relation to gentrification (Atkinson, 2004; Beauregard, 1990; Cybriwsky, 1978). Low-income families, the elderly and female-headed households, in particular, are endangered by the loss of affordable housing or displacement from neighbourhoods (Atkinson, 2004; Palen & London, 1984). Rising rents and land values induced by revitalization may also have a damaging effect on local businesses (Bianchini, Dawson, & Evans, 1992; Mangen, 2004). Sassen (1996), for example, pointed to the replacement of neighbourhood shops tailored to the everyday needs of local residents by upscale boutiques and restaurants catering to the high-income urban elite in attractive neighbourhoods of the major cities. The altered structure of local facilities and increased costs worsen the possibilities for local inhabitants to supply their everyday needs in their place of residence (Atkinson, 2004; Cybriwsky, 1978). Madanipour (1996) noted that new developments and regeneration policies intensify the threats to public space through its privatization, control and restriction of the access. From a social point of view, Cybriwsky (1978) demonstrated how the revitalization of a neighbourhood brought the deterioration of the local distinctive lifestyle, the weakening of close social contacts, and a slackening of internal control mechanisms for maintaining order in the local community (see also

**Table 1**

Age-structure of the population in the study neighbourhoods (2001). Source: Czech Statistical Office, census 2001.

	Prague 1	Central Smíchov	Prague
Population total	34 581	19 783	1 169 106
Population 60+	7 881	4 185	243 646
Share of population 60+	22.8%	21.8%	20.8%
Old-age index	204	166	155

Note: Old-age index shows the ratio of population over 60 years old to 100 children aged 0–14.

Beauregard, 1990; Jacobs, 1961). Changing populations, diminishing community control and the presence of particular social groups (e.g. young people and teenagers, foreigners) in revitalizing neighbourhoods may intensify anxiety about crime in shared space, particularly for women and the elderly (Fokkema et al., 1996; Pain, 1997; Thomas & Bromley, 2000).

Accepting the lower adaptability of seniors to changes, their strong neighbourhood attachment and limited activity space on one hand and the generally controversial social outcomes of neighbourhood revitalization discussed above on the other hand, the influence on the quality of life of the poor and the less mobile populations is likely to be negative. Therefore, low residential satisfaction of the elderly is expected in rapidly restructuring city centres of post-socialist cities in general and in our case study neighbourhoods in particular.

## The prague research

The context for urban restructuring and revitalization is different in post-socialist cities (Feldman, 2000; Temelová, 2007; Temelová, 2009), but the risks are in many respects reminiscent of the negative effects of revitalization observed in Western cities and described above. Węclawowicz (1998) believes that the concerns of elderly people in particular are frequently in conflict with the transformation processes and urban restructuring in post-socialist cities. The following section discusses the main changes to the residential environment in two types of neighbourhoods in the city centre using the cases of the historical core of Prague 1 and the former working class area of central Smíchov.

### Changing residential environment in the study neighbourhoods

The two study neighbourhoods, Prague 1 and central Smíchov, were chosen for the evaluation of the elderly residential satisfaction in city centre neighbourhoods. The main reason was a driving revitalization the both areas have been experiencing since the beginning of 1990s. The historical core of Prague is the area of the capital that is most affected by commercialization and tourism, while central Smíchov is one of the neighbourhoods where property-led regeneration has been the most dynamic in the city (Temelová, 2007). At the same time, the populations of Prague 1 and central Smíchov are relatively older in comparison to the city average, with Prague 1 having among the oldest populations in the city (Table 1<sup>1</sup>, Fig. 1).

As elsewhere in CEE, commercialization and touristification have been the most visible restructuring processes in central Prague (Enyedi, 1998; Hoffman et al., 1999; Szirmai, 2006; Sýkora, 1999). The renovation and construction of new, mostly commercial, spaces has been forcing out low-profit economic activities, everyday services and low-cost housing from the central areas, as the new uses provided more economically effective utilisation of

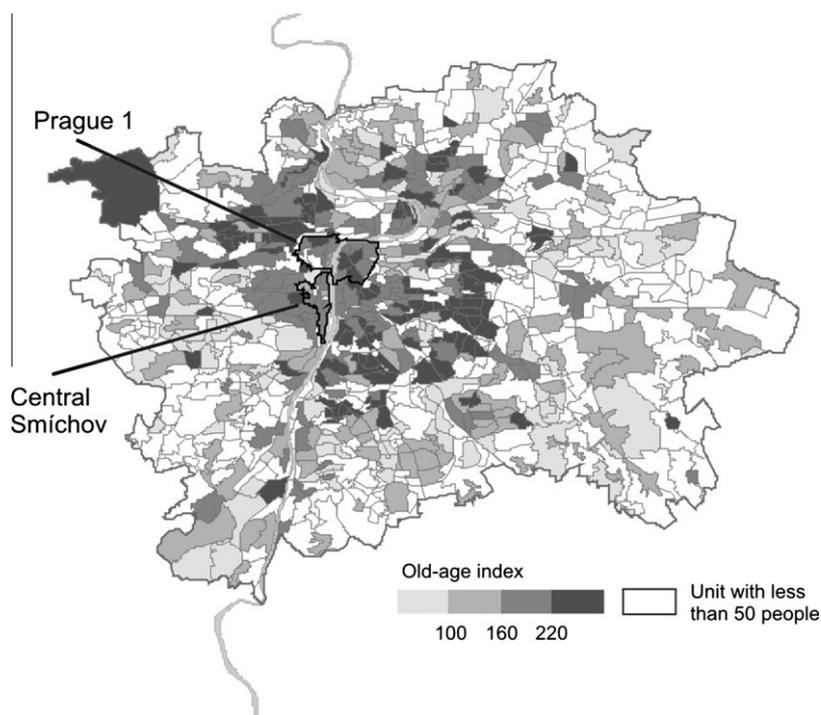
land and buildings. The historical core of Prague became a prime location for high value-added economic activities including consultancy, real estate, law and financial services, and luxury boutiques (Ouredníček & Temelová, 2009). Tourist consumption leads to the increasing supply of outlets and services catering for tourists and a substantial decline in shops selling everyday goods (Simpson, 1999). Because of the city's popularity among newly arriving immigrants (Drbohlav, 2003), the internationalized city centre has witnessed not only a growing number of foreign enterprises and tourists, but also the increasing presence of foreign cultures. Prague's core has become a sought-after residential destination for foreigners, young singles and childless couples (Ouredníček & Temelová, 2009). Gentrification is evident in high-valued city centre addresses (Sýkora, 1999; Sýkora, 2005). Musil (1993, also Hoffman et al., 1999) pointed out the change in the structure of shops and services towards the outlets with speciality goods and luxury items in central areas among the negative consequences of revitalization and growing tourism.

Under socialism, the central and inner parts of cities in CEE countries stagnated economically, physically and socially (Borén & Gentile, 2007; Enyedi, 1998; Musil, 1993). New political and economic conditions, however, created opportunities for the revitalization of neglected neighbourhoods, particularly those adjacent to the city core which offered a promising potential for commercial and/or residential development (Feldman, 2000; Kiss, 2002; Temelová, 2007). Prague's Smíchov is one such neighbourhood. Since the turn of the millennium, new office, shopping, entertainment and residential projects, mostly developed by the adaptive reuse of brownfield sites, have made it a new secondary centre of Prague. The enhanced commercial and residential appeal of the neighbourhood has led to the continuous spread of physical upgrading in central Smíchov (Temelová, 2007). The combination of a central location and relatively favourable property prices drew numerous firms into the area, largely foreign companies (Temelová & Novák, 2007). The inflow of younger and better educated people to the new condominiums and renovated tenement houses has contributed to the growth of socio-economic status of the inhabitants living in this neighbourhood (Table 2). The retail structure of central Smíchov has shifted towards services and outlets demanded by daily business users and better-off residents, as the increasing rents often lead to less lucrative economic activities and the retail outlets being pushed out from the development core to more peripheral zones (Polívka, 2007; Temelová & Novák, 2011).

### Residential satisfaction survey: Data and analysis

To measure the residential satisfaction of the elderly, a face-to-face questionnaire survey containing open and closed questions was used. The open questions took the form of short interviews. The survey was carried out in spring 2008, during the morning and afternoon hours of working days. The research focused on those elderly people who actively use the urban space and experience the neighbourhood's opportunities and barriers in daily life. The purpose was thus to interview the active users of the city space, i.e. those seniors who are more able to evaluate the actual condition and quality of the neighbourhood with regard to their independence in everyday life. The physical and mental disabilities of individuals are the factors that create the major mobility barriers on the level of flats and houses (particularly due to the stairs and lack of lifts) (Sýkorová, 2008), while physical and price accessibility, safety, etc. operating at the neighbourhood level are only secondary problems for them. Thus, we assume that the immobile seniors (non-users) are primarily handicapped by the physical barriers in their micro-space (flat, house) and less by the urban (neighbourhood) space.

<sup>1</sup> The data for the area delimited as central Smíchov are available only from the census in 2001.



**Fig. 1.** Old-age index by basic settlement units of Prague (2001). *Source:* Czech Statistical Office, census 2001. *Note:* Old-age index shows the ratio of population over 60 years old to 100 children aged 0–14.

The respondents were contacted by trained interviewers directly on the streets of the neighbourhoods<sup>2</sup>. Every older-looking person was approached with initiatory questions about his/her age and place of residence. This filtered out the respondents over 60 years old<sup>3</sup> living in the case study neighbourhoods (Prague 1 or central Smíchov), who were then interviewed further on issues of residential satisfaction. The key areas discussed in the survey included the accessibility of shops and services, public spaces and safety, local social support, and housing. The research population for evaluation of the residential satisfaction of the elderly is based on the subjective perception of 225 respondents (149 in Prague 1, 76 in central Smíchov, which represents 2% of the population over 60 years in the respective neighbourhoods). The older population of Prague 1 compared to central Smíchov was reflected in the research population (in Prague 1 the average age of respondents was 75.8 years, in central Smíchov it was 74.7 years<sup>4</sup>). Despite a high willingness of the elderly residents to participate in the survey and thus very few non-responses, the research was marked by a regularity of lower male response, particularly in the historical core (combination of a strong over-representation of women in this age bracket and more frequent refusals by men). We mainly conduct the analysis of frequency distributions of the variables of interest in this study.

<sup>2</sup> Although the trained interviewers operated throughout the whole neighbourhoods, the streets with a higher concentration of senior residents received more survey time. To identify them, maps of the age-specific population distribution by houses were calculated (ISEO, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> The age of 60 corresponds with the average age of retirement in the Czech Republic (Eurostat, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the age composition of the elderly respondents the samples in both neighbourhoods are dominated by the 70–79 age group (45%). Comparing the proportions of younger and older seniors, the former prevails slightly in Smíchov, the latter in Prague 1, which has a generally older population. Despite the heterogeneity of the elderly life styles the survey did not show any significant differences in residential satisfaction between the various age groups of seniors interviewed.

**Table 2**

The proportion of university educated residents in 1991 and 2001. *Source:* Czech statistical office, census 1991 and 2001.

Territory	1991 in %	2001 in %	2001/1991 1991 = 100
Prague 1	19.7	24.2	122.8
Central Smíchov	16.8	20.4	121.4
Prague	16.0	18.8	117.5

*Note:* Proportion of the population older than 15 years.

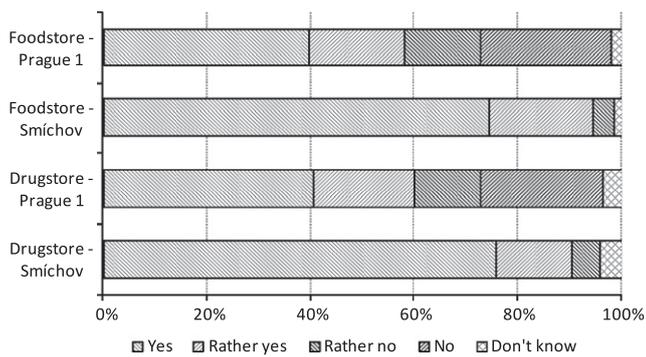
## Results: Residential satisfaction of the elderly in the city centre of Prague

The residential satisfaction of the elderly inhabitants of our case study neighbourhoods was evaluated along four key areas of daily life: access to local facilities, public space and safety, social support and housing. The perceptions of the seniors themselves and the practices they adopt in meeting their everyday needs in relation to shopping, mobility and social participation will be analyzed and discussed in the literature context, next.

### Access to local stores and services

Mollenkopf et al. (1997) observed that everyday walks and errands are typically the most frequent trips of people in later age. Our research in Prague's historical core and the Smíchov neighbourhood also showed that walking is the most important mode of transportation for the elderly. Daily shopping in particular is carried out on foot, while public transport is more often used for visiting relatives and friends, going to the doctor and for occasional shopping trips to the more distant areas.

Although the majority of the elderly residents interviewed expressed satisfaction with the accessibility of food- and drugstores in their neighbourhoods, the availability of these basic facilities is perceived as considerably worse in the historical core. While over



**Fig. 2.** Satisfaction of the elderly with the access to daily stores. Source: Questionnaire survey, 2008 (n = 149; 76). Note: The computed  $\chi^2$  value for the both categories of services exceeded the critical value, the null hypothesis that the two distributions are the same is rejected ( $\alpha = 0.01$ ,  $df = 2$ ).

90% of the seniors are satisfied with the shopping opportunities in central Smíchov, the figure for respondents living in Prague 1 is only 60% (Fig. 2). The availability of other basic facilities including a general practitioner (family physician), pharmacy and post-office was rated positively in both study areas (over 80% of satisfied respondents).

The survey results indicate the differential impacts of revitalization on the supply of basic resources in central Smíchov and Prague 1. Despite the critique that regeneration and “exclusive projects” frequently earn in urban literature (e.g. Bianchini et al., 1992; Magen, 2004), the building of commercial complexes in central Smíchov established new shopping facilities welcomed also by the local population, including the elderly. The supermarkets and drugstore chains incorporated into the new projects are the main consumer magnets in the area. Thanks to the lower price levels, most of the elderly residents meet their daily needs in these supermarkets (over 95%). Central Smíchov, in comparison with other newly developing sub-centres in Prague, still maintains a mixture of facilities in terms of type and price (which also confirms its attractiveness for daily shopping of seniors), and thus also a relatively heterogeneous socio-demographic structure of the area's users (Polívka, 2007; Temelová & Novák, 2011).

The consequences of the touristic and commercial appeal of Prague's historical core apparently stand behind the lower (though still surprisingly reasonable) satisfaction of elderly residents with daily supply facilities. The interviewed seniors mostly complained about the absence of food- and drugstores close to their homes (37% and 48% of respondents, respectively) and about the expensive goods in local outlets (35% for food, 25% for drugstores). They see the closing down and the transformation of local grocers and other daily shops they used to go to into more profitable uses as lying behind the declining opportunities to buy everyday goods in the historical core. The perceived higher price level is partly explained by a lower share of elderly people who do their shopping in supermarkets in Prague 1 (less than 70% of respondents). But the survey also revealed that the price paid for a standardized basket of basic foodstuff is 17% higher in Prague 1 than in central Smíchov (Table 3). Higher price level in the historical core indicates that the shops located there are looking for the clients with higher purchasing power. The orientation of some smaller grocery chains in the historical core to more expensive and premium goods is also confirmed by their operators (e.g. Fuková, 2008; Vopěnková, 2008).

**Public space and safety**

The recreational and social role of public space in the living environment of the elderly is undeniable. The compactly built

**Table 3**

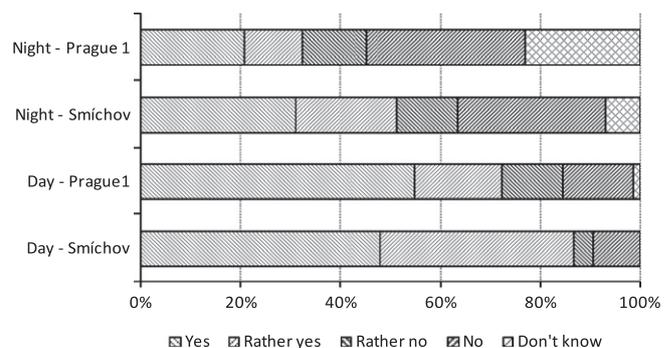
Basic statistics of standardized baskets of basic foodstuffs (2009). Source: Catalogue of shops and services in Prague 1 (38 food stores), field survey using the same method of mapping in central Smíchov (34 food stores), June 2009. Exchange rate 1 EUR = 24.1 CZK.

Indicator (in EUR)	Prague 1	Central Smíchov
Average price	14.1	12.1
Median price	13.8	12.4
Maximum price	18.6	15.5
Minimum price	9.8	8.0
Standard deviation	2.1	2.1

environment of city centres naturally offers fewer opportunities and places for outdoor relaxation, which is then reflected in the lower satisfaction of the elderly residents in this sphere. The city centre of Prague is no exception. Only about half of the elderly respondents interviewed feel satisfied with the availability of public spaces for relaxation in the study neighbourhoods. The needs for space also change with age. While the younger elderly prefer larger parks, older seniors tend to opt for smaller green spaces and squares furnished with enough benches. In either case the older residents are very sensitive to the crowdedness of public spaces, and the presence of other people, especially groups of tourists and sportsmen, disturbs them and undermines their satisfaction with their favoured relaxation places in the neighbourhoods.

The accessibility of parks and greenery ranks among the top problems perceived not only by older generations, but also by other residents of the wider city centre (Temelová, Ouředníček, & Dvořáková, 2009). However, relatively low satisfaction in this sphere should not be related to post-socialist urban restructuring. The number and distribution of parks and green spaces mirror the long-term building development of the central urban zones. Although there is pressure on the privatization of space on the one hand and the trend towards regeneration of public spaces on the other hand, the already densely built environment sets the most important limit to the space available for developing parks and greenery in central city area.

Regarding the feeling of safety, there are differences in the elderly people's perceptions of the two Prague neighbourhoods. While both areas are perceived as fairly safe during the daytime, the fear of crime grows at night, especially in Prague 1 (Fig. 3). A considerable number of the elderly in Prague 1, particularly those over 75 years old, were neutral on this question, because they claimed not to walk outside after it gets dark. The tendency of the elderly to avoid risky situations in planning their time-space trajectories in the city became clearly evident from the survey.



**Fig. 3.** Feeling of safety in the neighbourhood. Source: Questionnaire survey, 2008 (n = 149; 76). Note: The computed  $\chi^2$  value for night feeling of safety exceeded the critical value, the null hypothesis that the two distributions are the same is rejected, for daytime feeling of safety the null hypothesis cannot be rejected ( $\alpha = 0.01$ ,  $df = 2$ ).

Additionally, the elderly people interviewed often related their anxiety about crime to particular types of places within their neighbourhoods of residence (i.e. Prague 1 and central Smíchov). Examples include parks and certain squares and streets with a concentration of nightlife venues (bars, clubs, pubs) or with the presence of undesirably perceived social groups (homeless, drug addicts and drug dealers). Also the main shopping centres, the places where many elderly residents do their daily shopping, evoke anxiety about crime. Our research basically confirms the findings from other big cities indicating that many elderly residents feel unsafe in evening and night-time streets and public spaces (Fokkema et al., 1996; Thomas & Bromley, 2000). The reasons for not feeling safe are common to all of the places mentioned above: “strange individuals” (homeless men, drunken and noisy night users, drug addicts and dealers, teenagers and foreigners are all perceived as being challenging for seniors living in Prague 1 and central Smíchov). The issue of the safety of elderly people is particularly pronounced in Prague 1, where the in the number of restaurants, clubs and other leisure facilities has increased dramatically after 1989 has attracted many local and foreign night-time users.

#### *Local social support*

Considering the stronger attachment of elderly people to the local community, interactions with neighbours and the supportive relationships between the elderly and those around them mean a lot in their lives. Increased migration and a higher fluctuation of population in the central city after 1990 would suggest a distortion of local communities. However, a positive appreciation of social support from neighbours, particularly of emergency assistance with shopping, transport, helping when they are ill, etc. dominates in both study neighbourhoods. The elderly living in central Smíchov, however, perceive the supportive relationships considerably better than those residing in Prague 1. While 90% of the elderly people interviewed in Smíchov trust in the assistance of their neighbours, “only” 75% of the historical core respondents claimed to do so. A higher share of undecided respondents in Prague 1 was explained either by no experience in asking neighbours for assistance or by the fact that the neighbours are seldom at home, so they could hardly provide any help.

Although long term residents prevail among elderly in both neighbourhoods, the certainty of a neighbour's social support was seen to be weaker in Prague 1. There are also more elderly respondents who cannot evaluate the relationships between neighbours since they do not know them. The study did not attempt to systematically map people's social networks or the intensity of their social contacts, but the survey did suggest that the elderly perceive the population change and high level of population turnover in the neighbourhood. Flats in the historical core are often sold to better-off households or rented out to young couples, students, foreigners and other tenants (Ouředníček & Temelová, 2009) who have as yet lived in the place only briefly or temporarily and thus also the chance of community building is lower.

#### *Housing and residential stability*

The elderly who participated in the research are long term residents of the neighbourhoods. The respondent population in Prague 1 has lived in the city centre for an average of 43 years (75% have spent more than half of their lives here), while the seniors interviewed in Smíchov have spent on average 37 years in their current place of residence (62% have spent more than half of their lives here). The long-lasting residence and stronger psychological attachment to the place boosts a favourable and satisfying environmental experience (Golant et al., 1984). On the other hand, modest

income of the retired people that is very typical across CEE countries makes elderly to struggle with high living costs. Only roughly a half of the interviewed seniors consider housing costs as affordable in both study neighbourhoods.

The residential satisfaction of elderly people is a critical predictor of their mobility intentions (Oh, 2003). The results of the survey suggest that the majority of the elderly plan to stay in their current homes (90% in Smíchov, 84% in Prague 1). Only a few respondents expressed an intention to move away from the neighbourhood, which confirms the rather high residential stability of older people. Mobility intentions were, as expected, significantly stronger in the group of younger seniors.

#### **Discussion and conclusion**

Urban populations are ageing and the demand for age-appropriate living environments has become one of the central concerns in social research (e.g. Föbker & Grotz, 2006; Gabriel & Bowling, 2004; Golant et al., 1984; Musil, 1982; Phillips et al., 2005; Sýkorová, 2008; Temelová et al., 2010). In the CEE countries, the end of state socialism brought a diversification in the life styles of the elderly, as well as in their demands on the residential environment. Several age cohorts of the elderly with markedly different life experiences, physical abilities, attitudes and expectations live next to each other in urban space and differently evaluate the opportunities it offers for them.

The equipment and the characteristics of different living environments influence the activity patterns of the elderly. Urban scholars generally agree that city centres offer good preconditions for an independent and active lifestyle in older age thanks to the proximity of facilities, walkable distances and density social contacts. The urban restructuring initiated by the political and economic changes of the 1990s in post-socialist cities, however, raises concerns about the quality of life of the elderly and low-income households in the city centres. Although many of the negative effects of revitalization may derive from the Western experience, the context of post-socialist cities is specific in the timing, speed and complexity of the changes that have been transforming the urban neighbourhoods. This article discussed the residential satisfaction of the older residents in the two types of neighbourhoods in the city centre of Prague, historical core (Prague 1) and former working class neighbourhood (central Smíchov), which have been undergoing a remarkable revitalization during the last two decades. Two city centre neighbourhoods undergoing various revitalization processes (touristification, commercialization, property-led regeneration, etc.) and experiencing different changes in their residential environments were examined. Access to stores and services, public space and safety issues, local social support, and housing affordability were among the main concerns discussed in relation to the satisfaction of elderly people in the city centre of Prague.

Generally the elderly perceive the residential environment in both the historical core of Prague 1 and in the former working class neighbourhood of Smíchov fairly positively. However, the results do show some disparities in particular aspects of residential satisfaction in the two neighbourhoods. Commercialization and touristification promote the specialization of city centre retailing, which is reflected in the older residents' dissatisfaction with higher prices and the loss of basic supply resources (mainly grocery stores) in Prague 1. On the other hand, the construction of new shopping malls in Smíchov has brought cheaper supermarkets to the area, which has become popular shopping destinations for the elderly. This puts into question the common assumption of the necessarily negative impacts of regeneration on the availability of affordable shopping and service infrastructure in the vicinity of elderly people's residences. On the contrary, balanced regeneration brings not only “exclusive projects”, but also new and accessible

functions to the neighbourhoods, which can enhance the accessibility of daily facilities for local population.

Although some critical areas of the elderly residential satisfaction were identified, it seems that they manage to carry out the everyday activities of living despite the remarkable transformation of the residential environment in the city centre of post-socialist Prague. The anxiety about the dramatic deterioration of elderly people's quality of life in the context of market forces and related revitalization processes did not appear too drastic and, generally speaking, the elderly residents seem to be relatively satisfied in the city centre of Prague. On the other hand, the lesser accessibility to daily facilities in Prague 1, together with lower residential satisfaction in other spheres (particularly weaker certainty of neighbour's social support and lower night-time safety), suggest a deeper impact of the post-socialist condition on the elderly residing in the historical core of Prague 1 and their higher exposure to relocation urgency. Although the impacts of neighbourhood revitalization have not drastically reduced the quality of life of the local elderly so far, certain findings of this research indicate potential risks for the future, such as, for example if the intensity of the restructuring escalates and the new functions completely take over the space. After the period of relatively unregulated development in Prague's city centre, a responsible attitude on behalf of local government is required. It should enforce sensitive regulation mechanisms to maintain the existing fragile balance between the new activities and the needs of elderly residents.

The results of the study have a more general relevance. Not only Prague, but the city centres of CEE cities in general have regained their central business functions during post-socialism, which has been linked to remarkable transformations in their residential environments. It is reasonable to believe that these changes influence the everyday lives of the older residents in other CEE city centres in similar ways and push for adaptations to their daily routines and habits. Moreover, the rootedness of the elderly is strengthened by many years spent in the neighbourhoods and thus a desire for relocation is not likely (not to speak of the financial and physical restrictions). With the ageing of the urban cores, local governments are responsible to consider the needs and concerns of the elder generations in planning and governance in order to build inclusive cities and communities across post-socialist Europe.

#### Data sources

Catalogue of shops and services – map of goods and prices [Katalog obchodů a služeb – mapa sortimentu a cen], Municipal district of Prague 1, June 2009. Czech Statistical Office. Census 1991 and 2001. Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>, 19.05.08. ISEO – Information system of population registration [Informační systém evidence obyvatel], Ministry of the Interior of the CR, 2008.

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