

Attractiveness of Small Cities in Rural or Abandoned Regions

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Abstract: Small and medium-sized municipalities in regions, where former industry collapsed (coal mines closed, manufacturing transferred to cheaper countries, etc.) are facing outflow of people in productive age and brain drain. This results in an aging population, and even lower attractiveness for youngers to stay or to come, despite wonderful nature around and potential for tourism. Our research aims to understand both the reasons for such development and real needs of the region and people living there. Improving the living comfort of local people, focus on how to support attractiveness for tourists. Design of infrastructure for young families, seniors, bikers, make better connection and marketing of beautiful surroundings may be way, how to move forward. The aim of the article was to determine the possibilities of increasing the comfort and attractiveness of selected municipalities for current and potential residents and tourists. Our research has been focused on two medium-sized municipalities, with a different past background. Outputs may be generalized and suggestive for other municipalities worldwide.

Keywords: Small and medium-sized cities, pedestrian safety, sustainable development, rural regions, tourism

1 Introduction

Recent rapid growth of automobile traffic, the problem of pedestrian safety - especially children, disabled and elderly people, time and space accessibility and maintaining a comfortable life in cities and other municipalities became a heavily addressed issue. In large cities, this issue is usually dealt systematically with appropriate attention. Small and medium-sized towns in remote regions have similar problems, but this attention and systematic solution is minimal or none. Thus these municipalities are exposed to a higher risk of outflows of inhabitants and less attractiveness to tourists [1]. On the other hand, just these municipalities have enormous potential for a comfortable life of inhabitants and have many potential attractions in tourism. Our study is based on examples of two middle cities one in the South Bohemian region and the other in Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, which are two of many cities fighting to solve the issues of creating a safe and

comfortable city for living and tourism. These municipalities are Chotěboř and Milevsko.

Chotěboř is a medium-sized town located in the Havlíčkův Brod district in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands (Vysočina) Region. As major local employers, there are engineering and woodworking companies. In addition, we can find a brewery, also important in terms of tourism [2]. Chotěboř is a small district, i.e. the municipal authority provides state administration for a district that has approximately 22,000 inhabitants in 31 municipalities [3]. Milevsko is a medium-sized municipality located in the South Bohemian Region, Písek District. The Milevsko Region has approximately 18,546 inhabitants [3]. The Milevsko microregion is a geographically, economically and socially homogeneous territory. In town Milevsko itself currently live roughly 8400 citizens [4].

The average age of the population as of 1 January 2017 was 43.1 in Chotěboř and 45.6 in Milevsko. Both cities are struggling with the outflow of inhabitants, especially young people, and the population is aging slowly. Fig. 1 shows population development from 2004 to 2018 in Milevsko and Chotěboř. In ten years (from 2008 to 2018) the number of inhabitants in Chotěboř decreased by 6.2% and in Milevsko by 8.5% (Fig. 1).

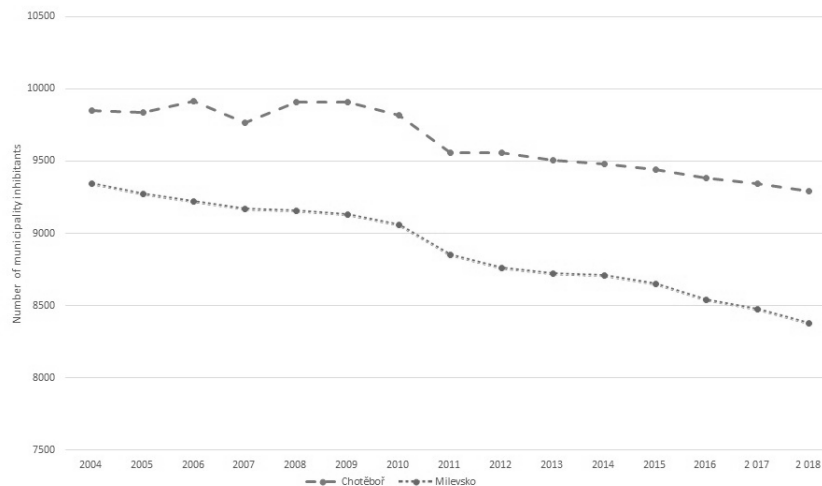


Fig 1. Graph describes development of total population of both cities surveyed. Source: [3]

2 Material and Methods

The aim of the article was to determine the possibilities of increasing the comfort and attractiveness of selected municipalities for current and potential residents and tourists. Paper presents partial research results. Our research has been focused on two medium-sized municipalities, with a different past background. The first of them is Milevsko, a medium-sized municipality located in the South Bohemian

Region, Písek District and the other, our research has been focused on is Chotěboř, a medium-sized town located in the Havlíčkův Brod district in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands Region. In order to determine the possibilities of increasing the comfort and attractiveness of these municipalities, information from several secondary sources have been used: survey results, municipal websites, strategic documents of the municipalities, results of the feeling map, statistical data. These gained information are supplemented by a field survey - by own observation in the place of the municipality from which the record has been made. This observation has taken place 25.3.2019 in Milevsko and 8.4.2019 in Chotěboř. Data analysis, logical deduction and synthesis methods were used to process the data. The outputs have been summarized in the SWOT analysis, which provides an overview of the strengths and weaknesses in terms of increasing the comfort and attractiveness of the solved municipalities for current, potential inhabitants and tourists. The SWOT analysis also provides a basis for further addressing the issues in these municipalities and creates background for further research.

3 Results and Discussion

Milevsko is a town that, within the Smart City program - Living Milevsko, is trying to systematically address the increase in comfort of living standard and sustainable development. On the contrary, Chotěboř does not solve the current situation with a conceptual approach. Both municipalities are faced with the problem of today's small and medium-sized municipalities that are not close to big cities or large businesses that create a sufficient amount of potential jobs. Milevsko plans to address the issue of job opportunities by building an industrial area that has strategic potential from the perspective of the planned transport infrastructure. The following section summarizes the information from the point of view of industrial development impact, urban amenities, tourist, relaxation and occupational attributes, which are based on the analysis of strategic documents, websites, research conducted in the areas, the Milevsko feeling map [5] and the field observation.

3.1 Milevsko

- **Transport:** The interconnection of the town itself and its surroundings is at a relatively good level. Lower class roads and one class I road pass through the city, where No. 19 is one of the relatively busy roads[4]. In the town center there is comfortably accessible bus station and in a remote part a train station accessible from the center by bus shuttle, which provides a considerable amount of connections everyday. It is planned to bypass the city in the future, which is particularly important from industrial development point of view.

- **Civic amenities:** Health care is provided in the city by the local policlinic. As part of children's education, the town offers its citizens and also citizens of the surrounding villages the opportunity to attend one of 4 nursery schools, as well as 2 elementary schools, the Grammar School Milevsko, the professional secondary school Milevsko, but also one elementary Art School. Given that there is an increase in the proportion of citizens over the age of 65 (2,018 inhabitants in 2017 - data from the Czech Statistical Office), municipality administration provides care by the care center, nursing homes (2 in Milevsko and 5 in the administrative district) and homes for seniors (3 workplaces).

- **Cultural, relaxation and interest attributes:** Milevsko offers possibilities for cultural and tourist activities e.g. monastery founded in 1187 or the Church of Sts. Bartholomew located in the town center on the square of Edvard Beneš and the synagogue. The town also houses the Milevsko Culture House and the Milevsko Museum, the House of Children and Youth. Two retirement clubs are active there. People also may enjoy sports and recreation area Milevsko (summer stadium and sports hall), outdoor swimming pool, tennis courts, canine club, zoo but also the natural environment that surrounds Milevsko and last but not least the parks and ponds in the built-up area of the city. Milevsko is natural center of the tourist area of Toulava [6,7].

- **Results of Milevsko feeling map:**

- *Residents are proud on:* the monastery, E. Beneš Square including all the major buildings in its closest neighborhood, especially the Church of Sts. Bartholomew and City Hall. Furthermore, old Mill or park Pheasant Farm, children's playground near Suchan's pond, Šibeňák.

- *Positive perceived places:* Šibeňák, Hajda and Lišnický pond, where the quiet natural environment was generally positively perceived, where you can relax or play sports..

- *The center of social life:* House of Culture, Milevsko Amphitheater, businesses located in the city center, but also Milevsko cinema or the main road in the city center itself..

- *Places perceived negatively:* The most unsightly and unsustainable spaces were most often referred to as places such as the train station, the old housing residential state, the park at Tyrš Square, the bus station, Pod Farou Street, U Váhy Street and Sokolovská Street [5].

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to both towns were determined on the basis of the information obtained (Tab. 1).

3.2 Chotěboř

- **Transport:** The town surroundings are interconnected through second and third class roads with the town center being. Busy traffic in the city center is a potential danger to pedestrians and cyclists. Second class road II346 connects the town with the I34 first class road. Bus station located on the central square inappropriately restricts further development of the town center, train station situated

in a remote part with no bus shuttle with center limits access to train services. Nearby the town is small grassy airport.

- **Civic amenities:** There are full civic amenities in the town i.e. banks, employment office, fast rescue service, a number of private doctors including specialists, a rehabilitation institute, a nursing home for physically and mentally handicapped children and a post office, about twenty public catering and refreshment companies, a hotel and a guesthouse plus other hostels, three supermarkets, one department store, the city has its own market. Near the town center there is a nursery, a kindergarten, two primary schools, a vocational school, a business academy with a higher education, and secondary school. Local authorities have decided to build a house for the elderly.

- **Cultural, relaxation and interest attributes:** Historical zone of the old town, including a castle with a large park lies in the northern part of the town. In the east of the city people may use numerous sports facilities, which gradually pass into the wild in the Železné mountains protected area with the nearby Doubrava Valley. Fifty different associations, non-profit organizations, bands or sports clubs are registered and active. Cultural activities include a cultural center, a gym house, a cinema, a town museum, and a central library with an information center. "Friend of music" club, Elementary art school and other associations and organizations regularly organize concerts or other events in the town. For having some sport activities and relax, there is a sports hall, a summer stadium with a football pitch, an indoor ice rink, a shooting range, a fitness center, a solarium, tennis and volleyball courts, a ski slope with a lift. Břevnická Dam outside the town is natural center for bathing and recreation during summer.

3.3 SWOT analysis of the Milevsko and Chotěboř municipality

Based on the data obtained, it was possible to create the concept of Swot analysis, which is shown in Tab. 1.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of the Milevsko and Chotěboř municipality

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Necessary civic amenities	- Existence of problematic places where citizens feel uncomfortable or threatened (feeling map - Milevsko)
- Built sports and relaxation facilities	- There is no infrastructure for cycle paths within the city that are linked to the extavilan.
- Smart-city program living Milevsko and its activities	- Insufficient provision of barrier-free pedestrian communications.
- Connection to the transport infrastructure of the neighborhood - road and train transport	- Few jobs for residents
- Reduction of traffic through the city through the I19 road (Milevsko)	- Cutting the town into two sections - road I19 (Milevsko)
- Touristic potential of Toulava area and monastery complex (Milevsko), Bohemian-Moravian Highlands region, castle and brewery (Chotebor)	- Overexposed capacity of bus station and thus inefficiently used space in the city center (Milevsko)
	- Missing communication for pedestrians and cyclists to railway station (Milevsko)
	- Traffic overexposure of roads passing through the city

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- A highly developed sense of belonging to an area that has been developing for a long time (Chotěboř)
 - Leisure activities for older citizens and mothers with children
 - Lack of facilities for care of citizens over 60 (Chotěboř)
 - Missing surveys to improve population comfort - traffic surveys, urban surveys, feeling map (Chotěboř)
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Opportunities	Threats
- Solving problematic places marked in the feeling map (Milevsko) and developing a feeling map and other necessary surveys (Chotěboř)	- The aging of the population and the outflow of the younger generation beyond job opportunities
- Building a bypass around the town - also for the industrial park (Milevsko) and reducing the frequency of passageways (Chotěboř)	- Stagnation of Smart city Activities - Living Milevsko
- Realization of industrial zone project	- Not building a city bypass
- Support activities to increase interest and awareness of the monastery (Milevsko), chateau (Chotěboř)	- Ineffective conceptual solution of cycle paths in towns or their non-implementation
- Increase of tourist potential, relaxation activities, decommissioning of the town traffic system of bicycle paths within the municipality and surroundings and their connection to rural areas	- A non-conceptual solution to the barrier-free movement of pedestrians around the town centers
- Increasing the attractiveness and accessibility of the city for endangered population groups - a barrier-free center for pedestrian	- Increasing automobile traffic - increasing traffic intensity and the need for parking spaces by increasing the number of vehicles per inhabitant of towns
- Engaging in Smart-city program (Chotěboř)	- Lack of funding to address problematic sites marked in the feeling map
- Building new facilities to increase the tourist attractiveness of the area	- Un-connectedness of planned city strategies and thus non-conceptual solution of the issue
	- Poor promotion of tourist attractions

Jako prolematické body byly determinovány aspekty, které se shodují s výsledky pocitové mapy, kde obyvatelé pocítují neklid a nebezpečí. Jsou nimi místa charakteristická zvýšeným dopravním provozem, místa s potřebou přechodů, nedostatečně široké chodníky, případně místa, kde chodníky naprosto chybí. To koresponduje s odbornými prameny [8, 9], podle kterých prostory přetížené městským faktorem, tedy i nadměrnou dopravou, přetěžují psychiku jedince. Navíc jsou takové prostory plny technických zvuků, které byly prokázány jakožto zvuky nejméně příjemné lidskému sluchu [8]. Bylo dokázáno, že v takových místech se lidé cítí napjatí, ostražití, rozmrzelí [8, 10] nebo v takových místech mohou pocítovat např. vyšší míru stresu.

4 Conclusion

The aim of the project is to develop a methodology for adjusting the city's interior, i.e. streets, squares and parks, etc. in such a way as to increase the proportion of non-motorized traffic, reduce the load on the urban space by motorized transport and thus reduce the amount of pollutants and traffic accidents. Another goal is to intensify social life, support the mobility of seniors and increase the availability of important facilities for them (health, cultural, social, leisure, etc.). This means a greater inclusion of this ever-growing population, which is often limited by the lack of convenient transport. One way is to reduce crime and increase traffic safety, which supports the activities of seniors in the city area. The secondary objective is to introduce or intensify the participation of citizens in transport or urban planning.

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