

## URBAN MOBILITY, DEMOGRAPHICAL CHANGES AND ACCESSIBILITY AND TRANSPORT FOR ELDERLY

Karel Schmeidler<sup>1</sup>

There are two dilemmas with the increased mobility Europe has witnessed over the last century. On the one hand, mobility has become an essential condition for social emancipation and economic development. Whilst on the other hand, the social differentiation of access to new transport technologies is serving to fragment and splinter social cohesion.

This dichotomy presents a challenge since “personal mobility is key to independence”. Accessibility to the spatial opportunities in the built urban and rural environments is a hurdle for people with reduced mobility, such as disabled people, elderly people, families with young children, and the young children themselves. Society is changing, is getting older, and is more open to transnational mobility patterns, including the growth of tourism and in-migration. Society is expecting more flexible mobility solutions, which need to be affordable also for people with low incomes.

**Key words:** Mobility, Transport, Quality of Life, Senior Citizens, and Demographical Changes

### 1 Accessibility Needs of Specific Groups of Transport Users

Life quality of senior citizens in relation to mobility conditions SIZE – “Life quality of senior citizens in relation to mobility conditions” (project number QLK6-CT-2002-02399) was a project in the framework of the specific research and technological development programme “Quality of life and management of living resources”, key action 6 “The ageing population and disabilities” in EU’s Framework Programme.

European policy regarding the elderly aims at maintaining their mobility. This is a central element of their integration in society. Senior citizens want to stay autonomous and independent as far as possible. Without the possibility to maintain mobility, senior citizens cannot lead an independent life, with many other problems, such as isolation and health problems as a consequence.

The project SIZE had a life-span of 3 years and is divided into 4 research areas: State-of-the art & preparatory activities, qualitative studies, standardised survey and finalisation & distribution of results.

---

<sup>1</sup> Karel Schmeidler, PhD. Associated Professor Transport Research Centre 35 Dpt. - Applied Human Sciences in Urban Planning and Transport., CZ-636 00 Brno, Lisenska 33a, Czech Republic, tel.: 00420-543215050 ext. 124, Fax: 00420-543211215, E-mail: schmeidler@cdv.cz

## 2 Summary of the most important results of quantitative survey in the Czech Republic

The general objectives of SIZE were:

- To explain and describe the present mobility and transport situation, the problems, needs and wishes of different groups of senior citizens from their own perspective compared with experts' points of view (“experts” being sociologists, psychologists, traffic experts, experts on gerontology, architects and urban designers, urban planners, politicians, policy makers, experts of other related EU projects, etc.);
- To motivate action by the authorities and other relevant groups in society who are, or feel, responsible in this area, among others by making discrepancies in problem identification transparent;

To identify relevant solutions for existing problems and to provide guidance for setting up and implementing policies aimed at “keeping the elderly mobile”.

The results of the Czech sample differ from the results of other participating countries mainly in questions of rating public transport and attitudes of public towards senior citizens

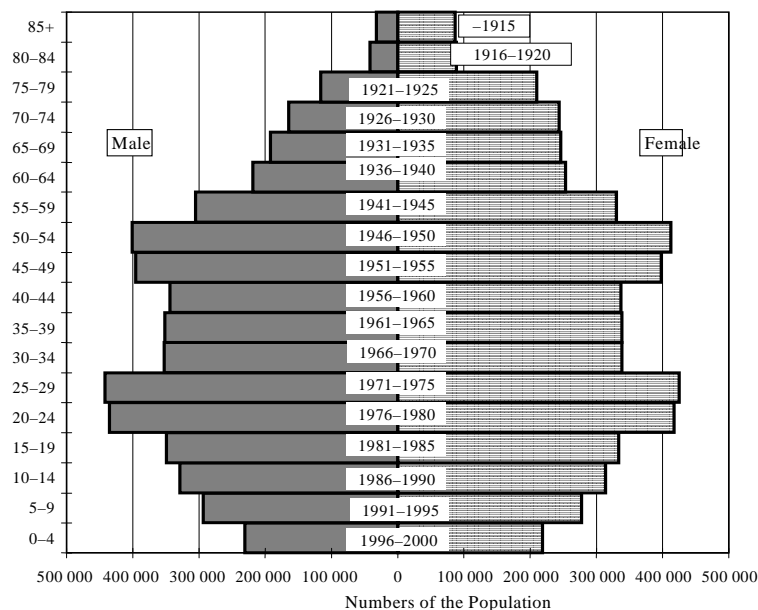


Fig. 1: Age structure of Czech population

## 3 The Czech senior citizens

Concerning dimension of cares and fears, Czech seniors – more than seniors in other countries – express fear, especially fear of contact with people. They are afraid of menace from car drivers and passers-by, they are afraid of victimization – assault, dispossession.

Quality of life was measured in the frame of the project. In most sub dimensions (e.g. financial conditions, quality of public spaces and infrastructure), Czech senior citizens expressed more contentment

than seniors from other countries. Surprising exception appeared the dimension of public transport. Here, Czech seniors more than others complained of insufficient equipment with low-floor vehicles, and insufficient respect and support from public transport drivers. Public transport is the most frequently used mean of transport for Czech seniors; that is why they have considerable demands in this area. Compared to era before 1989, situation in public transport is perceived as worse (restriction of public transport).

#### 4 Ageism – the sort of social exclusion in CZ

Concerning dimension of mobility barriers, Czech seniors perceived more sensitively than the rest of sample all asked items. However, as the most important barrier, the negative attitudes of public towards senior citizens were indicated. Thus, subjective ageism, or age discrimination was indicated.

It is possible to identify and to interpret those spots in traffic system, in which the social ageism is encoded. Which places are taboos for older people? Which places are constructed without regard to older people? Negative attitudes toward older drivers were mentioned many times. Generally said, old person is not welcome road user in traffic. Road traffic is an area that is not arranged for older people with their limited mobility. In this space, speed, aggression and ferocity dominate, and these attributes are not ascribed to old age. Here, senior citizens rightly feel humiliated and discriminated.

Indifference towards older people in public transport is expressed, for example, by lack of barrierlessness. The relationship between seniors and places where they live reveals deeply rooted attitudes and values. Considerable unsuitability of public transport system for people with reduced mobility, i.e. also for older persons, is in this country usually solved by establishing of barrier less lines. From certain point of view this can be perceived as an act of stigmatisation, that causes exclusion of older people, or people with reduced mobility, from the system of public transport, and contributes to age disintegration and segregation of society. Of course, it is possible to argue that there is not enough money to renovate vehicle fleet etc., but we can see, for example in Brno, that only small part of new public transport vehicles have accessible arrangement. Non-accessibility strengthens tendency towards social exclusion of older citizens.

The most demonstrative display of ageism in public transport appears in relations between drivers, passengers and older fellow travellers. Seniors are confronted not only with heavily accessible physical environment; driver and other passengers – as seniors, according to results, feel themselves – let them know that they do not belong here, being too slow, having too many demands, claiming attention (asking seats etc.).

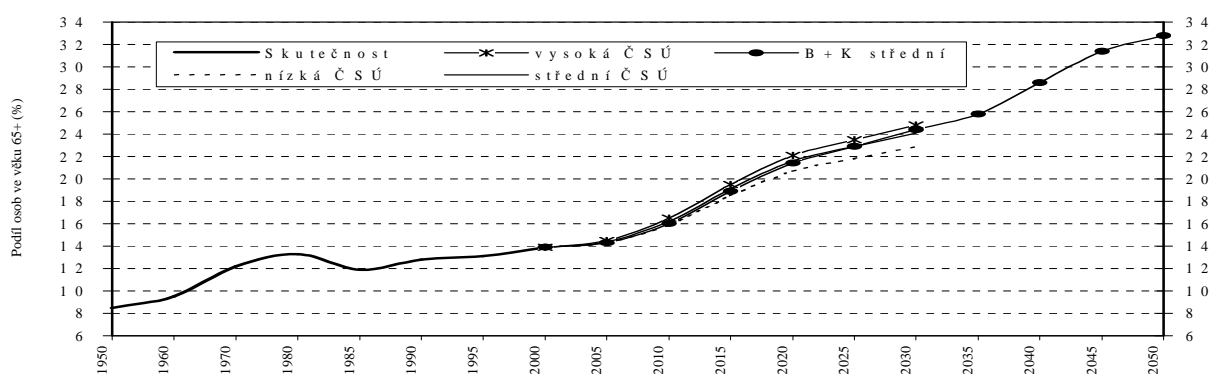


Fig. 2: Growing number of senior citizens aged 65+, projection according state authority CSU

## 5 Mobility of elderly in environmental context

Mobility is not only related to the personal ability of the elderly but above all to the configuration of the urban spaces, and in particular to the barriers it presents for the most vulnerable road users. A relevant issue to be faced by the municipalities is how to ensure for the elderly citizens the possibility to carry out their every-day-life activities, in particular when they walk. This is not an easy task since urban spaces located in the newer parts of the cities that constitute the largest portions of the residential areas have been designed mainly to meet car mobility requirements. Pedestrians' mobility is often compelled to use the "left-over" spaces. What comes out may turn out to be unsuitable for the requirements of many a subgroup, especially for the elderly, and above all for fostering social relationships.

Such a "car culture" is so deeply rooted that also when pedestrian urban spaces are planned anew, they are designed in a way that does not succeed in inducing users to start an identification process. As they are often not conceived from the pedestrians' point of view, they are often not popular, therefore not used or also misused, and quite frequently they in the end assume such a state of neglect that they reach exactly the opposite goal of what they have been created for.

Generally, it is necessary to find and specify the barriers for walking. These barriers are manifold, and they are different for different people. From a point of view of effectiveness, it is necessary, first of all, to eliminate the highest number of small barriers for the highest number of people.

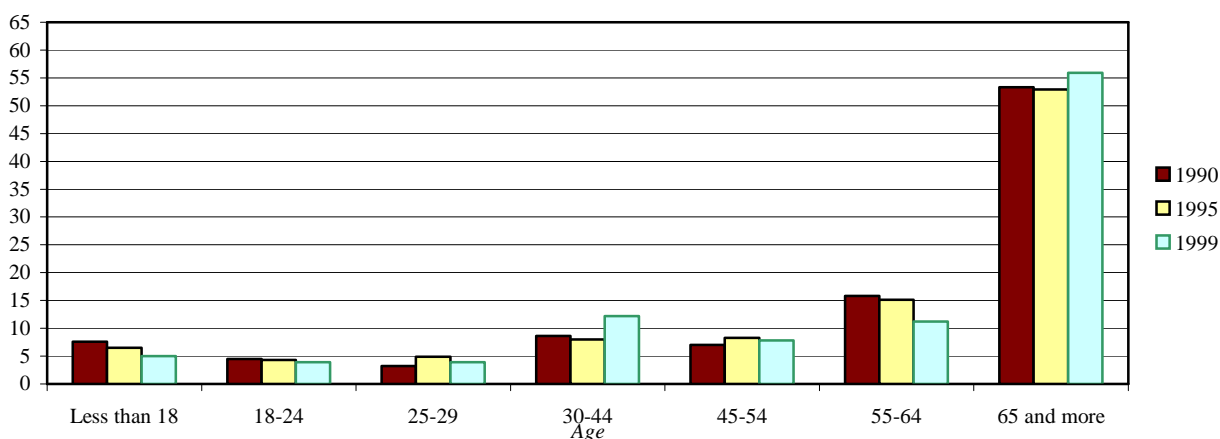


Figure 3: Percentage of dead pedestrians depending on range of age (period 1990-95-99; ISTAT data)

The loss of the driver's license leads to an increase of walking of course. But walking is dangerous. In connection with the elderly walking is thus a rather ambiguous mode: One would like to promote it, because of its environmental friendliness and a lot of other attributes. However, adequate preconditions for walking have to be provided, also considering individual preconditions. Otherwise, it will be very difficult to connect the life quality of elderly citizens to walking, or having to walk. For themselves, being able to use a car will certainly provide positive preconditions for keeping their own life quality on a high status. But the situation may be paradox: For the life quality of elderly it is positive if they are not confronted with cars, where they (have to) walk. A considerable part of our creativity in this connection has therefore to focus on how to provide walking facilities that are appropriate for the elderly. At the moment, the preconditions do not seem to be too good:

## Reference Literature

1. SCHMEIDLER, K. Development of Transport, Mobility and Urban form in the Czech Republic. In **XVI. World congress of Sociology, ISA - International Sociological Association: The Quality of Social Existence in a globalizing World**, Durban, Zulu-Natal (Jižní Afrika), 23.-29. červenec 2006 [CD-ROM]. Durban (Jižní Afrika): University of South Africa, 2006. ISBN 0 620 36568 4.
2. SCHMEIDLER, K. SIZE Project - Life Quality of Senior Citizens in Relation to Mobility Conditions. In **International Sociological Association - ISA, XVI. World Congress of Sociology: The Quality of Social Existence in a Globalizing World**, Durban, Kwa-Zulu-Natal (Jižní Afrika), 23.-29. 7. 2006 [CD-ROM]. Durban (Jižní Afrika) : University of South Africa, 2006. ISBN 0 620 36568 4.
3. SCHMEIDLER, Karel. Ekologický transport ve městech : Bezpečnost zranitelných účastníků silničního provozu. **EKO - Ekologie a společnost**, 2006, roč. 17, č. 6, s. 26-27. ISSN 1210-4728.
4. SCHMEIDLER, Karel. Mobilita seniorů ve městech a pěší doprava : Mobility of the Elderly and Walking. **Pozemné komunikácie a dráhy**, Univerzita Košice, Slovensko, 2006, roč. 2, č. 2, s. 17-30. ISSN 1336-7501.
5. SCHMEIDLER, Karel. Role dálkových autobusů : Ekologická doprava seniorů a handicapovaných. **EKO - Ekologie a společnost**, 2007, roč. 18, č. 1, s. 8-10. ISSN 1210-4728.