FORUM

THE SUBURBANIZATION OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION: EXAMPLES FROM CZECHIA

Artur Boháč[1]

ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the geographic and socioeconomic characteristics of socially excluded suburban localities in Czech cities and their hinterlands. It develops groupings based on selected case studies, incorporating factors such as the size and population of the city and locality, socioeconomic indicators, ethnic and social composition, spatial positioning, historical development, and infrastructure accessibility. These analytical groupings aim not only to enhance academic understanding but also to inform targeted policy interventions. Drawing on urban models and social exclusion concepts, the study critically reinterprets them within the post-socialist Central European context. It further identifies emerging trends in the spatial distribution of socially excluded areas in suburban zones. The paper introduces key theoretical and conceptual frameworks related to social exclusion, emphasizing its multidimensional and spatially embedded nature. Methodologically, the study employs an interdisciplinary and multi-method approach primarily rooted in human geography.*

KEYWORDS: *suburbanization, social exclusion, urban models, Czechia, Roma people*

INTRODUCTION

Socially excluded localities (SELs) present a significant societal challenge in Czechia, with their numbers continuing to rise despite overall economic growth and campaigns against social exclusion (SE). During the war in Ukraine, connected to a massive influx of refugees to Czechia, the situation worsened

1 *Artur Boháč* is Assistant Professor at the Department of Geography, Technical University of Liberec, in the Czech Republic; email address: artur.bohac@tul.cz.

(Agentura pro sociální začleňování 2023). The EU and international human rights organizations have emphasized the issue of social exclusion in Czechia and the need for more inclusive strategies (Hurrle et al. 2016). SELs in Czechia emerge predominantly in suburban areas. The increasing suburbanization of SELs over time is evident in the relevant sources (e.g., Sýkora et al. 2020). Most SELs are located in post-industrial and border regions in the northern part of Czechia.

This article focuses on Czech suburban areas from a human-geographical perspective. However, it overlaps with other social sciences, which is inevitable given the topic's interdisciplinary nature. The study is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: In what ways does suburbanization contribute to the emergence, transformation, and persistence of SELs in post-socialist Czechia?

RQ2: Which spatial, infrastructural, demographic, and historical factors differentiate types of suburban SELs?

The article focuses primarily on the social exclusion of Roma people, which represents a persistent structural pattern, in contrast to the issue of Ukrainian refugee housing.

The text also addresses trends in social exclusion, specifically the movement of socially excluded populations from central urban districts to suburban areas and, on a larger scale, from more affluent regions to less affluent ones. Suburbanization in Czechia is a relatively frequent topic of social science research (Novák–Sýkora 2007; Ouředníček et al. 2019; Kubeš–Ouředníček 2022). Also, social exclusion is a popular topic (GAC 2006, 2015; Mareš et al. 2008). However, examinations of a combination of the two are rare, despite several notable human-geographical efforts (Hurrle et al. 2016; Sýkora et al. 2020; Matoušek–Vališová 2023) with different focuses than this study. This article addresses this gap by presenting empirically grounded groupings of suburban SELs in Czechia, illustrating their spatial configurations, drivers, and contextual specificities.

From a metatheoretical standpoint, this study is situated within critical urban theory, which views urban space as a site of conflict, negotiation, and the reproduction of power (Brenner 2009; Harvey 2012). This perspective insists that processes such as suburbanization and exclusion are politically embedded and historically contingent.

METHODOLOGY

This study combines qualitative desk research, spatial analysis, and fieldwork conducted between 2023 and 2024. Data sources included municipal planning documents, cadastral records, demographic statistics (Czech Statistical Office, GAC surveys, indexes of quality of life and social exclusion), NGO and media reports, as well as non-participant observation in suburban localities, focusing on environmental quality, housing conditions, mobility barriers, and interactions in public space. The analytical process consisted of three steps:

1. Data compilation: First, potential SELs were identified based on available quantitative indicators commonly used in Czech monitoring practice within the SE index, which serve as empirical indicators of social exclusion rather than direct measures of its causal origins (see the section *Social exclusion in Czech suburbs and its dynamics*). Second, these candidate localities were subjected to qualitative verification through field observation, analysis of ownership structures, and assessment of local institutional presence. This step aimed to distinguish between statistically disadvantaged areas and territorially concentrated forms of social exclusion. Only localities that met both the quantitative and qualitative criteria were included in the analysis.
2. Comparative cross-case analysis: Localities were compared to identify recurring structural drivers and spatial patterns. Case selection followed two criteria. First, SELs were chosen to represent different types of suburban environments (inner-ring neighborhoods, outer suburban zones, separate settlements). Second, they illustrate major categories relevant in the Czech context (size, housing type, transport accessibility, and dominant ownership).
3. Pattern synthesis: The analytical grouping was constructed iteratively, assembling cases into categories representing shared mechanisms of exclusion. The synthesis followed grounded principles of qualitative classification and comparative analysis (Bailey 1994).

A key limitation is the uneven data availability, especially regarding the exact number of inhabitants in SELs, their mobility, and internal diversity. Moreover, field observations were affected by seasonal factors. Other limitations are acknowledged in the conclusion.

FRAMEWORK FOR URBAN STRUCTURE

Compared to villages, cities are more extensive, have higher population densities, and are centers of compact development. They exhibit distinct demographic, social, and professional structures, specific lifestyles, cultural heterogeneity, and provide services such as administration, education, commerce, and culture to surrounding areas (Frey–Zimmer 2001). In Czechia, cities or towns must have at least 3,000 inhabitants and be recognized by state institutions, except for historical settlements with city status. The Czech language does not distinguish between towns and cities, so the author applies this approach for greater clarity in the text. In the Czech context, cities can be divided into (MMR ČR 2012):

– Large: over 50,000 inhabitants, statutory cities, and mostly regional capitals. Their complex organism consists of spatially and functionally independent units, usually dominated by citywide centers. Areas of trade, services, and administration complement the functional composition. Large cities cannot exist without a comprehensive transport system. They are usually associated with greater anonymity, poverty, and crime. Residents do not usually use the entire city.
– Medium-sized: 10,000–49,999 inhabitants, microregional centers. These are large enough to benefit from a typical urban economy without being overloaded in social or environmental areas. They usually have a public transportation system.
– Small: 9,999 and fewer – municipalities with the essential characteristics of a city, but their organization and social structure are simple. Their advantages include the direct connection of individual parts to a central hub with basic amenities and to the surrounding landscape. There is no need for a public transport system. Closer interpersonal relationships arise from people who know each other.

Urban models have played a pivotal role in understanding cities' spatial organization and growth patterns. Burgess (2008) introduced the concentric zone model, in which lower-income populations reside closer to the city center, where industrial activities are concentrated. Hoyt (1939) expanded Burgess's ideas with his sector model, accentuating the influence of transportation routes and the tendency for social exclusion to cluster along these corridors. The multiple nuclei model, proposed by Harris and Ullman (1945), suggests that cities develop multiple centers that serve different functions, and that SE is not concentrated in one zone but in less attractive, low-cost areas.

The above-mentioned models were created in the US environment, and their applicability to Central and Eastern Europe is limited (Hirt–Stanilov 2009). Therefore, the models are considered heuristic tools for interpreting selected types of suburban SELs rather than deterministic explanations. The specifics of European cities, such as their historical-religious urban centers combined with business districts, are reflected in the model of a European city, which resembles a combination of concentric zone and sector models (Daniel–Hopkinson 1990). In post-socialist countries, districts of panel housing estates often emerge on the city's edges during their construction. In some cases, after demolitions in inner cities, the sites are adjacent to city centers. Urbanism and social composition in these countries were centrally planned, and the challenges of a market economy sometimes led to social exclusion.

SUBURBAN SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Suburbanization, as a population movement from central urban districts to suburban areas, continues to reshape the social and economic landscapes of cities worldwide. The movement of a socially disadvantaged population is driven by the pressure of private or public actors, as central districts become increasingly attractive to investors, and due to the individual choices of specific individuals or groups. Delbosc and Currie (2011) emphasize that a lack of access to reliable public transport can significantly hinder social mobility and exacerbate isolation among suburban residents. Watt (2009) discusses how contemporary suburban life is marked by increasing class and ethnic heterogeneity, which can lead to both inclusionary and exclusionary practices. Patulny and Morris (2012) highlight how stigma associated with public housing can limit social connections among residents, thereby inhibiting opportunities for employment and social integration. This can be interpreted as a manifestation of symbolic social exclusion.

Contemporary research on post-socialist suburbanization highlights profound differences from Western trajectories (Hirt–Kovachev 2015). Hungarian suburban patterns demonstrate the coexistence of affluent gated enclaves and deprived peripheral estates. They illustrate how suburbanization in post-socialist contexts can simultaneously produce spaces of privilege and spaces of marginality, often within close spatial proximity, driven by uneven marketization, fragmented planning capacities, and selective public investment (Csizmady et al. 2022).

Social exclusion is a complex phenomenon that emerged in the suburbs of Paris, London, and New York during periods of social unrest and economic

decline (Castells 1989). It encompasses various individual and societal factors that prevent full participation in social, economic, political, and cultural life (Council of the European Union 2004). SE is challenging to measure and compare across individuals or groups. However, Burchardt et al. (1999) identified five dimensions: consumption, savings, production, and political and social participation. Kenyon et al. (2003) expanded this model to include temporal, mobility, and living space dimensions. Factors such as health, education, age, unemployment, transport access, and housing shape participation in these dimensions in different ways, acting either as structural constraints, observable indicators, or consequences of social exclusion, depending on context and temporal sequencing. As a crucial factor, unemployment is correlated with higher crime rates and increased reliance on social benefits (Dollar et al. 2019). Those most affected by exclusion are often migrants, ethnic minorities, older adults, or those in poverty.

Reardon and O'Sullivan (2004) define spatial segregation as the physical separation of different population groups within a specific geographic area. This includes the distribution of groups and the extent of their concentration or separation. Income segregation, common in cities, results in unequal access to housing, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, with poorer populations often confined to underdeveloped areas (Gordon–Monastiriotis 2006). Spatially, SELs are usually separated from other parts of the city by roads, railways, industrial areas, dumps, and rivers. The suburbanization process often triggers gentrification in inner-city areas, where wealthier populations reinvest in urban neighborhoods. As a result, low-income residents are relocated to suburban peripheries with fewer amenities. The orientation of a neighborhood toward a marginalized or ethnically diverse one often leads to white flight (Kye – Halpern-Manners 2019). The term is primarily associated with the US environment but is also transferable to Central European settings.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN CZECH SUBURBS AND ITS DYNAMICS

The Industrial Revolution, which began in the late 18th century and continued into the 19th century, marked a significant turning point in Czechia's urban development. As industries emerged, cities such as Prague, Brno, and Ostrava experienced rapid population growth. Urbanization led to the demolition of walls and the construction of transport lines and infrastructure. The difference between well-maintained neighborhoods and working-class areas became

apparent. Industrialization peaked during the communist regime, which focused primarily on heavy industry. The housing stock's lack of renovation and development was an issue. The construction of panel-block flats peaked in the 1970s and affected especially small and medium-sized towns, particularly as they came into contact with historic city centers.

The transition to capitalism presented numerous challenges, including factory closures, increasing brownfields, the decline of former workers' housing, and a shift towards the service economy. After the fall of an authoritarian regime, suburbanization became increasingly prevalent, as middle- and upper-class groups migrated to the outskirts of cities and low-income groups moved to peripheral post-industrial urban zones.

Poverty and marginalization existed in Czechoslovakia before the fall of socialism. However, these conditions were not articulated in SE terms and were masked by full employment, enterprise-based housing, and state control. Moreover, the disadvantage was spatially dispersed (GAC 2006). Additionally, the growth of the Roma population, whose integration into Czech society remains a long-term challenge, has exacerbated exclusion. The original Czech Roma population was almost exterminated during the German occupation, but Roma newcomers from the Slovak part were relocated to the Czech lands, particularly to the borderland. Massive population exchange occurred after World War II when Germans were expelled from the Czech borderlands and replaced by Czechs, Slovaks, Roma, and other newcomers. The Sudetenland region, in particular, is associated with higher levels of negative socioeconomic phenomena and support for radical political parties (Korčák–Netrdová 2022). Longstanding prejudices against Roma also contribute to this ongoing issue (Koky–Graf 2023).

This paper adopts a definition of SEL centered on cumulative disadvantage, spatial concentration, and limited institutional presence, which enables systematic analytical differentiation while acknowledging internal heterogeneity, in line with the SE index. The index was developed by the governmental Agency for Social Inclusion. It is based on the number of people receiving social benefits (housing and living allowances), the number of long-term unemployed, the number of enforcement proceedings due to overindebtedness, and the elementary school dropout rate in a municipality. For mathematical details on the index's construction, visit the agency's website (Agentura pro sociální začleňování 2023).

In this study, social exclusion is understood as a cumulative, self-reinforcing process involving three analytically distinct yet interconnected levels:

1. Structural causes include long-term processes such as deindustrialization, labor market restructuring, housing commodification, discriminatory practices, and uneven regional development.

2. Social exclusion manifests empirically through observable indicators, including long-term unemployment, prolonged reliance on social benefits, substandard housing conditions, limited access to education and services, and spatial concentration of disadvantage.
3. It produces a range of social consequences, including persistent poverty, poor health outcomes, stigmatization, and the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage.

The spatial concentration of these levels of social exclusion heightens the risk of exclusion, particularly among the Roma population, which has specific socioeconomic characteristics; 50% of Roma are endangered by poverty (Šimíková et al. 2024). SELs often experience social issues such as vandalism, substance abuse, and environmental degradation.

Surrounding residents and even the media (e.g., Týden.cz 2009) negatively symbolically label these places as "bad addresses," "problem spots," or "ghettos." Stigmatization is also connected to declaring these places as Roma, although the latter do not always constitute the majority of the population in a locality. Research suggests that living in an SEL can negatively impact children's cognitive abilities, particularly those of Roma children (Mrhálek et al. 2022). Studies also indicate that school choice can contribute to social segregation and the perpetuation of inequality (Nekorjak et al. 2011).

Socially disadvantaged people are either relocated by municipalities, unguided by any centrally organized policy to combat social exclusion, or not respecting one, to the outskirts of gentrified areas, or choose to concentrate in these areas with available housing. These areas often feature state-subsidized housing for disadvantaged groups. Marginalized people who are usually in a rental relationship are forced out of better localities for official reasons, including efforts to make the original place more attractive, and to prevent the further destruction of houses allegedly associated with marginalized people. It is difficult for marginalized inhabitants, especially Roma people, to find housing outside an SEL, even when they are employed. However, many Roma prefer living with other Roma due to their cultural proximity. More than half of SELs were created through natural migration, and another 35% through managed migration (GAC 2015). Czech municipalities attempt to address the problem of SELs with controversial measures, such as the preventive demolition of houses in an SEL and its surroundings, or the declaration of municipally designated areas where residents are no longer eligible for housing allowance supplements. Then, struggles between individual municipalities over where SELs will be created or expanded emerge. Usually, poor municipalities in the peripheries lose this battle.

A typical example of a suburban, formerly industrial and working-class locality that has become desirable is the Karlín neighbourhood in Prague. It is located two kilometers from Prague's Old Town, but historically served as an industrial suburb outside the medieval city limits, retaining its peripheral characteristics into the 20th century. In the Czech urban-geographical tradition, such districts, originally independent settlements later absorbed by expanding cities, are considered inner-ring suburbs. Karlín was heavily damaged during the 2002 flood. Damage accelerated the plans for neighborhood reconstruction from the 1990s onwards. There were numerous Roma communities in Karlín, but many of their houses were destined for demolition. During the floods, evacuations were carried out, but some people never returned. Some went to other poorer districts in Prague. Most received relocation compensation and disappeared to northwestern Bohemia, where they had relatives (Ilík–Ouředníček 2007). Nowadays, Karlín is a prominent district known for its corporate offices and white-collar housing.

The most significant concentrations of SELs are found in the Ústí nad Labem (Ústí nad Labem, Most, Litvínov, Bílina) and Moravian–Silesian (Ostrava, Karviná, Havířov, Krnov) regions, particularly in districts with a long industrial history and a legacy of population exchange. High concentrations are also observable in the Karlovy Vary (Mariánské Lázně, Kraslice), Olomouc (Přerov, Jeseník), and Liberec Region (Frýdlant, Tanvald). The number of SELs has been increasing rapidly in the Moravian–Silesian and Ústí nad Labem Regions, which indicates that larger SELs attract other marginalized residents from across the country (GAC 2015). The average SEL has around 167 inhabitants, though some larger SELs have populations exceeding 1,000. It is estimated that there are 606 SELs in Czechia, with a population currently between 95,000 and 115,000.

Living in an SEL or in a region with high SEL concentrations is associated with lower quality of life, as reflected in a recent report by Mahdalová and Škop (2023) that used the quality-of-life index for municipalities. This index encompasses demographics, security, housing, infrastructure, employment, income, education, and other factors to assess the quality of life. This index's map closely mirrors the SE index map. Sýkora et al. (2020) researched lower levels of basic settlement units. To identify localities with population concentrations at risk of social exclusion, the number of persons jointly assessed for a living allowance is divided by the total population in these localities. Sýkora et al. (2020) use a quite detailed territorial focus, which is appreciable in the context of large cities, but overemphasizes a single material criterion. This is why the author generally prefers the SE index (Agentura pro sociální začleňování 2023).

Using outputs from Mahdalová and Škop (2023) or *Obce v datech* (2024), we can categorize SELs in terms of:

– High quality of life: prosperous regions with developed services, regional centers profiting from globalization processes (e.g., Prague, Brno, and surroundings). Stagnation or a reduction in the number of SELs and their inhabitants can be expected due to real estate and land prices and gentrification.
– Moderate quality of life: most parts of Czechia, with the expectation of a slight increase in the number of SELs and their inhabitants due to higher natural population growth in localities (Romea 2024).
– Low quality of life: already high absolute and relative numbers of SELs and cheap housing make a significant increase in the number of SELs and their inhabitants very probable (e.g., northwestern Bohemia, Silesia). Areas of low quality of life include the outer and inner peripheries. The outer peripheries include former German settlement areas and post-industrial areas in Silesia. The inner peripheries typically lie near the borders of the Czech administrative regions, resulting in limited access to transport, services, and other amenities.

DIFFERENTIATING FACTORS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN CZECH SUBURBAN ZONES

Internal characteristics

Generally, SELs can be divided into houses, streets, or neighborhoods. Vališová (2021) focuses in more detail on the type of housing (see Table 1). A SE family house is a building with a maximum of three housing units, usually with a single owner who rents to families receiving social welfare benefits. SE blocks of flats encompass a range of building types, from small brick houses to multi-storey prefabricated apartment blocks, usually under single ownership. Typically, the mentioned hostels have shared kitchens and bathrooms. These facilities charge fees based on the number of occupants. Blocks with a high share of SE flats exhibit an unstable character, with a tendency toward gradual deterioration in their social composition and a shift toward SE blocks of flats due to the out-migration of more socioeconomically advantaged residents.

Table 1. *Typology of Czech socially excluded people's housing*

Housing/ settlement type	Group A	Group B	Group C
House	SE family house	SE block of flats: Standard SE block of flats, Hostel for adults, Hostel for families with children	Block with a high share of SE flats
Continuous territory	Group of SE family houses	Group of SE blocks of flats	Group of blocks with a high share of SE flats
Discontinuous territory	Locality with a high share of SE family houses	Locality with a high share of SE blocks of flats	Locality with a high share of blocks with a high share of SE flats

Source: Vališová (2021)

Prior research outputs work with different territorial levels. GAC (2006, 2015) and Agentura sociálního začleňování (2023) created their SE index for municipalities. Sýkora et al. (2020) depict stages of SE on the level of basic settlement units. Analyses of social exclusion also exist on a regional or municipal level. The stage of social exclusion in a locality can be determined by the SE index, which can be divided into (Agentura pro sociální začleňování 2023):

– None or very low,
– Low,
– High,
– Very high.

Precise data on the number of particular SEL inhabitants are sometimes unavailable, and we work with estimates. Generally, the limit for declaring a specific place an SEL in the Czech context is 20 people (GAC 2015). Based on this, SELs can be defined (in terms of Czechia) as:

– Small SEL: fewer than 100 inhabitants (e.g., Ralsko – Náhlov);
– Medium-sized SEL: 101–1,000 inhabitants – the average SEL has 167 inhabitants (e.g., Děčín – Boletice nad Labem, Ostrava – Přívoz);
– Large SEL: more than 1,000 inhabitants – 24 SELs fall into this category; more than half of socially excluded people live in one (e.g., Litvínov – Janov, Ústí nad Labem – Předlice, Mojžíř, Havířov – Šumbark, Karviná – Nové Město).

We can also make distinctions, especially in the case of larger SELs, on the level of basic settlement units:

– Homogeneous SELs: only marginalized people and a poor state of buildings (e.g., Most – Chanov);
– Mixed SELs: both worse and better quality places. These areas include non-marginalized inhabitants, standard houses, schools, and some business activities (e.g., Ostrava – Přívoz).

Also, the temporal dimension should be considered, as the presence of many SELs is dynamic. We can divide them into:
– Old SELs: these have existed since the socialist era, although the term SEL only emerged in the Czech environment after the Velvet Revolution (e.g., Most – Chanov).
– Middle-aged SELs: these have existed since the 1990s and 2000s. The majority of SELs fall into this category.
– New SELs: these emerged after 2010 and are usually smaller than the old and middle-aged ones, mainly including hostels.

Another division takes into account the intentionality of the grouping of marginalized people. Namely:
– SELs that were created intentionally by a state or self-government: an example of a settlement primarily intended for Roma people, even in the communist era, is Chanov, part of Most. This was initially designed for people who had lost their homes in the surrounding villages due to mining activities. Initially, the number of majority residents and Roma was balanced, but within a short time, the majority population began migrating to the city of Most. The reason was a different culture and a lack of understanding of the Roma. Assimilation did not work as expected. On the contrary, Roma ethnic groups moved from Most to Chanov, and Chanov became a homogeneous area (iDNES.cz 2017).
– SELs that were created intentionally by a private entity: we should distinguish between bad and good intentions in this case. On the one hand, there are speculators, and on the other, for example, there is the Diocese Charity of Ostrava–Opava, which founded the so-called Village of Coexistence in Ostrava. This was built for socially vulnerable families who were victims of the 1997 floods. Here, 10 Roma, 10 non-Roma, and 10 mixed families reside in 30 houses. Neighboring SEL Na Liščině endangers a relatively successful project (Diecézní charita 2022).
– SELs that emerged more or less spontaneously in a low-cost housing locality: not due to general societal pressure.

The following grouping is connected to the dominant type of ownership in an SEL, which may take the following forms:

– Private: often operates based on the "trade in poverty," i.e., buying a house or block of flats in poor condition in a cheap locality, then providing substandard rooms at exorbitant rents, ultimately paid for by the state through housing allowances.
– Municipal or state: involving at least a minimum standard of housing
– Illegal occupation: emerges in impoverished localities and is often perpetrated by small groups of marginalized people (ČT24 2018).

Relational characteristics

The ratio of socially excluded individuals to the total number of inhabitants in a neighborhood or city is a significant factor. The total number of inhabitants of a city is also crucial because of SELs' connection to the availability of transport and other services. Here, it is possible to categorize cities, dividing them into:

– Large: over 50,000 inhabitants. SEL inhabitants predominantly live in their neighborhood and do not need to leave it except to visit state institutions, etc. Most members of the population do not interact with socially excluded people on a daily basis, as they usually avoid SELs. A high number of city inhabitants can have a diluting effect, but it also leads to the emergence of separate neighborhoods. Research indicates that larger cities exhibit higher levels of spatial segregation, which can negatively affect educational opportunities for disadvantaged populations (Gomà Garcia – Muñoz Aranda 2018).
– Medium-sized: 10,000–49,999 inhabitants. Here, excluded people and localities are more visible than in a large city, provided they are not concentrated in a remote settlement.
– Small: 9,999 and fewer. Excluded people and localities are more visible than in large cities, especially if they are not concentrated in a separate settlement. Usually, SEL inhabitants are in everyday contact with most of the population.

Most media-covered incidents and protests regarding cohabitation between the majority population and SEL inhabitants have occurred in small and medium-sized cities where SELs or suburbs lie within walking distance from the centers. A famous protest took place in Litvínov (Janov – 22,500 inhabitants) in 2008, a machete attack happened in Nový Bor (11,400 inhabitants) in 2011, a shooting attack in Tanvald (6,000 inhabitants) in 2012, and violence and related protests

in the Šluknov Protrusion (cities of Šluknov – 5,700 inhabitants, Rumburk – 10,900 inhabitants, Varnsdorf – 14,700 inhabitants) in 2011 (Ústecký Deník 2011; ČSÚ 2021). Interestingly, these significant dysfunctions in majority-minority cohabitation emerged in northern Bohemia during a specific period. This can be partly explained by the fact that this peripheral region was a popular destination to which to transfer marginalized people from Prague or Brno, where gentrification had emerged, or from Slovakia. Higher income prospects and family ties also played a role. In this case, newcomers had problems with the majority population and even with long-time resident Roma.

The following grouping is based on the SEL's general location within a city. We can distinguish suburban SELs according to their location:

– In the inner circle around a city center that was formerly an outer suburb or independent adjacent settlement (e.g., Ostrava – Vítkovice, Přívoz, Cihelní, Brno – Cejl);
– On the very edge of the city, known as the outer ring (e.g., Ústí nad Labem – Mojžíř);
– As a separate settlement close to a city (e.g., Děčín – Boletice nad Labem).

Despite these categorizations applying to specific Central European post-socialist cities, such simple divisions can be further refined by examining the foreign urban models presented in the second chapter. We can distinguish:

– SELs within the inner circle around a city that can be related to the concentric zone model: according to Burgess (2008), inner circle neighborhoods experience significant poverty, crime, and social instability.
– SELs along thoroughfares: these lines and sectors do not always lead directly to a city center, as in the sector model. The Cihelní and Zárubek SELs in Ostrava are closely aligned with the model. Hoyt's model (Hoyt 1939) is also relevant because it combines industrial zones and low-income neighborhoods.
– Separate SELs close to a city: these can, in some cases, be connected to the multiple nuclei model with its separate industrial or residential units. Several SELs in Ostrava, which has numerous centers, are partly separated from the city.

Many SELs exist in the places of former villages that became parts of larger cities during urban unification processes between the 1950s and 1970s, where panel estate housing was built (Ústí nad Labem – Mojžíř, Litvínov – Janov, Děčín – Boletice nad Labem, Havířov – Šumbark). Then, we can distinguish SELs in neighborhoods that contain old industrial zones, townhouses, and apartment buildings for the middle class, which were built at the turn of the 19th and 20th

centuries. Some relatively prestigious neighborhoods were peripheralized for various reasons, and SELs emerged (Ostrava – Přívoz, Vítkovice, Ústí nad Labem – Předlice).

We can also categorize the specific suburban location in relation to other zones:

– Next to or near a passenger or cargo railway station or railway: inhabitants often live in houses which were initially built for railway maintenance purposes or the accommodation of railway employees (e.g., former SEL Přívoz-Přednádraží in Ostrava). Such locations increase the visibility of an SEL or its inhabitants when the railway station is functioning. Inhabitants of SELs usually spend a lot of time in the vicinity of the railway station due to a lack of meaningful activities, and often beg for money. This is one of the reasons why there are guards and frequent visits by municipal police to railway stations near SELs. Examples of these types of SELs can be found in Ostrava, Děčín, Přerov, and Bohumín.
– Next to other transport hubs such as central bus stations (Plzeň, Chomutov) or neglected river harbors (Ústí nad Labem, Děčín)
– Next to or near a busy road: e.g., along Mariánskohorská Street in Ostrava, Havířská Street in Karviná, Cejl Street in Brno, and Opletalova in Ústí nad Labem. Sometimes, a road divides a SEL from "standard" parts of a city.
– Next to, near, or in a low-class residential or low-quality hostel zone: Karviná – Nové Město (Roma people), Česká Lípa – Průmyslový obvod (mixed inhabitants), Plzeň – Slovany (predominantly foreign workers). The groups of inhabitants mentioned have different life strategies but live under similar conditions.
– In former military barracks: Olomouc, next to Černá cesta Street, and Bruntál, next to Rýmařovská Street
– Next to or near a factory or brownfield: e.g., Ostrava – Přívoz, Kunčice, and Kunčičky. Usually, factories bordering SELs are environmentally problematic and have existed since the communist era or earlier. Brownfields and SELs are frequently located next to each other. There is no detailed map of brownfields for Czechia. However, the Moravian–Silesian Region has a regional brownfields map (Moravskoslezský kraj 2024) that can be compared with maps of SELs, for example.
– Next to, near, or in the zone of some specific, negatively perceived activity: former military areas – e.g., Ralsko.
– Next to uninhabited, mostly natural territory: forests, meadows – e.g., Ústí nad Labem – Mojžíř and Děčín – Boletice nad Labem

Several of these types can apply to a single SEL. Combinations of the above-mentioned locations with neighboring relatively prestigious destinations are interesting. Many such examples exist in Ostrava, where villa quarters in Zábřeh and Slezská Ostrava neighbor the Vítkovice and Mexiko SELs. Similar disharmonies may arise when SELs abut touristically attractive localities or tourist routes. In the borderland, some suburban SELs are located near mountain resorts (Nové Město pod Smrkem, Tanvald), spas (Teplice, Bílina, Jeseník), natural attractions (Krásná Lípa), or historical monuments (Jaroměř – Josefov, Broumov, Duchcov).

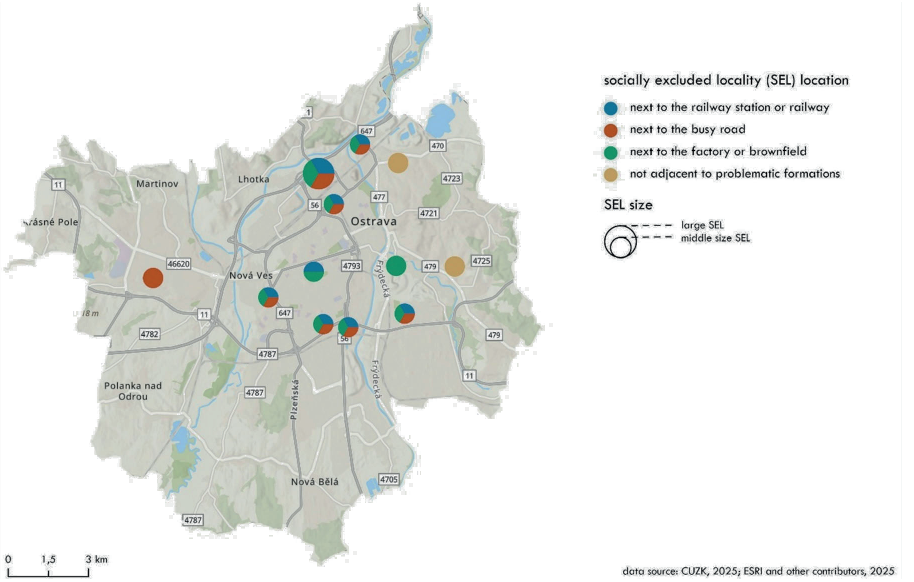
We can also categorize SELs according to public transport availability (which usually correlates to their location within a city) into:

– Well-connected SEL: public transport is available frequently, typical of large cities and regional capitals. Still, there may be localities with infrequent connections on weekends and at night, or long walking distances to the nearest transport stops (e.g., Ústí nad Labem – Předlice).
– Moderately connected SEL: most Czech SELs;
– Poorly connected SELs: small cities with a rural, dispersed character. A typical case is Ralsko, especially its socially excluded part, Náhlov. The area is highly isolated, with no public transportation available within the town. Náhlov is accessible from the village of Osečná via limited public transport, while the distance to the center of Ralsko, specifically the central Kuřívody area, ranges from 18 to 30 kilometers. The roads through the former military zone remain impassable year-round. In contrast, the town of Osečná is just 5 kilometres away, making it the primary hub for local services, including a kindergarten and primary school. Náhlov's location at the intersection of former administrative districts is problematic regarding administrative matters. While the city of Ralsko is part of the municipality with extended jurisdiction of Česká Lípa, Osečná belongs to the Liberec administrative district.

SELs are sometimes at risk of having their public transport services canceled or limited. In the disadvantaged areas of Ústí nad Labem, public transport vehicles are accessible only through the front door, where the driver verifies ticket validity. Following several attacks on drivers, public transport to the Mojžíř area was temporarily suspended. In Ostrava, transport assistants, working alongside municipal police officers, focus on SELs and potential non-paying passengers. Problems with transport disrupt locals' access to employment, education, and services. Incidents in SELs can also disrupt mail delivery, which happened in Bohumín (Týden.cz 2009). Some services may be limited. In one shop in the SEL in Ostrava – Hrušov, daily necessities were sold through a barred window.

Figure 1 depicts various aspects of the differentiating factors in Ostrava, the third-largest city in Czechia, which has many SELs. Ostrava faces significant societal and demographic challenges (Rumpel–Slach 2012). The city is heavily impacted by ongoing deindustrialization, shifting from its traditional reliance on coal mining and heavy industry toward emerging economic sectors. Originally, Ostrava had a single city center next to the Ostravice River. The industrial and housing expansion of the 20th century shaped Ostrava into a polycentric city, as described by the Harris–Ullman model (Harris–Ullman 1945), characterized by extensive residential zones with varying population densities, interspersed with large undeveloped or vacant spaces and operational or abandoned industrial areas. New centers were built in Poruba and Jih neighborhoods. Figure 1 shows the substantial SE within the city.

Figure 1: *Map of SELs and their attributes in Ostrava*



Source: Compiled by the author.

CONCLUSION

Although this study outlines a detailed set of differentiating factors and analytical groupings of suburban SELs, these categories are fluid, intersecting, and not mutually exclusive.

Regarding RQ1, our analysis confirms that suburbanization is a key driver of both the emergence and reconfiguration of SELs, primarily through gentrification-driven displacement, uneven housing markets, and the peripheralization logic typical of post-socialist urban regions.

The suburbanization of social exclusion in Czechia represents a multifaceted process that aligns with critical urban theory (Harvey 2012) and its claim that exclusionary urban restructuring is not merely spatial but institutionally produced and path-dependent. This process is likely to become increasingly visible. Nevertheless, social exclusion is strongly regionally conditioned. Structurally impaired and socioeconomically weaker Czech regions are associated with higher levels of SE. Moreover, many marginalized people immigrate to these areas. This pattern forms a vicious cycle and is often supported by rival city councils. The features of suburban SELs in Czechia are variable. Although some Czech SELs reflect the logic of urban models, none of these fully capture their contextual dynamics. Instead, the patterns correspond more closely to the post-socialist urban trajectories described by Hirt and Stanilov (2009).

Regarding RQ2, the differentiation of suburban SELs is most strongly shaped by their specific location within the urban structure, transport and service accessibility, housing ownership patterns, and long-term historical trajectories such as industrial decline and post-war population exchange. This mirrors a multidimensional understanding of social exclusion (Kenyon et al. 2003). Czech cities encompass a diverse range of suburban types, meaning there are SELs located a few hundred meters from city centers and those on city margins. Several localities designated as SELs still have a realistic chance of becoming standard, or at least relatively functional, parts of cities. Meanwhile, others have a minimal chance, and several places are at risk of becoming SEL. These probabilities correspond to the outlined differentiating factors and groupings. This distinction reinforces the need to analytically separate the structural causes of social exclusion from its empirical indicators and social consequences. The study also emphasizes the differentiation between the internal and relational characteristics of suburban SELs. It shows that similar internal configurations can follow very different trajectories depending on relational factors such as transport accessibility, proximity to urban centers, and administrative embeddedness.

Small SELs formed by a few houses are a relatively dynamic phenomenon, especially when under private estate ownership. The transformation of small SELs into standard housing has happened in many Czech cities. The transformation of large SELs is a long-term process that can be accelerated by unexpected events, such as the 2002 flood in Prague – Karlín. If the migration of marginalized populations is not taken into account, improving the situation in SEL will require highly demanding social work. Larger cities typically have more financial resources and a larger social work workforce, but their SELs have more residents. SELs where non-marginalized people still reside and basic services are available have a better chance of positive transformation than homogeneous SELs. Nevertheless, the existence of services and non-marginalized residents is fragile. In the case of criminal incidents in SELs, these tend to migrate.

The location within a city is essential, primarily because of public and other transport options. The closer an SEL is to a city center or transport hub, the greater the chance of improving the situation, provided gentrification is not a factor. Czechia is a small, relatively densely populated country. Social exclusion, mainly in suburban areas, is more about symbolic exclusion than geographical exclusion. Geographical barriers exist between SELs outside town centers and standard neighborhoods, but these boundaries are easily surmountable.

The proposed groupings integrate local specificities, such as housing ownership regimes, suburban morphology, and transport accessibility, with broader post-socialist trends, including deindustrialization, fragmented governance, and speculative housing markets. The groupings that are developed bridge local specificities with wider post-socialist mechanisms (Csizmady et al. 2022). In Slovakia, segregated settlements highlight similar tensions between the legacies of central planning and exclusionary spatial logic (Rochovská–Rusnáková 2018). The Hungarian pattern (Csizmady et al. 2022) exhibits a strong presence of exclusive gated communities and peripheral, deprived estates within the same suburban belts. The Czech case is less about simultaneous dual suburbanization and more about the outward displacement and peripheralization of socially excluded groups. Informal, self-built, segregated settlements are common in Slovakia and Hungary. However, in Czechia, with more stringent building regulations and a lack of the historical continuity of such settlements, these do not exist. For the same reasons, suburban SELs in former vineyards, allotment colonies, or recreational dacha areas, which are known in Hungary, Romania, and the Baltic countries (Olah et al. 2011; Leetmaa et al. 2012), are very scarce and small in Czechia.

Future research could apply the identified differentiating factors and spatial patterns of exclusion across territories at different hierarchical levels, with particular attention to the transport accessibility of SELs. It could also support

the development of more targeted social programs in collaboration with decision-making bodies.

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