



ERIS web journal 1/2013

Poverty and social exclusion in urban area

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Abstract

The article summarizes information about poverty and social exclusion in the context of the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic has as a post-communist country different experiences with poverty and unequal distribution – before 1989 it officially does not exist, it was a one of the most equal countries on the world. After Velvet revolution many things has changed. Unfortunately, “jungle capitalism” and neoliberalism defined a direction of post-revolution steps. Poverty, unemployment, creating of ghettos – were growing problems for the weakening state.

The next part of this paper is about separation and segregation, which are results of social polarization. Impact of this is visible in the structuring of space – creating of gated communities on the one hand and creating of ghettos on the other hand.

In the last part is presented one excluded locality with interesting history – transformation from living miner’s colony to a ghetto.

Keywords

poverty, social exclusion, segregation, ghetto

Introduction

An increasing number of people living in economically highly developed countries (including the Czech Republic) are permanently excluded from the labour market and they are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Their numbers are increasing regardless on stage of economic cycle (Keller, 2010). I summarise these information about poverty and social exclusion in the Czech Republic and on specific example I deal with changes in excluded locality.

Poverty

Mareš (1999: 109) states that "there is no "right" or "scientific" definition of poverty, of which could be reached general consensus, as there is no single generally accepted method of its measurement". It is, however, necessary to create a definition of poverty as it will point to a group of people who need help and increased attention of the state and social services.

How numerous will this group be depends on setting of the poverty line. If the poverty threshold is placed "high", a group of poor will be more numerous than in the case that it is placed "low". The change of the number of poor in society may not be given only by changing living conditions, but also by change of the poverty definition, respectively change

of criteria, by which the society assesses poverty and on which it decides to whom to admit privileges associated with poverty." (Mareš, 1999: 109-110)

Living in poverty means to be particularly materially deprived. It means to live without what is necessary and what is as necessary accepted by the society.

Czechoslovakia

Poverty was not discussed in the socialist Czechoslovakia - officially poverty did not exist, but it was there. The poverty rate, however, reached then very low values; social security, which in the late 60s covered practically the whole population, prevented its increase. As a result of the general redistribution, the standard of living increased mainly to lower layers. Income inequality has been levelled so that there was not too much difference between "rich" and "poor" (Machonin, Tuček 1996; Večerník 1998). The Communist regime was in the administrative regulation and redistribution of resources (labour and social) much more long term consistent than in most other countries of the communist bloc. Gini coefficient, characterizing the distribution of household income per capita, was in Czechoslovakia in the mid 80s 0.197, for comparison it was 0.209 in Hungary, 0.253 in Poland and 0.278 in the Russian federation (Potůček 1995).

It should be however emphasized that even the lowest income was not on the level of pure survival, but relatively decent standard of living (Rys 2003). So also in terms of absolute poverty, meaning real hardship as a result of non-satisfaction of basic needs, there were only very little poor in the former Czechoslovakia. Therefore Czechoslovakia ranked among the socialist states to the highest levels of advancement (Potůček 1999).

The main cause of poverty under communism was not low income or its loss, but the number of children in the family. The most common type of poverty has been linked mainly to the transitional stage of family cycle, especially at the beginning with a larger number of children and at the end in the case of lonely or disabled people (Potůček 1995; Večerník 1998).

The state helped to improve the situation of the low-income families by free healthcare, education and massive subsidies of prices of basic food, housing (including generous interest-free and partly non-repayable loans system) and energy. The state directly intervened by large-scale social benefits that had universal character and were generally tied to employment (Mareš, Možný 1995).

The current situation

After social transfers the number of poor in the Czech Republic is 9 per cent (Eurostat 2012). This the lowest number in the EU. Most at risk are especially persons from jobless households and single parent families with children.

There are many reasons – political conditions in the country and the changes related, low wages in occupations, rising household debt, no savings (after securing expenses for the household, there is no amount left for savings), increasing degree of uncertainty (on which ceased to exist an adequate way of insurance) permeating virtually all areas of life. Very problematic and expanding phenomenon is the one-way nature of such social decline.

Bauman (2008:68) states that “today’s excommunication can no longer be seen as the result of momentary misfortune that can be remedied – it has a touch of finality”.

The consequence of these trends is a fact that in economically most advanced countries, including the Czech Republic increases the number of people, who are permanently excluded from the labour market and fall below the poverty threshold. Their numbers are increasing regardless of the stage, in which the economic cycle is (Keller 2010). Social exclusion is seen as a “one-way street”, bridges that once go up in smoke will hardly be rebuilt (Bauman 2008).

Changing nature of poverty

Poverty has many faces and in various times “to be poor” means something different. Clearly defines this Paugam (2005 in Keller 2010: 148-150, 2011) with his conception of three types of poverty:

- Integrating poverty – there is a lot of poor and the given way of life is reproduced across generations.
- Marginalizing poverty – poverty is changing from a rule to an exception; in relation to them is reflected a strong stigma, blame for their life situation is attributed to personal handicaps.
- Disqualifying poverty – the number of poor is rising rapidly again; situation of the rising number of poor contrasts sharply with the prosperity of those, who are able to maintain it or even increase it; by the social collapse is endangered almost everybody – that causes collective fear that begins to threaten the social order.

The third type of poverty more or less implicitly contains the risk of and the fear from violence and disorder. For growing number of people is offered a decreasing number of opportunities with (especially for those on the bottom of labour market) deteriorating conditions and with low wage (casualization of work).

A certain degree of inequality may therefore be a beneficial element for the society. The situation, however, is increasingly exacerbated with increasing level of inequality and poverty. The designation inequality ceases to correspond to the given state and it is more apt to speak about incommensurability (Keller 2010). Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) show that in societies with lower social and economic differences both, the poor and also richer people live better. The fundamental arguments support by capturing various dimensions of quality of life (mental health, crime rates).

Schumacher (2000: 258) states: “One do not need to be supporter of full equality (whatever is under this term hidden) to realize that the existence of inordinately rich people in any society today is a great evil. Certain inequalities in wealth and income are undoubtedly “natural” and functionally justified. But even here, as in all human essentials, everything is about rate.

Measuring of poverty

European Union Member States use the Eurostat methodology that is based on the relation to the median of equalized income. It is a relative measurement method. The poverty line is set at 60 % of median of equalized income. For the conversion of disposable income of

households to an equivalent income is used so-called modified OECD scale working with coefficients:

- 1,00 for the first adult household member
- 0,50 for the second and each additional adult household member
- 0,30 for each child (up to age 13 years included)

By accumulation of these coefficient is to each household assigned a number of consumption units and the disposable income is by this number divided. (Zelený, 2002)

“Being poor...” in the Czech Republic

This subhead offered a view on current situation in the Czech Republic in numbers.

Threshold of income poverty in the years 2000 – 2010 for the consumption unit

	Poverty threshold annual (CZK/EUR)	Poverty threshold monthly (CZK/EUR)
2000	64 600/2 568	5 383/215
2002	73 879/2 955	6 157/246
2005	80 987/3 239	6 749/269
2006	85 714/3 428	7 143/285
2007	92 212/3 688	7 684/307
2008	101 083/4 043	8 424/336
2009	109 184/4 367	9 099/363
2010	111 953/4 478	9 329/373

Sources: CSO. Statistical Yearbook of the Czech Republic 2011, 2010, 2009; Mikrocensus 2002.;
25 CZK = 1 EUR (July 2012)

At-risk-of-poverty rate (%)

	2010
Persons, total	9,0
Age group 0-17	14,3
Age group 18-64	8,1
Age group 65+	6,8

Sources: CSO. Statistical Yearbook of the Czech Republic 2011.

Social exclusion

Social exclusion is defined as a process, in which the society is significantly polarized. It is a process of separation of individuals and social collectivities from the society, which deprives them of rights and obligations that are associated with membership. (Mareš, 2006)

It is not about the distribution of “up” and “down”, but rather about the distribution of “inside” and “outside” (although one of the important reason “not being inside” still remains in most cases “being down”, it is by far no longer the only reason for exclusion). The concept of social exclusion is seen as multidimensional; impacts of exclusion are manifested in various spheres of human life and they are not perceived only in the lack of material, as it is in the case of the concept of poverty. (Baum 2004; Mareš 2006)

Dimensionality of social exclusion – the situation of excluded

A typical feature of social exclusion is its multidimensional character. (Byrne, 1999; Lister, 2002; Percy-Smith, 2000)

Mareš (2006) states that in the literature can be found various concepts of dimensionality, but very often are distinguished three basic dimensions of social exclusion, namely: economic, political and social (division in Bhalla, Lapeyre 1997: 418).

Economical exclusion is a source (but also the result) of poverty and represents exclusion from living standards and life chances usual in the society or given collectivity. One of the basic forms of social exclusion is now marginalization in the labour market.

- According to Percy-Smith (2000) especially long-term unemployment, low income and associated income poverty is one of the forms of economic exclusion. It is not just about unemployment.

- Rodgers (1995) distinguishes between exclusion from the labour market (growing number of unemployed and growing difficulty of their reintegration in paid work) and exclusion in the labour market (location of the individuals and social categories in the secondary labour market with its uncertain and non-standard contracts, low wages, inadequate working conditions, almost zero skill requirements and bleakness of the work performed).

Political exclusion is primarily the denial of civil, political, but also basic human rights to certain individuals or collectivities that represents their exclusion from the influence on society and on their own fate. Percy-Smith (2000) lists among the symptoms of political exclusion the low participation in elections, denial of political rights, inability to participate. Social exclusion for affected subjects means the way of life deprived not only of comfort and life chances usual in the society, but also reducing their influence on decision-making (including decisions about the circumstances of own life), or to influence this decision-making.

- Bauman (2011) writes about citizenship de jure, where everyone has the same rights by law and about citizenship de facto, where disadvantaged groups are not able to effectively exercise their rights.

Social exclusion in the narrow sense prevents people to share certain social status or social institutions and to participate in social, economic, political and cultural systems, which determine the social integration of the individuals into society (Walker, Walker 1997) and in social activities (including leisure time activities or social life of their community), or represents a certain form of their social isolation. That is both on the macro-social level and in the micro-structural level in communities (devastated environment and housing, inaccessibility of services, collapse of support networks,...). According to Percy-Smith (2000), this is a matter of breaking the traditional household and marital breakdown, homelessness, crime, unwanted teenage pregnancies. He speaks also about the cultural exclusion as denying the right of individuals or collectivity to participate in the culture of the given society and to share its cultural capital, knowledge and values with the others.

Byrne (1999) notes that the main forms of social exclusion are those excluded by income (poverty) and those excluded in space (due to the poverty, but also by other factors). Wilson (1996) states that social exclusion reveals very often and very clearly as the ghettoization and in ghettos reveals as a culture different from a mainstream culture of the society. Whether it is talking in this case about underclass, about the culture of poverty or the cultural differences associated with different ethnicity or religion, etc.

Groups threatened by poverty and social exclusion

Very few people could or would say that they are not threatened by poverty. Risk rate is not evenly distributed; some groups of people, households are more at risk than others. This chapter is about groups threatened and already affected by poverty and describes reasons of this threat.

- Children and multi-families

Poverty among children has a major impact on their whole life and attitude to it. Child poverty is linked to the poverty of their parents. Searing emphasizes that life chances of children are strongly influenced by life circumstances and living conditions of their parents (Searing, <http://www.radical.org.uk/barefoot/poverty.htm>).

- Unemployed

Unemployment is very a problematic area and a big question demanding reaction of the society. While heavy capitalism was characterized by its dependence on location and wage forces due to its reproduction and growth, while offering long-term sure income, “liquid” capitalism does not give or offer guarantee of job (Bauman, 2002). An ideal for employers – production without employees (Schumacher, 2000), becomes more and more real owing to technological progress.

“The people are treated as resources in pursuit of business interests, not as goals for themselves” (Bauman, 2010: 94).

- Old age pensioners

One of the consequences of individualism is that “particularly the young generation is not willing to participate on the fate of their predecessors – intergenerational continuity is severed and can be raised only by administrative decrees” (Petrušek, 2007: 424).

When there is poverty in the productive life, there is often poverty in old age, which is just a continuation of poverty from the period of economic activity of individuals in previous life stages. (Keller, 2010)

- Women – feminization of poverty

Discrimination against women in the labour market is also often ideologized by their role in the family. The man is here still traditionally regarded as the breadwinner. While from woman the Czech society expects that she will take care of both, him and the children with household. The fact is then reflected both to justification of lower earnings of women and their dismissals in the first wave (Wildmannová, 2005). A major problem also having an impact on women poverty is unequal remuneration for work.

Beck (2011) emphasizes the ambivalence of the woman’s individuation process, when a woman is torn between her own life and life for the others. Reich (2003) points out the need to choose one of two “tracks” – fast or slow. Markets and technology are changing so rapidly

that in them you have to be completely submerged, if you want to keep afloat. If you take a slower track, you will be more and more behind.

- Disabled persons

Persons with disabilities are often entirely excluded from the labour market; if they manage to ensure a job, it is a sheltered workshop. These people are therefore dependent on social benefits. Not only do these people have lower income, they also have increased costs associated with the procurement of necessary equipment, interior modifications or with the need to purchase drugs.

- Ethnic minorities

Poverty is among members of ethnic groups more frequent than among the majority population. Ethnicity is a factor affecting limits and barriers in life chances and quality of life – whether in terms of access to employment, income level or education opportunities. In Czech society, ethnic poverty is the domain of Roma. (Mareš, 1999)

How poverty and social exclusion influences the structuring of space? - Separation and segregation

In terms of understanding the causes and evaluation of the consequences it is important to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary separation of the groups of inhabitants of the space, and thus between separation and segregation. The separation occurs when a certain group of inhabitants partially allocates themselves on the basis of their preferences and activities, while segregation results from discrimination against minorities by the majority (Sýkora 2000).

Separation

Easily visible examples of spatial separation are citadels. That are an areas in which are voluntarily concentrate members of certain group of inhabitants defined against their surroundings by superior position in terms of power, wealth and social status, for the purpose of protection and increase of their superior status (Marcuse 1997). Citadels often have the form of closed communities - gated communities. (Temelová, Sýkora 2005)

Many gated communities are not just a residential area, but also a place where residents can enjoy leisure time activities and privacy. The residence can offer a wide range of facilities and services that maximize self-sufficiency and thus increase the isolation of these objects. Inside the walls is offered a lot of services which provide to residents living there all what their need - everyday life can take place only within this defined space.

In addition to extreme forms of residential separations are gated communities characterized by the privatization of public space. Public space means a place that is accessible to every citizen, it is a place where people meet, communicate together, and where the rules (regulations) are approved by the elected local self-government. Typical examples of public space are local roads (streets), parks, playgrounds or squares. Unlike other residential buildings in gated communities public space no longer exists - there is not access for all citizens and there are special rules that are not authorized by the municipal government, but

by residents or developer. This privatization of public space then weakens social cohesion, which is important for reducing social inequalities. (Mareš, 2004)

Segregation

Burjanek (1997) states that spatial segregation is one of the fundamental and visible manifestations of social exclusion. It is a condition or process of exclusion of some social groups in various areas, sites and locations based on socio-cultural characteristics and economic status that has already exceeded a certain level of segregation, which is a consequence of inequality in society. Socio-spatial segregation is linked with limited social mobility of excluded individuals that prevents them to re-integrate into the social, economic, cultural and political activities of the company. (Lux, Mikeszová, Sunega 2010)

Location concentrating excluded is a place where come almost exclusively people already excluded, for which there is no real alternative. (Percy-Smith, 2000; Savage, Warde, Ward, 2003)

As an adaptation to conditions of social exclusion there are often created some specific values and standards, which include for example stress on presence, inability to plan for the future, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness or the belief that a person cannot control own social situation.

Therefore new areas are created, where life is governed by different rules than outside their borders. For their residents ceases the majority society to be the reference society. They have no confidence in its abstract systems, especially if their exclusion removes from them many contacts with the access points of these systems. (Mareš 2006)

The result of segregation is creating of the ghettos. **Ghetto** is a product of racial oppression in all of its four basic levels - categorization, discrimination, segregation and discriminatory violence. It is a spatially limited area, where a racially or culturally homogeneous population creates under pressure of the majority its own institutions, which are parallel with the institutions of surrounding society. However, these institutions are only an imperfect parallel and not fully functional alternative. Therefore people, who are dependent on them, remain in a state of structural dependency. (Wacquant 1997: 343)

Wacquant (1997) points out that ghetto is often defined as a place of poverty culture where people lack the values of the "middle class" and "mainstream" society. However, they are, if at all, only very vaguely defined, which leads to the fact that the definition of the ghetto can be arbitrarily changed.

Ghetto is thus presented as a place of "disorder" and deprivation. Whyte (1993) says that what appears to be a social pathology or decomposition, may be just another form of social organization.

The risk is that the inhabitants of the ghettos may become increasingly alienated from the values of mainstream society and they become "foreigners" (Dahrendorf, 1995). Those who live in ghettos found themselves in a state of social isolation and the concentration effect emphasized and reinforced the boundaries between them and the others (Dahrendorf, 1991). The majority society is losing direct, and due to the collapse of its major institutions such as

the labour market, education and socialization system, political parties and the church in this environment also indirect control. By the threat to the integration of certain individuals or social groups in the society is then questioned the principle of solidarity (solidarity becomes selective) and also threatened the social cohesion.

Culture of poverty

Oscar Lewis (1966, 1967) dealt with spatial concentration of poverty in the areas of multiple deprivations. Based on his own studies of the slums, he formulated the concept of the poverty culture. By this term he marked a specific subculture. "It is a culture in the traditional anthropological meaning; it provides people with guidance on how to live, including ready-made set of solutions of human problems, and thus provides an important adaptive function" (Lewis 1966: 19). Lewis (1966) also says that such lifestyle can be found wherever people live too long (for example for generations) in areas of concentrated poverty.

Lewis (1966), however, warns against generalization. Not every poor lives in such a culture. Culture of poverty has its own characteristics - high unemployment and underemployment combined with low wages for unskilled labour; inability of the wider society to provide these people with social, political and economic organization; the emphasis on the family system based on fertile family.

For the culture of poverty are also typical certain aspects of human life in poor communities. These include the relationship between the subculture and the broader community, the nature of community in the area, the nature of family and attitude, values and character of the individual. Culture of poverty also has a strong tendency to reproduce itself. Especially children who are born into that culture are in it at the age of six or seven years very well socialized and it is difficult for them to use the option to improve the situation that can bring them another life. Children usually receive only a basic level of education and a greater part of their lives happens within the boundaries of the excluded area. Their cultural capital is not sufficient for life outside the excluded locality, but is very well adapted to life in it (Lewis, 1966; Radostný, 2005).

They become the next generation of slum residents, who bear the consequences not only of poverty, but also "... segregation and discrimination, fear, suspicion and apathy..." (Lewis 1966: 21). These people have no trust in institutions of mainstream society and prefer to rely on alternative systems of protection and security (family, friends, secondary economy) offered by the environment of the culture of poverty. However, the dismal conditions of life in this environment negatively influence the quality of life not only materially but also psychologically and socially. "The poverty of culture is one of the key features of the culture of poverty," says Lewis (1966: 25).

Example of the changes in the urban space – transformation from a living locality to an excluded locality

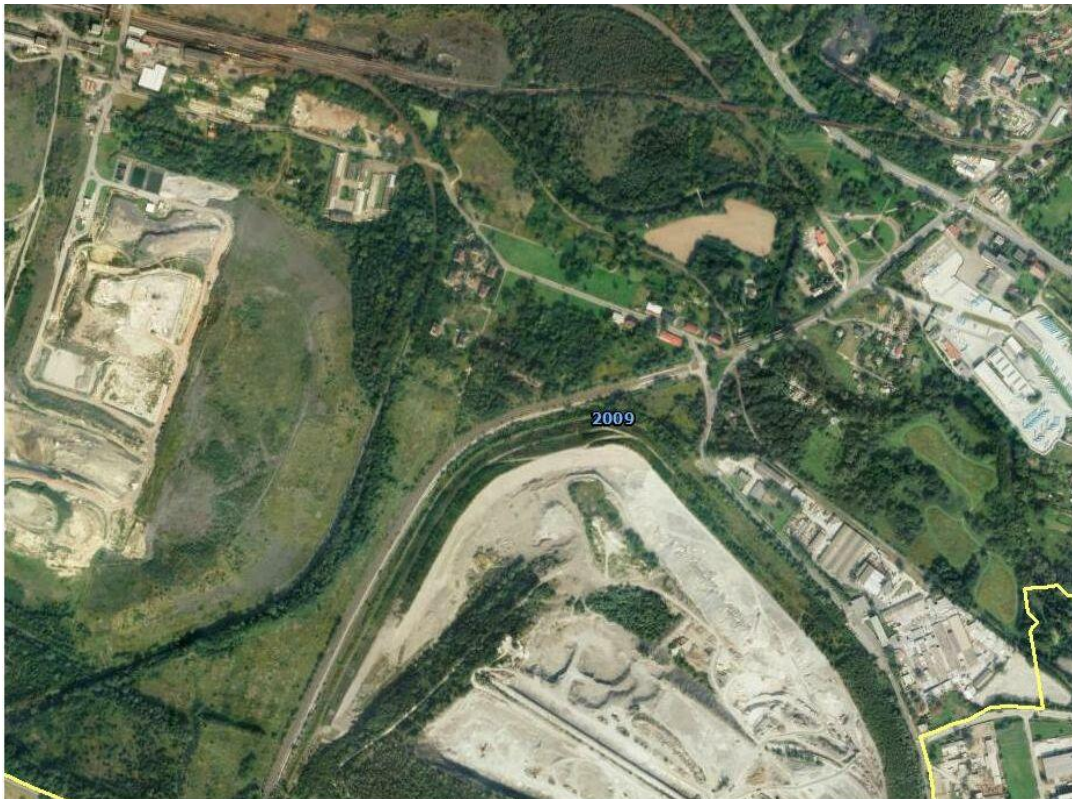
Ghettos are associated with another form of social organisation. But what is the moment when usual quarter start to become ghetto? One example can be a locality where I am doing my Ph.D. research. This locality called Zárubek (in the city of Ostrava)

It is a good example how radical and devastating can be different changes caused by changing importance of the area in the urban space.

Locality was a miner's colony. Changes begun in 1980s – people were moved from their houses to a block of flats and final hit was the closure of the mine in the 1990 (because of fire in the mine). After this last miners leaved the area.

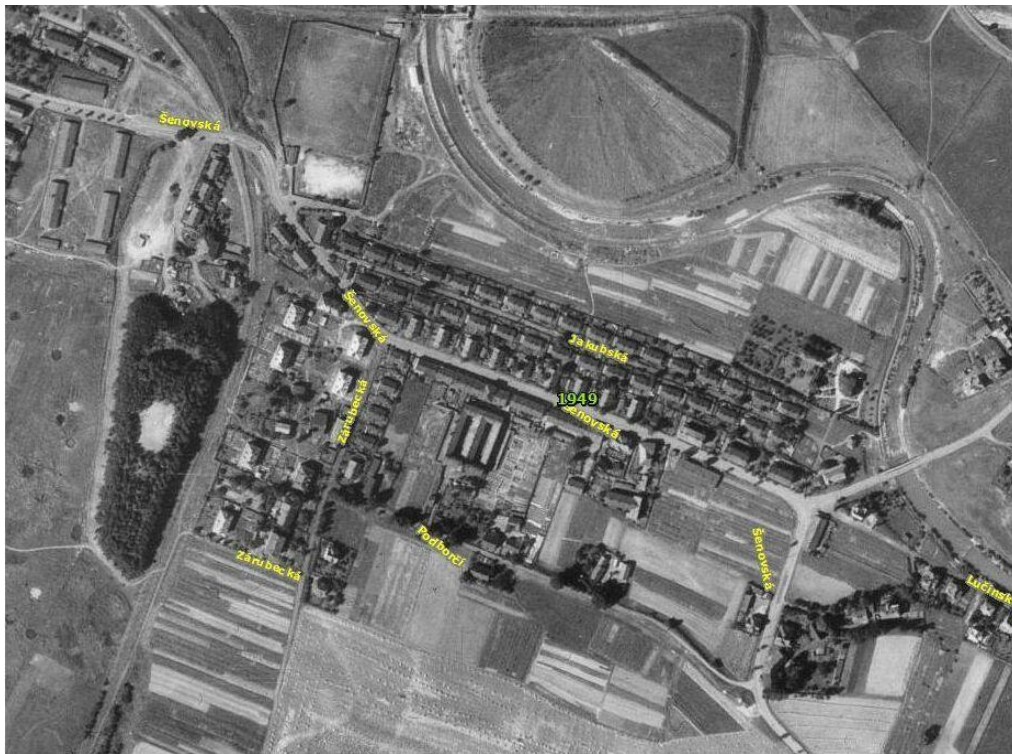


Source: NIKM, online, <http://kontaminace.cenia.cz/>

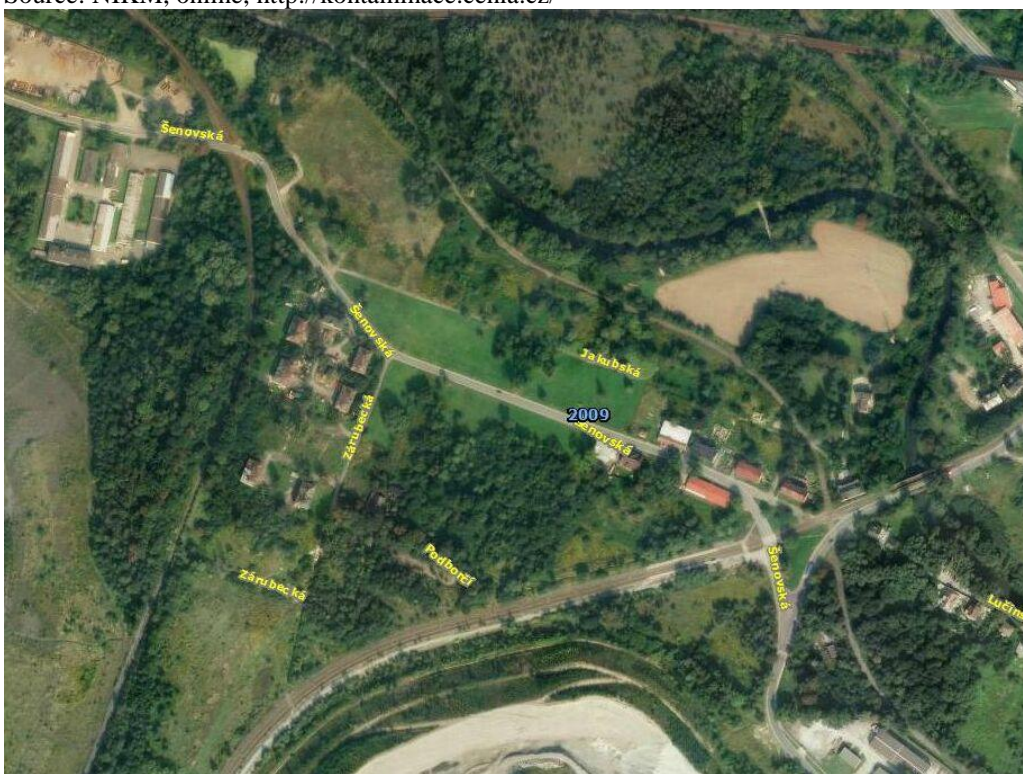


Source: NIKM, online, <http://kontaminace.cenia.cz/>

Some current information about this locality: approximately 280 people lives there; flats are lower category; houses that are located there, are the remains of a mining colony; population – mostly Gypsies; high rate of long term unemployment (on the legal job market). (Zárubek online)



Source: NIKM, online, <http://kontaminace.cenia.cz/>



Source: NIKM, online, <http://kontaminace.cenia.cz/>

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