



The public perception of urban river spaces in the Czech Republic

„Increasing awareness and propagation of functions of forests in landscape and in-nature riverbeds in urban environment as a component of ecosystem drainage basin service“

Introduction

- Streams or rivers are located almost in all towns in the Czech republic
- Public/individual perception of importance and role of rivers/urban rivers spaces are influenced by:
 - Historical experiences,
 - the attractiveness of the area,
 - accessibility,
 - physical-geographical elements,
 - opportunities of inhabitants to spend their free time in these spaces...



Residents and visitors relationship/perception of these elements of the urban environment are different (*Gobster and Westphal (eds.), 1998; Ležatka, 2010; Gilies et al., 2013*)

Questions

- What meanings/values do urban rivers spaces represent for the Czech public (residents/visitors)?
- Does the public know the concept of revitalization of watercourses/near-natural water course in the cities, and what changes would revitalization/water course contribute (recreational potential)?



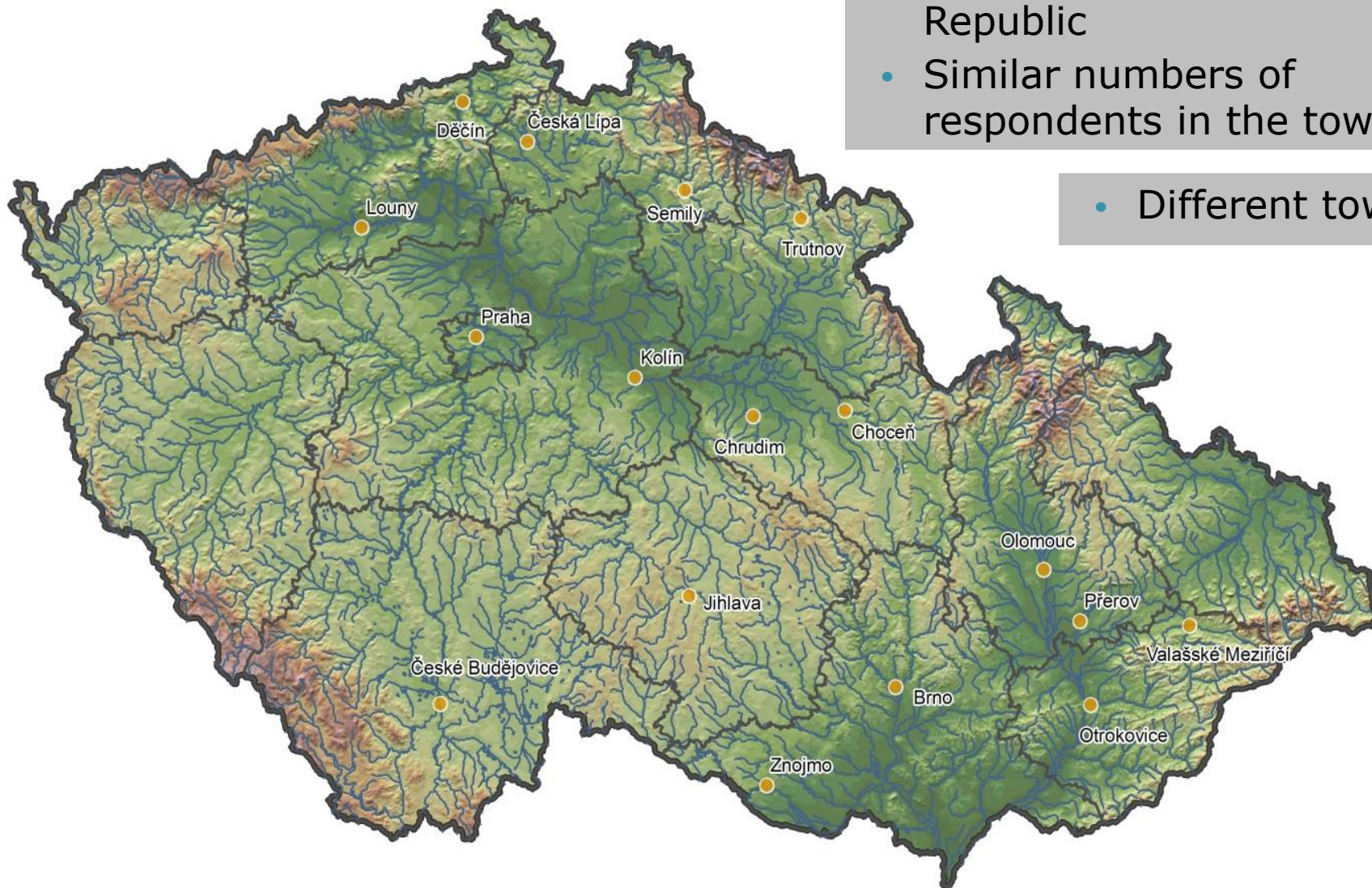
Method

- Research in selected towns of the Czech Republic,
- Personal interviews - trained interviewer; sites near or on the banks of rivers with an emphasis of the selection of those sites that can be described as near-natural environment in urban space.

Research

- the summer 2015
- 17 towns in the Czech Republic
- Similar numbers of respondents in the towns

- Different towns



Research - selection of towns

- Towns localized in 10 Regions and capitol city
- Small numbers of town inhabitant (less than 10 thousands) and Prague with more than 1 mil. residents.
- Economically developed towns/ towns with high unemployment rate and low opportunities to get a job.
- High/low tourist attractivity of selected towns
- Towns localized in agricultural countryside/ towns near large forest areas with high coefficient of ecological stability
- Towns of different characteristics of physical-geographical elements of rivers (resulted in evaluation of recreational effect of the towns).

Characteristics of respondents

- 599 respondents
- 55% of female
- Education:
 - university education – 25%, respondents with secondary school graduates as the most common group (also generally in the Czech population), 10% elementary education (respondents aged 15-18 years old attending secondary school)
- Age:
 - Number of seniors respondents (aged 65 and over) exceeded these "youngest respondents" by ten percentage points, but excluding groups of people 19-25 years old, all other groups of respondents were numerous.
 - 20% respondents 36-50 years old;
- Economic status of the respondents:
 - 13% of pupils and students, 22% of retirees, 46% of the employed and 4% unemployed, 6% of business owners/employers and 9% maternity or parental leave.
- Urban residents accounted for 86% of respondents, 7% of respondents represented a group of visitors and 7% people commuting to the work, service or study to that town.
- Almost half of respondent live up to 500 meters to the river and another one-fifth live to one kilometre.

Frequency and reasons for staying near the watercourse

- Nearly half of the respondents are near the river daily.
- 30% of them will come to the river at least once a week.
- 42% of respondents indicate as one of three possible reasons for staying near the river, the fact that they only pass (go through) the area.
- Reason of staying in the area because rest and leisure (both residents and visitors) was identify as very strong.
- An average of four out of ten respondents actively rest in this space and another one-fifth looks for more passive recreation.



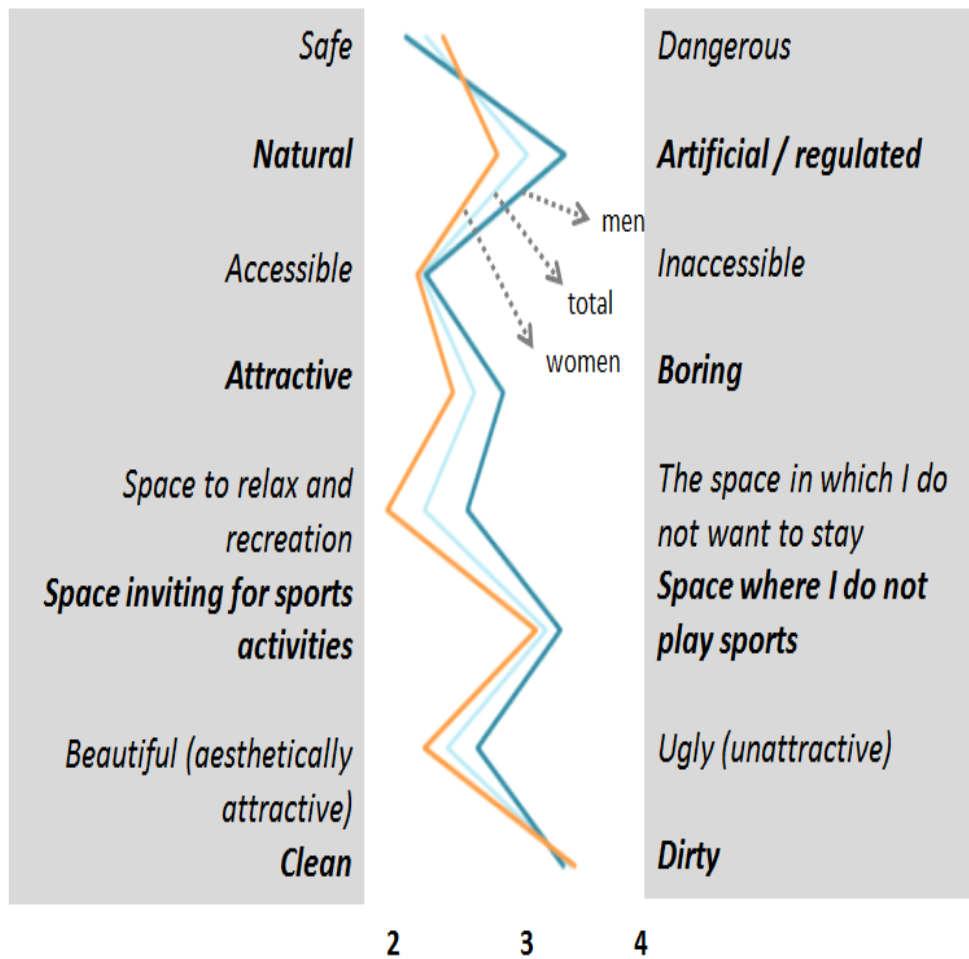
Most mentioned activity in the urban river spaces



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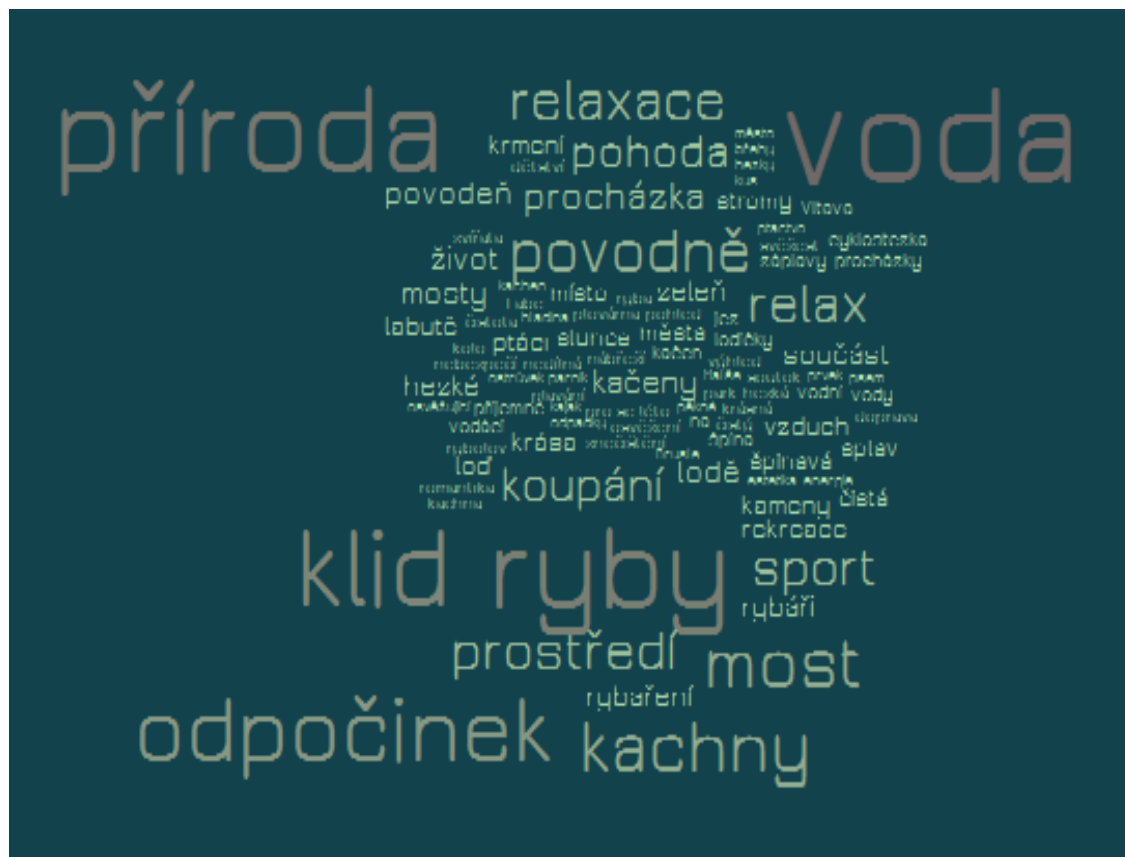


Urban river space: the perception of elements of the site



- space is accessible, inviting you to relax and rest, area is safe: 40% of respondents rating the best grade
- At least 30% of the respondents rated by best value urban river space as an attractive and aesthetically pleasing place inviting for sports activities.
- **But...**
 - 14% of respondents see these spaces as a place where they certainly do not want to play sports - the highest number of the most negative marks.
 - perception of space as "not very" clean, "not nature environment".

Attributes most frequently associated with the river in town

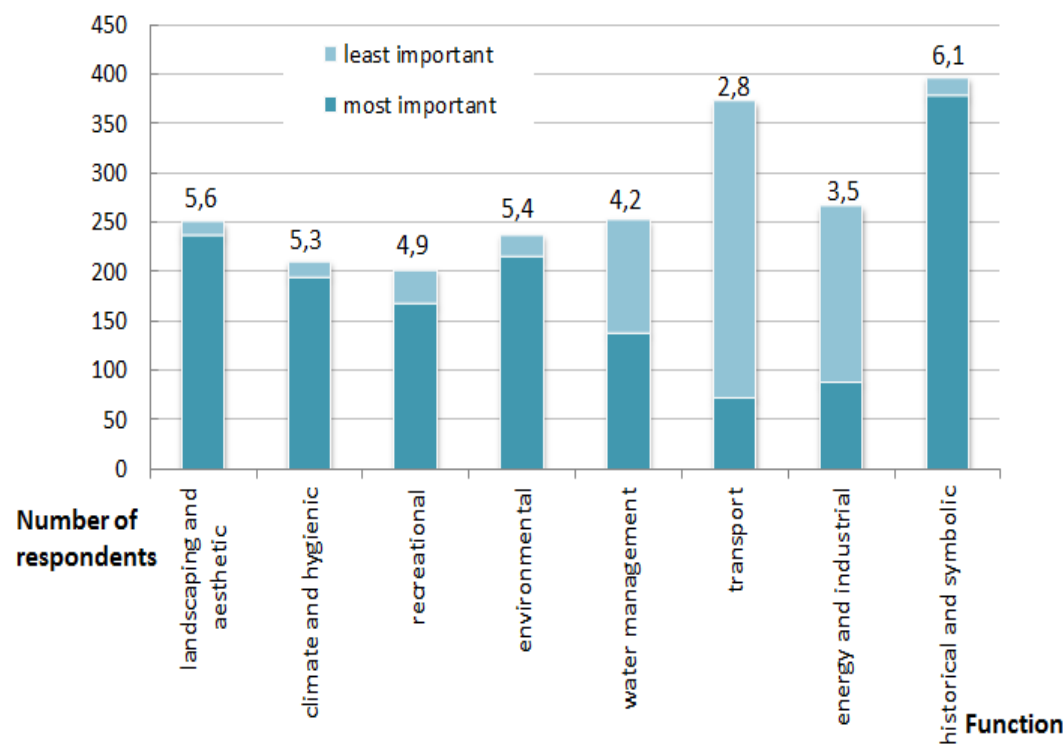


- In the case of fishing and boats, it shows that associations are sometimes more connected with certain images and ideals than with respondents lived experience.
- Respondents also often linked the river with:
 - its attributes such as water, rocks, meanders and twists or
 - the space, which is an integral part of the city, its identity and its specific symbol.

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The function of the watercourse in the towns

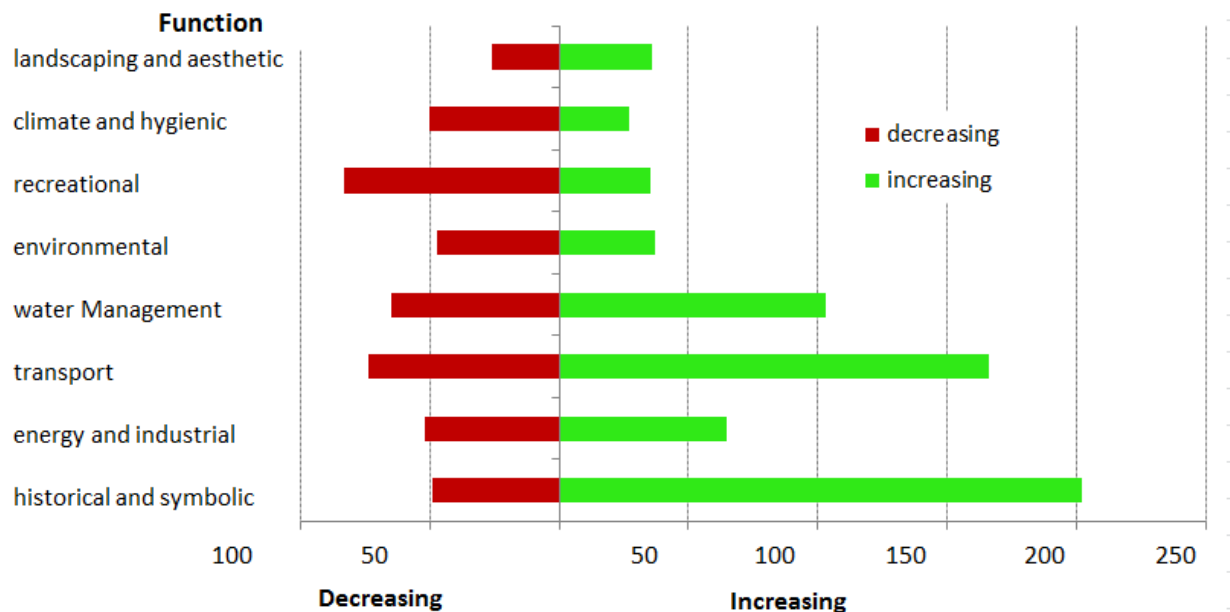
- The importance of the river as an important symbol of the city
 - residents and visitors perceive it as the most important function rivers in the urban space.
 - 63% of respondents assign it a value seven on seven-point scale



- Function of high importance:
 - Functions concentrated around the fulfillment of the assumptions that the river represents a near-natural environment in urban space.
- the recreational function was perceived by respondents as the "fifth" in order (only slightly above-average evaluation of significance).

Perception of the dynamics of importance of river functions

- Transport function as the function that gradually lose its significant role.
- The largest number of residents and visitors think that particular aesthetic (resp. countryside/ city-forming) and recreational functions of the watercourse in the city increase their importance.





Perception of the dynamics of importance of river functions

- Importance of industry and energy function, however, is seen as a relatively permanent and unchanging
 - Only 13% of respondents perceived the dynamics (negatively or positively)
- More stable element in the perception of residents and visitors:
 - the symbolic/historical function of watercourse

Conclusions

- The proximity of residence to the urban river space and the frequent movement in this area still may not mean that residents are seeking to rest and recreation in these areas.
- Urban river spaces were seen positively in all monitored aspects
- Perception of the specific locations of river areas in cities was reflected in the meanings and associations which respondents connect to watercourse in the towns (in general point of view).
- Urban river spaces are seen as a places of „busy/hectic city“ where people can relax and recreate.
- Residents and visitors are spending a lot of time by leisure activities in the urban river space and they associate this space with these activities
- **...but** in terms of functions of the river, respondents are not considered it so important and contrary they appreciate the functions that are associated with the creation of pleasant, attractive and near nature environment.

Thank you for your attention



ondrej.konecny@mendelu.cz