

Population development in South Bohemian town of Strakonice: Historical-geographical analysis

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Abstract:

Š. Klucka, A. Nováček: *Population development in South Bohemian town of Strakonice: Historical-geographical analysis*. – *Klaudyán*, 12, No. 1, pp. 1-14. This contribution focuses on analysis of population development of South Bohemian town of Strakonice. The paper also interprets and clarifies all important factors and events affecting its changes. Authors focus on industrial and post-industrial stage of development since the second half of the 19th century. The development of the town is observed in the broader historical context of economic and population changes. For a better understanding of urban development and the current state of the town, it is also compared with the development of other eleven selected towns in its surroundings. Conclusions of this article seek to summarize the obtained results in the form of answers to the question: Which development trends of Strakonice could be assessed as specific and which corresponded with the general settlement development in the region? The explanation of the most important causes, whether economic or political, which strongly affected the urban and population development of Strakonice, is also an integral part of the contribution.

Key words:

population development – historical development – South Bohemia – Strakonice

Introduction

Settlement system studies represent one of the traditional areas of interest for Czech historical geography. From the point of view of shaping the current form of settlement system the industrial stage could be determined as the most significant period. In South Bohemia it could be dated from the second half of the 19th to the end of the 20th century. During this period the region showed rather peripheral tendency in the context of Czechia (Nováček 2005). As a proof we can consider the fact that the portion of the region's population decreased approximately by 40 %, when compared to the total population of the country during this period. Despite the peripheral character of the region, there are several locations, where the development significantly deviated from this trend. As an example of such a dynamically developing location we may point out the town of Strakonice. The origins of this significant South Bohemian town were associated with the emergence of the local castle located at the confluence of the Otava and the Volyka rivers. The foundation of the castle is usually dated from the range of 1200 to 1235 (Kotlářová 2002a, p. 139). The castle was surrounded by four original settlements which were gradually united into a single town and became an important regional center. In 1367 it became seigniorial town on the trade route from Passau to Prague. The status of the town was enhanced by the fact that Strakonice castle was used from

the 15th to the late 17th century as the main seat of the Order of St. John in the Czech lands. As in many other similar towns even the development in Strakonice was negatively affected by the period of the Hussite Wars and Thirty Years' War. The crucial stage of shaping the current form and status of the town begins with the onset of the industrial revolution and the first industrialization in the 19th century. But the real rise of the town was connected mainly to the socialist industrialization from 1950s to 1970s. This stage significantly influenced the settlement system of the region in favor of several district towns. As a result of these changes Strakonice became one of the most important regional centers in terms of industrialization.

The article aims to uncover the roots of contemporary significance and status of the town in the settlement system through the analysis of population development. For this purpose the paper focuses especially on the industrial stage. The explanation of possible factors and causes that has affected the development is not the only aim. The paper also tries to distinguish general and specific trends therefore it provides comparison with the population development of the whole region and also with a few other selected towns throughout different historical periods. The article is based on the results of research conducted for the bachelor's thesis of one of the authors (Klu ka 2013). This paper represents a modified English version of an article that the authors published in Czech language in regional periodical (Klu ka, Nová ek 2014).

Applied methodology

A population development research with the usage of the historical-geographical analysis usually requires several necessary steps. First of all there should be an appropriate phasing of the timeline and the selection of towns for the comparison with the development of Strakonice. In general, the periodization of the study is divided into pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial stages (Rostow 1960, Bell 1973, Purš 1973, Hampl 1998). Population development itself is monitored with the focus on the industrial and post-industrial stages, because of its major impact on the current form of the settlement system. Considering the limited availability of statistical data, we have chosen the year 1850 as an initial starting date. Statistical data were collected separately for each town (Retrospektivní lexikon obcí SSR 1850–1970, Historický lexikon obcí eské republiky 1869–2005). The data on the population of Strakonice and other towns is for better time comparability always related to the current territory of the municipality. The analyzed period was further divided into several sub-stages (see Fig. 3–10). In order to detect the specifics of population development of Strakonice, it was necessary to compare its population development also with that of other settlements in the region along with comparison with the general trends in the population development of the region and the whole Czechia. For this purpose and on the basis of predetermined criteria (for more information see Klu ka 2013, p. 20) we selected 11 other towns: eské Bud jovice, Písek, Tábor, Prachatic, eský Krumlov, Jind ich v Hradec, Blatná, Volyn , Vod any, Sušice and Horaž ovice.

The core of the analysis was based on the statistical data processing, for instance the comparison and evaluation of population development through the calculation of percentage gains or decreases. There were also other indicators, including the relative index of change (RIZ). This index serves as an indicator of the rate of growth (or decrease) due to the superior territorial unit. Our selected towns and their sum is related to the diameter of South Bohemian Region (mean value = 1,00). Calculation of the relative index of change in the population of the town in certain period due to the South Bohemian Region is as follows:

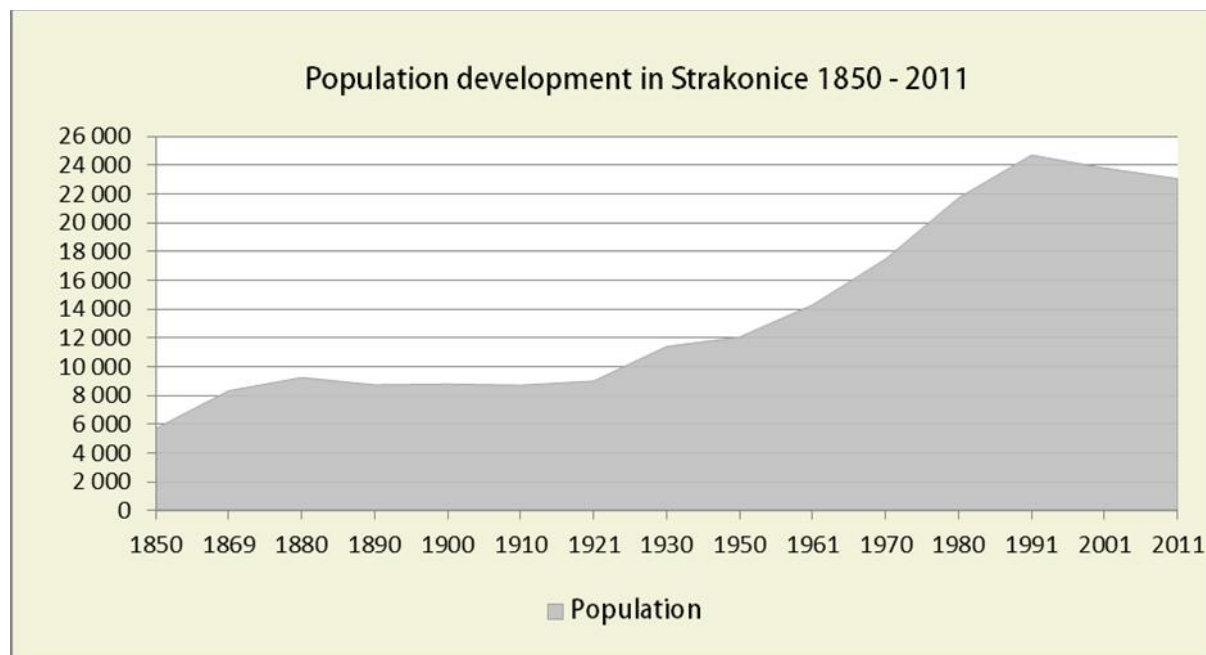
$$RIZ = \frac{K_m/P_m}{K_k/P_k}$$

Notes: K_m = population of the town at the end of the interval period, P_m = population of the town at the beginning of the interval period, K_k = population of the region at the end of the interval period, P_k = population of the region at the beginning of the interval period.

Analysis of population development in Strakonice in comparison with selected towns in South Bohemia

The process of settlement of South Bohemia proceeded relatively slowly. The main reason was the large distance from the densely populated fertile core areas, from where people gradually came (from vicinity of the Danube, Elbe and today's Prague, and later significantly less from the vicinity of Pilsen). Most of the region lacks fertile soils and it was initially covered with hardly penetrable vegetation (Nová ek 2012). The area of Strakonice located in the north-western part of South Bohemian Region is characterized by slightly undulated countryside. Scattered settlements were centered alongside rivers. Foundation of the castle in the years of 1220 to 1235 could be seen as the beginning of urban development of Strakonice (Kupka 2005, p. 5; Cvr ek 1989, p. 24–25). The original settlement was divided into four small settlements: Źabokrty, Strakonice, Bezd kov and Lom. During the following century, Strakonice became an important regional center thanks to its strategic location at the junction of important trade routes. At the latest by 1367, Strakonice became the town in the ownership of the House of Bavors. Its authority was later substituted by the Order of St. John (later known as the Knights Hospitaller). The development in the 14th century was slowed down because of the negative impact of the Hussite Wars, when the town acted as catholic base. The following period of Early Modern Age was associated with acquisition of new privileges and guild production with focus on clothing. There also was a strong Jewish community. The positive trend of development in the first half of the 17th century was strongly affected by the Thirty Years' War. Only one third of population remained in the town after the war (Cvr ek 1989, p. 72–73). Despite a partial economic recovery Strakonice copied the development typical for most Czech towns. It means that minimal population growth was regularly disturbed by epidemics. In the first half of the 19th century, when the industrialization started in the region, Strakonice was considered a medium-sized town. Its population, including the agglomeration (especially Bezd kov) did not exceed 5 000 inhabitants (Ku a 2008, p. 52–72).

Fig. 1: Population development in Strakonice 1850–2011



Source: *Historický lexikon obcí eské republiky 1869–2001*, Klu ka (2013).

Notes: The data is based on the current territory of municipalities.

As already mentioned, the population of the region in the reporting period 1850–2011 increased only marginally, from 626 879 in 1850 to the current number of 639 099, which is only 2% increase. For comparison, the overall population growth of Czechia increased by almost 60 %. This stagnation of the population development of the region could be attributed to its peripheral position, long persistent agrarian character, lack of raw materials and delayed industrialization. Another important phenomenon was negative migration balance which was a concomitant with this situation all the time until the 1970s. In addition to the German population, people moved to neighboring regions for better work opportunities. As a result of this situation the region lost the part of the population that could eventually have supported the growth of South Bohemian towns, if they had remained. Therefore, the growth of towns in South Bohemia did not reach at such a pace as in many Czech industrial regions (with the exception of eské Bud jovice). This fact also resulted in the development of Strakonice, where the population grew relatively slowly, or even stagnated from the mid-19th century until the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia.

The first phase of the development defined between the years 1850–1890 initially brought a population growth, which was recognized by the census in 1880. Until that date, the population increased from 5 702 to 9 246 (see tab. 1), and the town became one of the few settlements of the region with a significant proportion of industrial production. The early industrialization was represented especially by manufacturing of fezzes and other textile production for export. This production was mainly caused by the foundation of Fezko company in 1812. Although the introduction of railways (more information in Hlava ka 1990) to Strakonice in 1868 brought an extra boost for business development, it did not affect the population growth significantly. By the time of the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia the town underwent a period of stagnation and its population was just under below nine thousand inhabitants. This stagnation was caused by the reduction of textile production due to partial crisis in this sector and by problems with fezzes export (Berka 2002, p. 47). Layoffs workforce led many people to leave the city, including emigration overseas. The construction of a local railways linking Strakonice with B eznice and Blatná in the north and Volyn , Vimperk and Volary in the south did not change the situation. In the period 1890–1910 there was rather decreasing tendency in terms of the significance in the settlement system, because most of the observed surrounding towns (with exception of Blatná and Horaž ovice) showed more or less growth trends. The decline in economic activity in Strakonice deepened by the First World War.

Better times for the town's development came with the establishment of Czechoslovakia. In 1919 there was an important administrative change, which merged independent municipalities Strakonice and Nové Strakonice. As a result of this change, Strakonice became a compact and significant economic center in the region again (Kupka 2005, p. 13). In the 1920s, the population increased from 9 001 to 11 398. Growth rate of Strakonice of that period had surpassed all the other selected settlements, including the regional capital eské Bud jovice. An important factor was the start of a new enterprise eská zbrojovka (Z) engaged in the firearms industry. The emergence of the first production plant dating back to the 1919. Since 1929, the company began with production of bicycles and motorcycles and a new workforce started to move to the town. Unlike the textile company Fezko, the condition of Z was not affect by the subsequent "Great Depression" and the 1930s were, paradoxically, a period of intense industrialization. The Z soon became one of the largest producers of motorcycles in the former Czechoslovakia and in 1938 the company employed over 2 000 workers (Berka 2002, p. 47–48). Although the meantime of the 1930 to 1950 represented the stage of serious losses of population in Czechia, there was not a significant population decline in Strakonice; with the exception of Jewish population (Kotlárová 2002; Kupka 2005, p. 13). From the twelve selected towns only three did not witness population decline during the war and post-war periods, all of them are situated in the northern part of the region: Tábor, Písek and Strakonice (see tab. 1). The factory Z was nationalized and restructured, weapons production ended and it was fully replaced by motorcycle range.

The trend of population growth of Strakonice culminated during the period of socialism. Its population more than doubled and Strakonice became the fourth largest town in the region. Administrative significance, production capacity and position of the town in the settlement system

grew up. The years 1950–1991 can be described as the fastest ever increasing phase in terms of population development of the town, while Strakonice as well as for example Prachatice became the fastest growing town in the whole region (see fig. 3). During 1950s and 1960s new production plants were constructed for the Z factory which boosted population growth further. People were coming into the town mainly from the surrounding countryside, where the collectivization of agriculture took place. In the second stage, 1970s and 1980s, another more than seven thousand inhabitants appeared. A large part of these people have received housing in newly built apartment buildings in the north of Strakonice. This growth was caused by a specific new policy applied by the state. In the 1970s, the policy directed country's investment more than ever to the peripheral and far less industrialized regions, including South Bohemian and Vyso ina Regions. Major manifestation of this policy in the region was further expansion of production capacity of Z and opening of the new facility in the textile company Fezko (Stejskalová, Stejskal 2012, p. 33–35). This phenomenon was not specific only for Strakonice. We could see it in other district towns of the region on a similar scale, mainly in Prachatice, Jid ich v Hradec and eský Krumlov. Although the largest population rise of Strakonice took place in the 1970s and the 1980s, rapid growth was evident throughout the whole period of socialism, in which the population of the town has more than doubled from 12 056 in 1950 to 24 705 in 1991. The completion of urbanization at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s meant the end of population increases for the majority of towns. There also are several selected towns which have begun to lose its population; especially Volyn and Strakonice (see fig. 10). Conversely, Vod any showed a noticeable population increase. In the same period, Strakonice statistically lost 1 640 inhabitants, nearly 7 % of its population in 1991. This deficit can be partly justified by industrial restructuring (Z has also split up into several private entities) and growing unemployment. Furthermore, this trend involved a general decline in fertility and the advent of suburbanization processes – migration of people to municipalities in the hinterland of a bigger town or a city (Sýkora 2002, Hampl 2005). Surrounding villages such as Katovice, Sousedovice, epice or Radošovice could certainly be considered the suburbs of Strakonice.

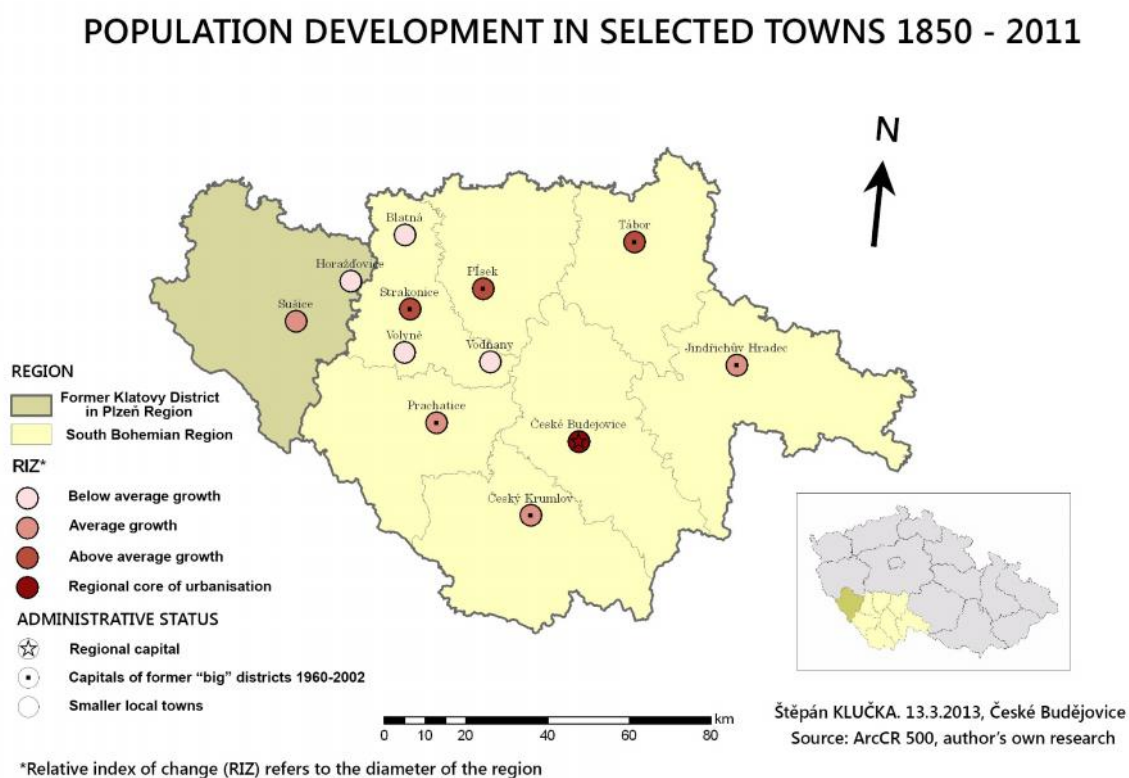
Synthesis

Taking into account the analyzed period, 1850–2011, Strakonice became the third fastest growing municipality in comparison with the other studied eleven towns. Population of Strakonice grew up nearly four times during the period. Only the regional capital eské Bud jovice and industrial town of Tábor showed more dynamic growth (eské Bud jovice grew up 7.9 times and Tábor 4.5 times). Conversely, the slowest development among the other district towns (centers of so called “big” districts from 1960–2002) showed eský Krumlov (1.9 times), Jid ich v Hradec (2 times) and Sušice (2 times), which all are towns affected by the expulsion of the German population (Stan k 1991). Even so, all the district towns included in this study showed a higher growth rate than the municipalities without this administrative position at the time of socialist planning and industrialization. Smaller towns without this function have undergone less dynamic growth, which was applied to selected settlements located in the territory of the former Strakonice district or with nearby distance: Blatná, Vod any (both increased approximately 1.7 times), Horaž ovice (1.3 times) and Volyn (its number of inhabitant was almost unchanged as a result of the expulsion of Germans; see tab. 1). This corresponds to the rule of concentration and the hierarchy of a settlement system throughout the industrial period (Hampl, Gardavský, Kühnl 1987). The lesser dynamic development in smaller towns was also affected by the vicinity of a near strong industrial center, which naturally drew off a part of their growth potential. On the basis of its population development, selected towns may be divided into three categories (see fig. 2).

Despite all the specifics, we could include Strakonice into the first group which represents towns with significantly more than average population growth. This group includes, in addition to Strakonice, also eské Bud jovice, Tábor and Písek. All mentioned towns were in the period 1960–2002 the seats of the former “big” districts (Janák, Hledíková, Dobeš 2007). All these towns are also well known for the common tradition of textile and clothing production later supplemented by engineering. The significant disadvantage of Strakonice compared to Tábor and Písek was the long

administrative fragmentation, which had a negative impact on population trends of the town (especially during the period before the First World War). By far the highest population growth was showed by the regional capital České Budějovice, where all the important control functions, economic activities and railway connections were located. For this reason, there was faster industrialization and population growth than in other towns. The continuity of population development of these centers was not so disturbed by the post-war expulsion of Germans. It only partially affected České Budějovice. The obvious similarities in the trends of population development within the fastest growing group were shown by Tábor and Písek. Both towns maintained balance growth even during the years 1930–1950, while in the first stage of the socialist period it lagged behind the growth rate of Strakonice and České Budějovice. At that time there was a domination of textile industry in Tábor and Písek which belonged to a less state-supported production industry than engineering located in the territory of the other two towns. The second phase of socialist industrialization has touched all the district towns equally. In the last period after 1991 there was a characteristic phenomenon of population decline (with the exception of Písek), caused by negative net migration and suburbanization.

Fig. 2: Population development in selected towns 1850–2011



Source: Klůčka (2013)

The second category consists of towns with average population growth dynamics. Here we can include following towns: Jindřichův Hradec, Český Krumlov, Prachovice and Sušice. These municipalities are rather small district towns with a borderland position whose development was strongly influenced by the expulsion of German ethnicity. For most of the industrial period this group showed no such increase as the towns of the first group. The largest increase in population occurred mostly during the second phase of the socialist era in the 1970s and 1980s. Their growth curves are

less differentiated than in the previous group (see fig. 3). A certain exception could be Sušice, already lying outside the South Bohemian Region. In this case, it probably reflected a greater connection to the center of another region – Plze . The growth rate of Sušice exceeded the other towns only in the first period defined in the 1890. For all the other selected towns there was a typical population stagnation followed after the Second World War by the overall population decline. Both of these phenomena sprung from the peripheral borderland position. Low level of industrialization of these towns began slowly changing under the era of socialism. Timber and textile industry began to expand in these areas (apka, Slezák, Vaculík 2005). Finally the new economic policy of the state at a later stage of socialism helped these disadvantaged cities in position for a dynamic population increase. Throughout the socialist period this tendency could be seen mainly in Prachatic, where people found new applications in the woodworking industry and later in engineering. The population of the town more than doubled from 1950 to 1991, and the growth rate even surpassed all the observed municipalities, including the second fastest growing town Strakonice. Since the 1990s the population of these settlements has stagnated (as opposed to the decrease of population in the larger towns in the first category). The only exception was the decreasing eský Krumlov, where people were more likely to leave in the last decade, because of the collapse of the paper industry and high unemployment.

Finally, the last category is represented by settlements with below-average dynamics of population growth. The group consists of rather smaller towns with a lower hierarchical position in the settlement system: Blatná, Vod any, Volyn and Horaž ovice. These towns were included into the study due to their near location to Strakonice and relatively close historical ties to this town. In comparison with the previous groups of municipalities this category is typical for its higher fluctuation in the population development, especially during the period of socialism (see fig. 3). Until the interwar period, the development of these towns corresponded more or less to the dynamics of the entire region (whether it was growth in the years 1850–1890, or subsequent stagnation in the 1890–1930). Expulsion of Germans did not cause a noticeable drop in population. It can be proved by the contrast of these towns with the development of borderland towns in the previous group. The expulsion was reflected to a limited extent only in Volyn , because it has never reached the original state afterwards. Its population slump continued in the 1950s and 1960s, when many of the inhabitants of this still very agriculturally oriented rural town moved to the nearby industrial town of Strakonice. In the same period, trends in population growth of other selected towns of that group were slightly increasing. This trend was replaced in the 1970s and 1980s by stagnation again, mainly due to the continuing movement of people into growing Strakonice or into other larger towns in the region. Trend of growing population has retained only Blatná, where a new enterprise engaged in food industry was built (Berka 2002, p. 89–104). In recent decades, since the 1991 census, these towns have experienced, as well as many others in the county, slight population decline due to aging of the population and particularly the young migration for work opportunities to larger cities. Vod any is the only town which successfully resists this trend of population decline because of its convenient transport position which helped to attract investment and thus the creation of new jobs (e.g. the company Vod anská dr běž Inc. and Pottinger Ltd.).

Conclusion

Strakonice could be together with eské Bud jovice, Tábor and Písek considered one of the main industrial centers of the South Bohemia. During the whole period 1850–2011 the population has increased from 5 702 to 23 065 inhabitants, what is an increase of more than four times of its original state. Like many other industrial towns of the region, even the population of Strakonice grew up significantly especially in the 1850s and 1860s. The town experienced even faster economic and population boom in the interwar period, and subsequently during the socialist industrialization period from the 1950s to 1970s.

Population development in Strakonice corresponded to the general tendencies of the development of the settlement system in the whole of Czechia to a certain extent, alternatively in South Bohemia. Nevertheless we can find several specifics. One of them was relatively small

impact of the introduction of the railways in the town in 1868. However, the connection to the railways meant a prerequisite for industrialization and gradual transformation into an industrial center. Another specificity that affected the population development is long-lasting administrative division into the two separate settlements – Strakonice and Nové Strakonice (Bezdkov). Their unification in 1919 created the compact regional center with faster development in subsequent decade. Between the World Wars, Strakonice experienced a dynamic heyday thanks to the foundation of engineering factory Z and its intensive industrialization coupled with population growth. Because of this early industrialization Strakonice differed significantly from other cities in South Bohemia, which rather stagnated and persisted in their orientation to the food and textile production. The early existence of the engineering company even resulted in specific development during the first two decades of socialist industrialization. Z plants and its production were changed to the production of motorcycles. This initiated a large migration into Strakonice, because of the large number of new job opportunities. As a result of this phenomenon, Strakonice became the fastest growing town in the region during the mentioned period. The following stages of the population development were not so unique in comparison with the general trend and have been followed by tendencies characteristic for most of the selected towns.

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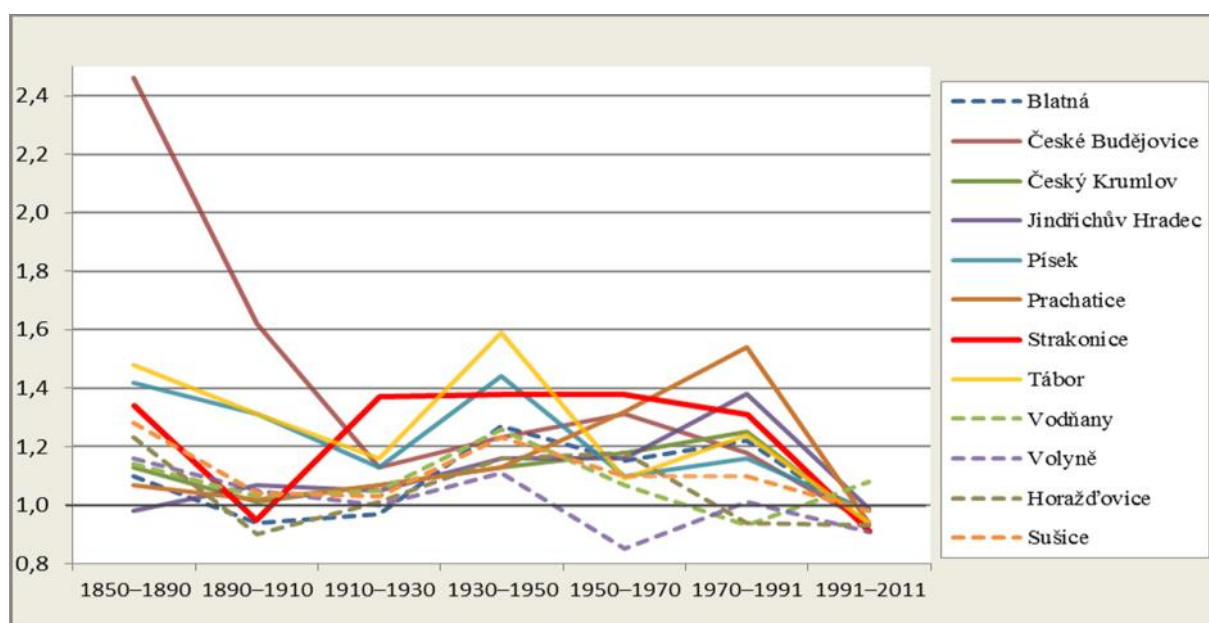
Appendices

Tab. 1: Population development of selected towns 1850–2011

Town	1850	1890	1910	1930	1950	1970	1991	2011
Blatná	3 892	4 891	4 839	4 476	4 355	5 262	6 944	6 714
eské Bud jovice	11 444	32 134	54 786	59 079	55 709	76 699	97 243	93 639
eský Krumlov	6 908	8 903	9 485	9 709	8 441	10 430	14 108	13 478
Jind ich v Hradec	10 777	12 032	13 602	13 591	12 080	14 675	21 822	22 062
Písek	7 728	12 550	17 273	18 658	20 560	23 713	29 550	29 641
Prachatice	4 379	5 363	5 779	5 926	5 130	7 100	11 805	11 432
Strakonice	5 702	8 733	8 715	11 398	12 056	17 478	24 705	23 065
Tábor	7 489	12 652	17 495	19 425	23 696	27 181	36 342	35 196
Vod any	4 123	5 364	5 811	5 813	5 624	6 284	6 331	7 026
Volyn	2 843	3 757	4 131	3 930	3 349	2 970	3 251	3 041
Horaž ovice	4 022	5 635	5 356	5 186	4 624	5 714	5 820	5 578
Sušice	5 555	8 117	8 866	8 715	8 229	9 498	11 308	11 323
Sum of all 11 towns	74 862	120 131	156 138	165 906	163 853	207 004	269 229	262 195
Sum without Sušice and Horaž ovice (Share on South Bohemian Reg. in %)	65 285 (10,4)	106 379 (14,9)	141 916 (18,8)	152 005 (21,1)	151 000 (27,4)	191 792 (33,2)	252 101 (40,5)	245 294 (38,4)
South Bohemian Region	626 879	716 015	753 025	718 820	550 911	577 543	622 889	639 099
Czech Republic total	6 624 318	8 666 456	10 076 727	10 674 240	8 896 086	9 807 696	10 302 215	10 512 208

Source: *Historický lexikon obcí eské republiky 1869–2001, Klu ka (2013).*

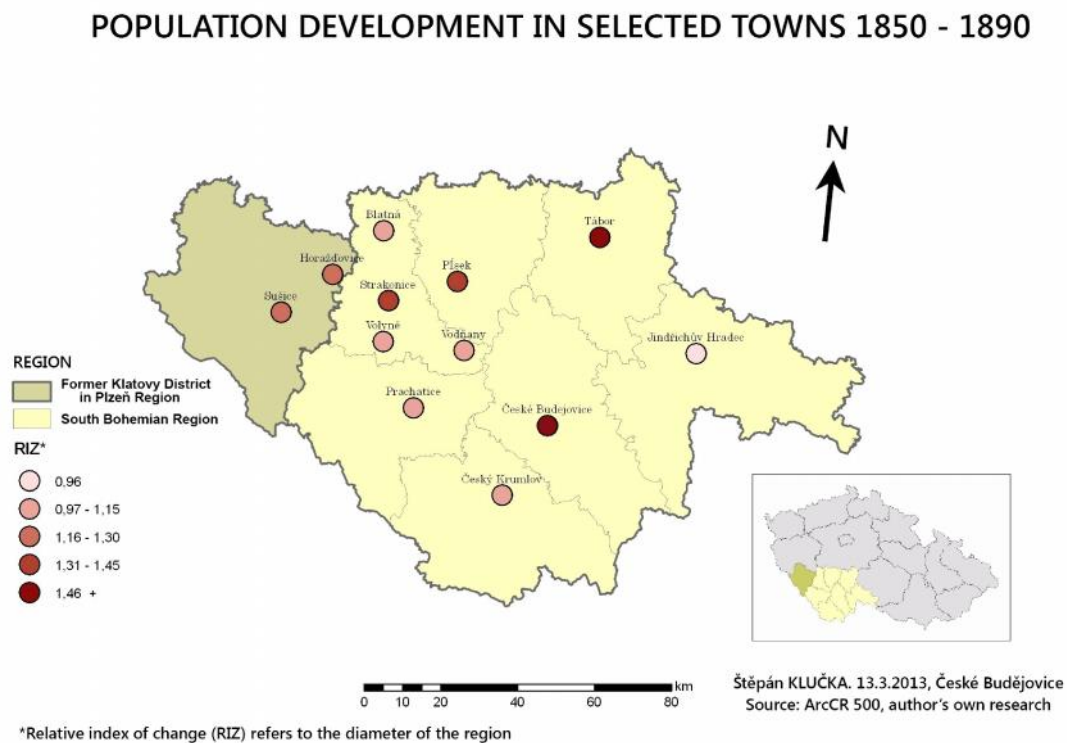
Notes: The data is based on the current territory of the municipalities

Fig. 3: Population dynamics of selected towns due to the development of the region (RIZ)

Source: *Klu ka (2013).*

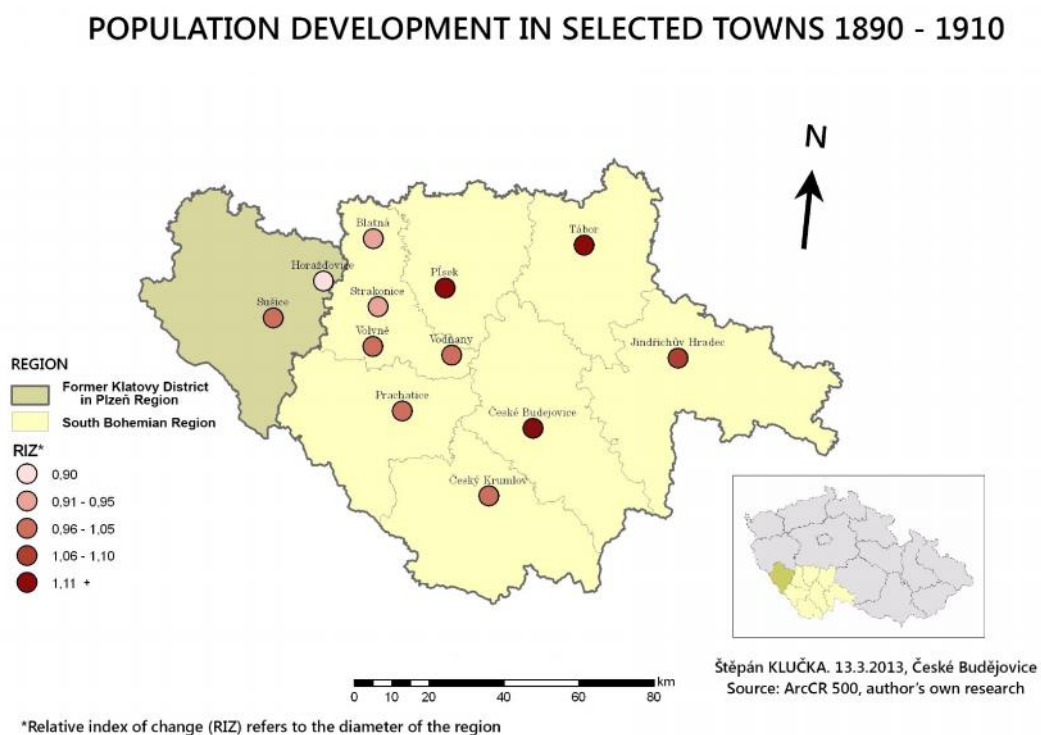
Notes: RIZ (relative index of change) see chapter Applied methodology. Values greater than 1.0 indicate higher relative growth than the average growth of the entire South Bohemian Region and vice versa in case of lower values.

Fig. 4: Population development in selected towns 1850–1890



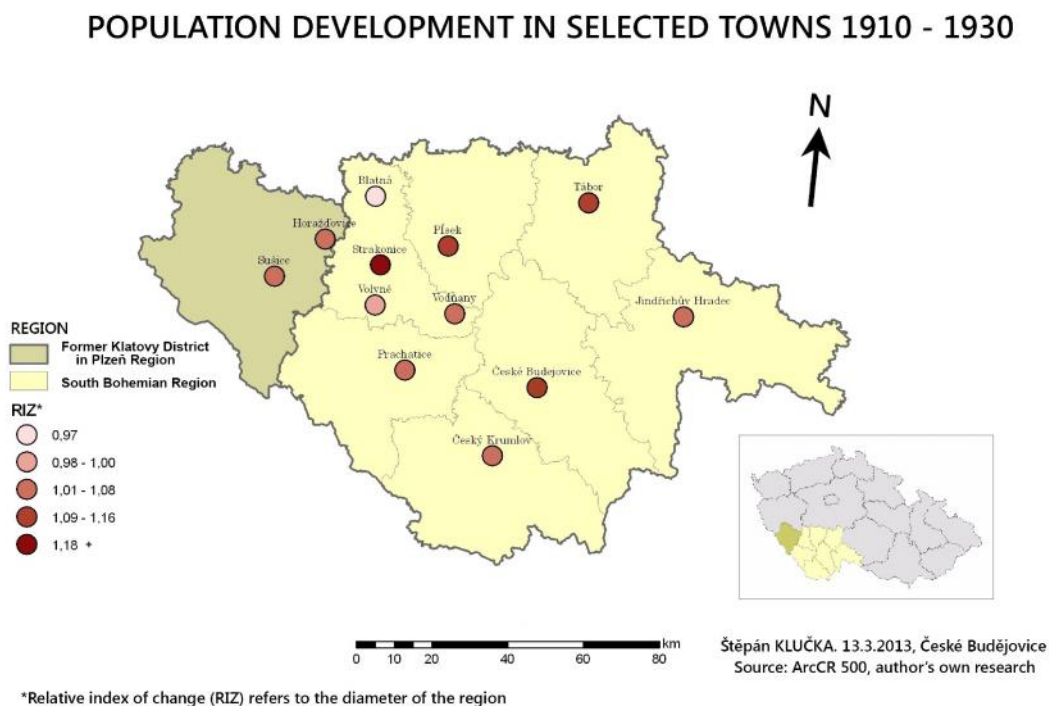
Source: Klu ka (2013)

Fig. 5: Population development in selected towns 1890–19100



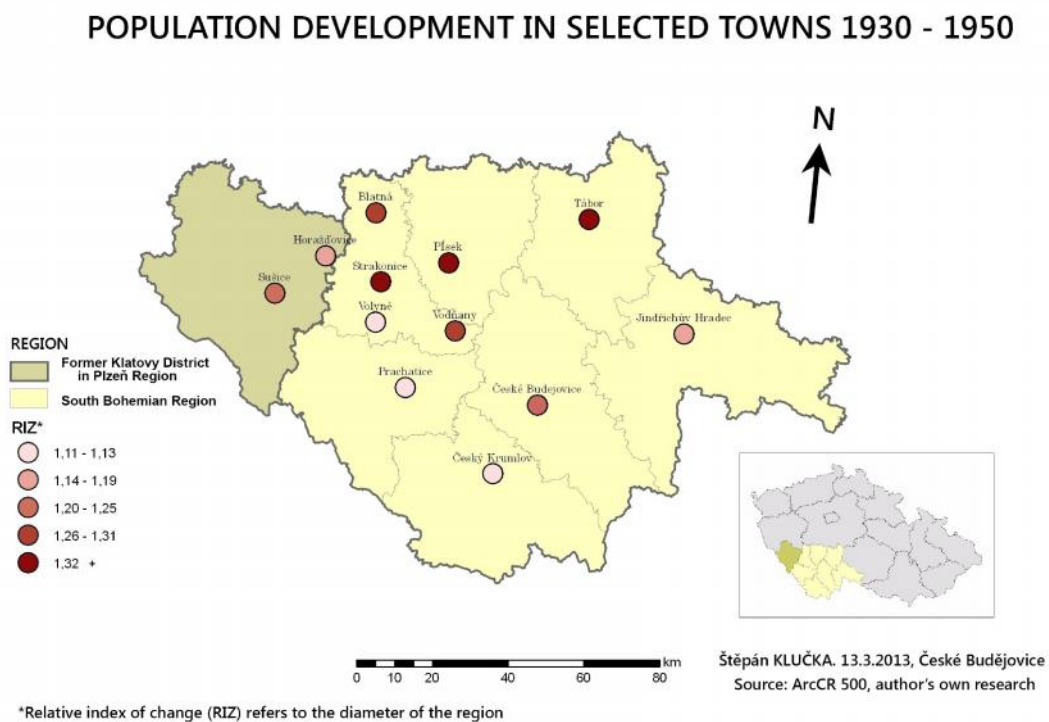
Source: Klu ka (2013)

Fig. 6: Population development in selected towns 1910–1930



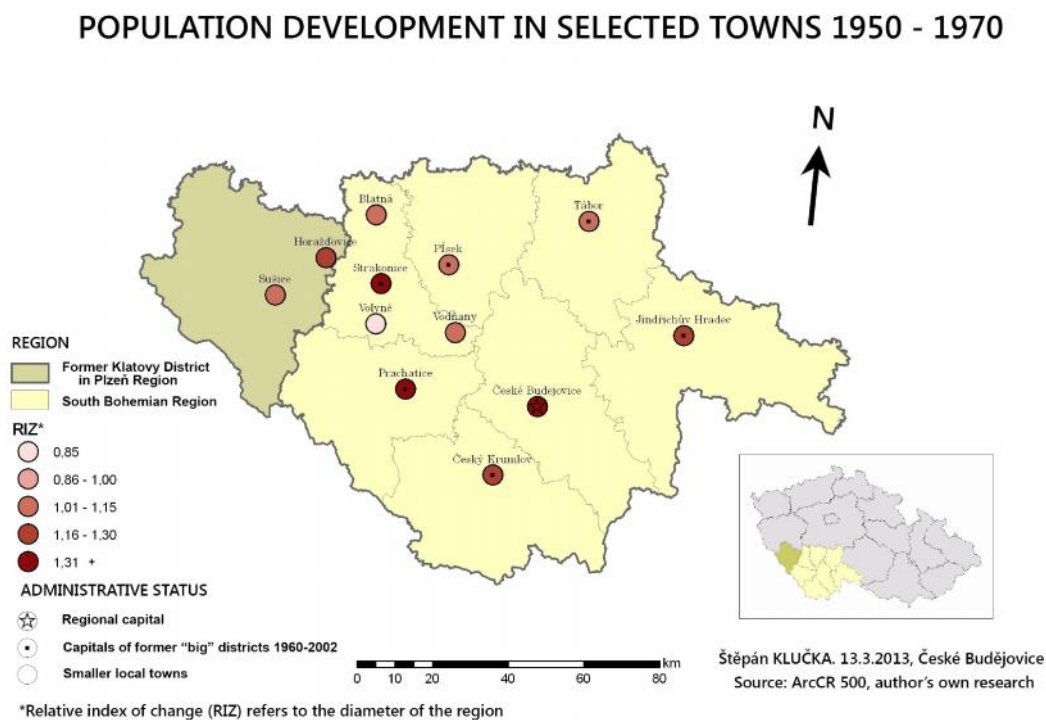
Source: Klůčka (2013)

Fig. 7: Population development in selected towns 1930–1950



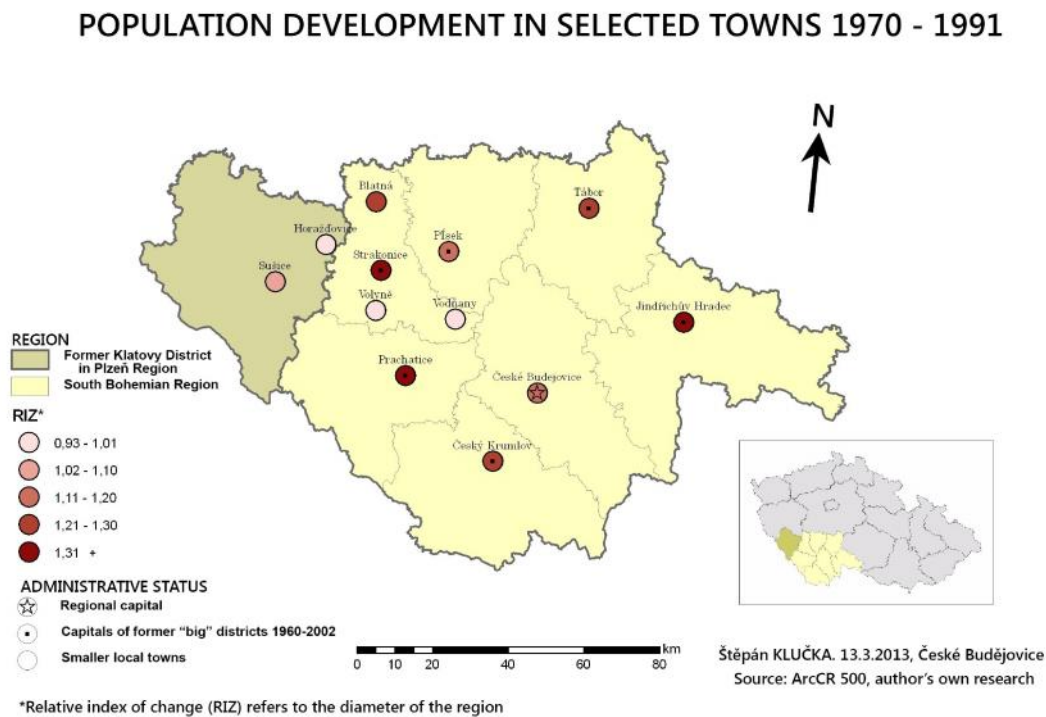
Source: Klůčka (2013)

Fig. 8: Population development in selected towns 1950–1970



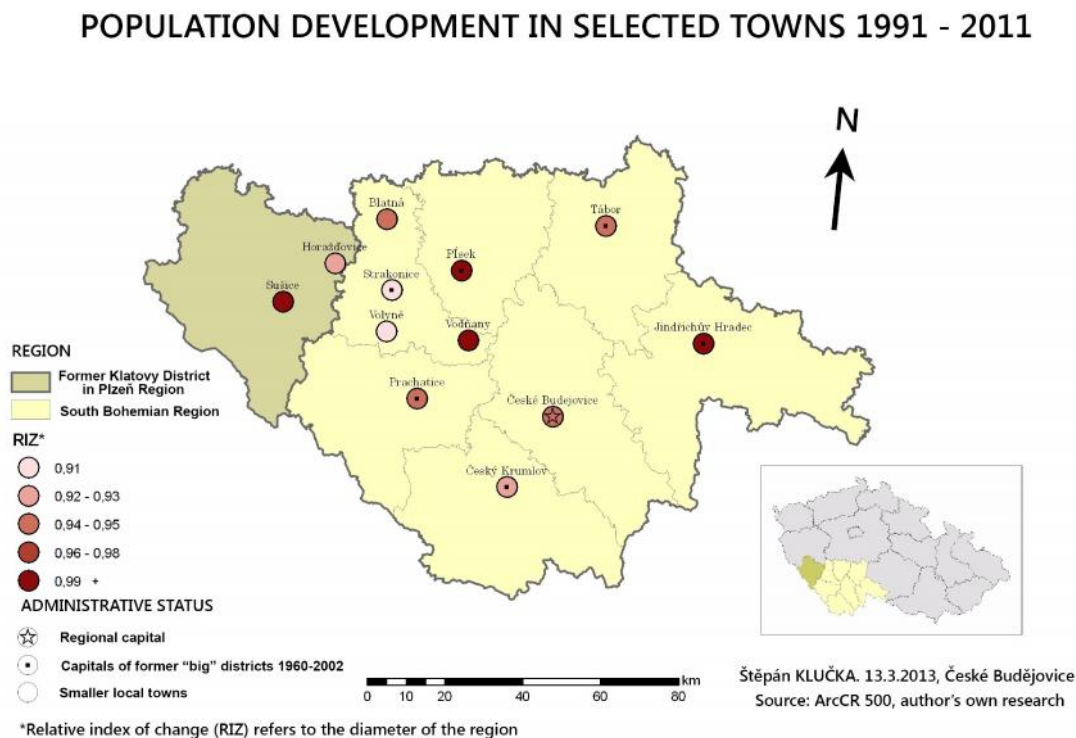
Source: Klůčka (2013)

Fig. 9: Population development in selected towns 1970–1991



Source: Klůčka (2013)

Fig. 10: Population development in selected towns 1991–2011



Source: Klučka (2013)