

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE BASIC SCHOOL NETWORK IN CZECHIA IN THE LAST THREE DECADES: CHANGES AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

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### Development of the basic school network in Czechia in the last three decades: Changes and current challenges

The article deals with the development of the basic school (ISCED 1 and 2) network in Czechia in the last three decades. Developmental changes and tendencies of selected characteristics as well as their territorial specific features are considered in the context of the OECD scenarios of the future of education. The focus is mainly on the change in the number of schools and the structure of its operators. Furthermore, the challenges and current problems of the Czech basic education system related to spatial factors of schooling are presented. In the context of long-term development, the development of the number of schools can be described as relatively stable. However, the last decade has witnessed a continuous increase of private basic schools, especially in urban municipalities. Growing number of students at schools, predominantly in the hinterland of the cities, has further highlighted the unpreparedness and rigidity in the governance and organisation of regional education, especially in school capacity planning. The paper also shares a critical review about the emerging educational policy tool called middle layer of support and points out selected negative aspects of the school catchment system. Spatially, there will probably not be extreme changes in the school network at the macro-regional level in the near future, however, some changes in local scale could be expected.

Key words: geography of education, basic school, school network, school operator, school capacity, Czechia

### INTRODUCTION

Education, in general, is most often viewed through a pedagogical perspective, as an implementation of educational processes. However, this is only one prism and only one of the structures of the whole system, for which some authors use the term educational landscape (see e. g. Freytag and Jahnke 2015 and Holloway and Kirby 2020). Dealing with the processes involved is definitely a task for an entire interdisciplinary teams of experts. The OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation's scenarios of the future of education (OECD 2001 and 2020) could be an example of such outputs. But even these – with respect to their purpose – focus more on the provision of education, its governance and organization and do not pay as much attention to, e.g., the spatial pattern of the systems and their geographical conditions.

The aim in this article of to characterise the main tendencies in the development of the basic school network (meant as a legislative term for a set of educational facilities in a given territory, cf. Průcha et al. 2013) in Czechia in the last three decades, since the dissolution of Czechoslovakia into two separate states. We will highlight its current challenges, which are related to spatiality in education, namely these arising from inequalities in the geographical distribution of basic education

providers and from the changing structure of the operators (i.e. those who establish and materially provide schools). These processes will be considered in the context of the OECD future scenarios. We will deal only with basic education levels 1 and 2, according to the International Standard Classification of Education ISCED which is maintained by UNESCO.

## GENERAL TRENDS IN SCHOOL NETWORK DEVELOPMENT IN ECONOMICALLY DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

With the completion of urbanization in economically developed countries, the function of education became concentrated in settlements at higher levels of the settlement hierarchy and generally in metropolitan areas, at schools with larger capacities (Ribchester and Edwards 1999). Together with massive school closures in (peripheral) rural areas these processes led to a polarization of the system (Bell and Sigsworth 1987). In addition to the aspects related to the distribution of population, the political decisions and other social-based factors have increasingly influenced the features of the school network (Kučerová et al. 2019). Thus, in contrast to the previous extensive phase of school network formation, it means a shift to a phase of intensive formation (Hampl et al. 1999). The development of the last thirty years is characterized by the following tendencies, which are similar in their principle for both post-communist and geopolitically Western countries (Kučerová et al. 2020):

1) Liberalisation and marketisation, i. e. market-oriented approaches to education management, have been reflected in education since the 1980s (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2012), in Czechia with the restoration of democracy after 1989. The withdrawal from strictly defined school catchment areas and allowing parental choice of school have become a key condition for this (Parsons et al. 2000). This has led to (quasi-)market behaviour, not only by parents of students, but also by the schools themselves (Hernández and Carrasco 2020). The marketization of schooling has occurred simultaneously with the decentralization of some control competences, including a broader transformation of the ideology of political territorial government into governance (an emphasis on allowing local stakeholders to participate in decision-making as much as possible) – Jahnke (2019). In Czechia, with the extreme fragmentation of local authorities (6,258 self-government municipalities), decentralisation tendencies bring problems in the organisation of regional education, where, for example, decisions on the closure of basic schools or catchment agreements are made by municipal authorities without wider territorial coordination (Kučerová et al. 2020).

2) Other dimensions of the educational landscape, on the other hand, are characterized by strong centralization tendencies, although they are also primarily shaped by a globalization neoliberal perspective. In particular, it involves understanding the function of education and the curriculum development (Kučerová et al. 2020). The spatial organization and the characteristics of the school network in this regard are primarily influenced by the perception and evaluation of school quality, by the schools' position in ratings by international large-scale comparative assessments, which in consequence strongly influence school choice, enrolment, capacity utilization or the degree of school segregation (Zancajo and Bonal 2022).

3) In the basic education systems of individual countries, the influence of non-state actors and alternative forms in education is increasing (van de Werfhorst 2014), and thus the diversity of the school network (e.g. the establishment of

schools operated by different legal-institutional groups of parents, private entities, the increasing role of home schooling etc.; see Koinzer et al. 2017).

4) The economic cost-cutting measures promoted by central governments (Solstad and Andrews 2020) as a consequence of economic, pandemic, political and implicitly also environmental global crises are evident in school policy. These measures include, for example, various forms of school consolidation, leading either to mere organisational mergers, or even to the direct disappearance of educational services in a given locality. With the predominance of a metro-centricity in the operation and planning of the education system, such measures affect peripheral rural areas in particular, where education seems extremely cost-ineffective with the low numbers of students (Cuervo 2016).

5) Finally, the character of the school network is influenced by the changing socio-cultural structure of the educated population. With macro-regionally significant migration waves in recent decades (e. g., the European refugee crisis in 2015, most recently immigration from Ukraine due to Russian aggression), the share of educated foreigners or members of non-majority ethnic groups is increasing. However, their geographic distribution is uneven and is mirrored, for example, in the school capacity ratio, changing parental preferences for particular schools or a higher emphasis on inclusive education (Koinzer et al. 2017).

To facilitate thinking about possible futures for schooling several scenarios by the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation were formulated. They should be understood as pictures of possible developments of the education systems that can be shaped by policy-makers and a wide range of the other actors (OECD 2001). The 2001 Expertise formulated six visions, which were revised to four in 2020. However, a proposal of the scenarios underlines that there is not one pathway into the future but always a combination of different aspects. The models present extreme positions of education systems, in which rather the role of the school itself or the role of central bodies of public education policy or the role of institutions and structures standing outside states' political representations, as e. g. private subjects, prevails. Although the scenarios do not explicitly address the spatial organisation of education, it is possible to reflect in their light the current ongoing tendencies in the Czech basic school network.

## METHODS AND DATA

This study deals with the development of the basic school network (ISCED 1 and 2) on the entire territory of Czechia since the school year 1995/96 to the present (2022/23), however, analyses of particular indicators were determined by the availability of the data. From the methodological point of view, descriptive statistics and comparison methods were used, as well as graphical and a cartographic data visualisation. In the concluding discussion, our findings were applied to the current challenges of the spatial organization of the school network, which resonate especially in the Czech political scene.

When we refer to rural areas and rural municipalities, we mean municipalities that have a population size of less than 3,000 inhabitants (based on Czech legislation).

The main sources of quantitative data are school register, annual school census on schools and population data. School register is a public database (<https://rejstriky.msmt.cz/rejskol/>) administered by the Ministry of Education that contains

information on individual schools (name, address, capacity, type of school, etc.). Every school operator is obliged by law to register its school in this database. The information is provided once at the establishment of the school's activity, or updated when it is subsequently changed. The information that each school provides annually is then considered as an annual school census. These are the data that change during the school years (e.g. number of students). This database is non-public and must be requested from the relevant institutions of the Ministry of Education. The third source, population data (number of inhabitants, etc.) at various regional levels are publicly provided by the Czech Statistical Office. Finally, debates and direct questions to experts in regional education, school policy and the organisation of the education system were an important source of data as well.

With the respect to the long data series, it is necessary to critically consider the quality of the data used in several respects. Firstly, it was not possible to cover the development of the school network in the first half of the 1990s, as these data are not available. The reason for this can be found in the absence of complete data on the school network with a unified structure and methodology (NPI 2009). For this reason, some time series are only analysed from the school year 1995/96 onwards. Secondly, the methodology of data collection by the ministry changed during the studied period. Thus, for example, older data have a limited range of attributes about individual schools than more recent data and thus could not be fully comparable. Thirdly, it was not possible to analyse the spatial development over the whole period due to insufficient digitisation of older statistical data.

## RESULTS

### Development of the number of basic schools

Over a long time period, the basic school network in Czechia has witnessed significant changes (see e. g. Kučerová 2012). From the beginning of the second half of the 20th century until the fall of the communist regime in the Cze-choslovakia in 1989, a downward trend in the number of basic schools can be observed with variable intensity. From an initial number of about 10,000 basic schools at the beginning of the 1950s, their number decreased to about half (5,000) by the end of the 1980s. This trend must be seen in the context of the former centrally controlled economy, which was also reflected in the spatial organisation of education. The main causal mechanisms can be identified as education reforms, changes in school administration and reporting, and the existing spatial-planning concept of settlement development known as the "system of central settlement units" (Musil 2002).

In the last three decades, the school network can be described as relatively stable in the context of long-term development and spatiality, the changes are rather random (Kučerová et al. 2020). In the early 1990s, a slight increase in the number of schools can be notable in response to the withdrawal of large population-based birth cohorts and the restoration of local governments (Kučerová 2012). During the centralisation practices of the communist regime, a large number of municipalities were administratively merged with higher central municipalities. The transformation to democratic local self-government after 1989 meant the mass dissolution of many municipalities, sometimes accompanied by the reopening of formerly closed down amenities, such as basic schools. Since the 1995/96 school year, however, a steady, slight decline in the number of schools can be visible again (Fig. 1), as a result of the optimisation of the school network (NPI 2009). The optimisation

process can be considered as a response to the low birth and fertility rates at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s (Hulík and Tesárková 2009). The fall in the 2004/05 school year was related to the implementation of the new school law, which included an administrative change in school reporting. Until the 2012/13 school year, there was a continuous trend of a slight decline in the number of basic schools, and since the 2013/14 school year the increasing number of students has led to a slight increase visible up to the present.

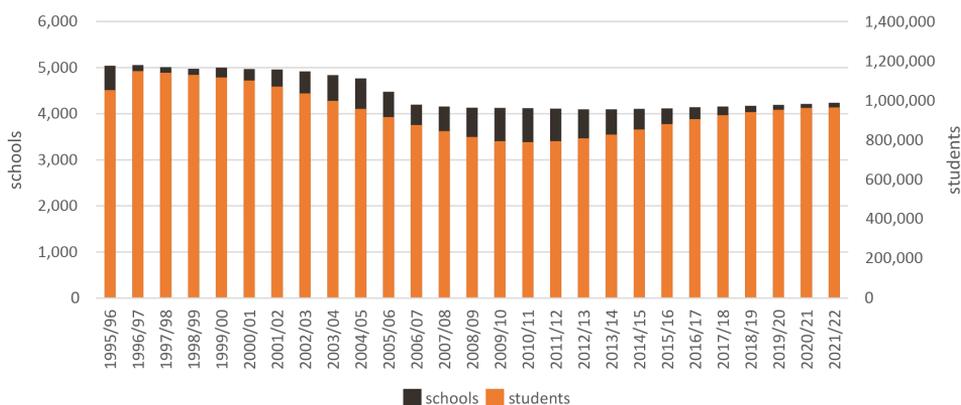


Fig. 1. Development of the number of basic schools and students in Czechia during the school years 1995/96 – 2021/22

A closer look at the change in the number of basic schools in recent years indicates two main trends (Fig. 2). Firstly, according to the year-on-year comparison, there is a cease in the decline of public basic schools, i.e. their stabilization, and even a very low increase in the last two years. Secondly, the overall growth trend in the number of basic schools in recent years is mainly due to the establishment of private basic schools. However, the year-on-year comparison does not provide insight into the internal dynamics of these changes in the number of basic schools, i.e. how many schools have been closed and how many have been established.

If we focus only on basic schools that have been closed, in the last 5 years a total of 43 those schools in Czechia have been closed administratively (i.e. the school is not registered in the school register) and 81% were public schools. However, the real reduction of the school network is much lower. In fact, when schools are closed, they may either really close or merge with another school. Hence, a school consolidation cannot be considered as a non-operating school, as it is merely registered under a different management, but the school is still operating in the locality. Thus, in the analysed period, only 24 schools actually closed and 19 were merged. The level of basic schools closure is therefore insignificant in the total number of basic schools.

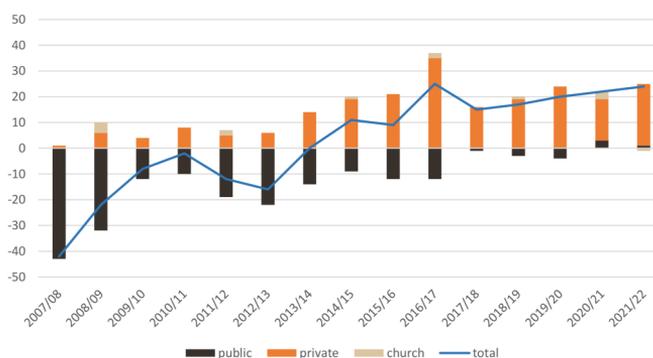


Fig. 2. Year-on-year comparison of the number of basic schools in Czechia by type of operator in the school years 2007/08 – 2021/22

Currently, the basic school network in Czechia includes 4 265 schools (Tab. 1). The majority of these are common public basic schools (85%), attended by 95% of Czech students. Although there has been an increase in private schools in recent years, their importance in terms of student numbers remains low. This fact is also related to the capacities available in each school. The difference in median or mean student numbers between schools of different operators is in some cases up to three times higher. This difference is particularly noticeable in a comparison of common public and private schools, which are rather smaller with regard to capacity.

Tab. 1. Selected characteristics of the basic school network in Czechia in the school year 2022/23

Operator	Schools		Students			
	abs.	rel.	abs.	rel.	median	mean
Public (common)	3 625	85.0%	1 266 123	95.0%	195	263
Public (other)*	289	6.8%	21 137	1.6%	59	73
Private	302	7.1%	37 602	2.8%	63	84
Church	49	1.1%	7 692	0.6%	140	157
Total	4 265	100.0%	1 332 554	100.0%	150	236

\* schools established by the region and the Ministry of Education (special schools, etc.).

### Changes in the structure of basic school operators

In addition to the number of basic schools, the structure of the school network is also changing according to various aspects, such as the operator. Before 1989, basic education was provided exclusively in state-established schools (NPI 2009). Privately owned schools could not be established, and church schools, like all activities of churches, were banned and closed by the communist regime (Jäger 2009). The spatial organization of education at that time was provided through strictly respected catchment areas according to the student's permanent residence. Parents were thus not only unable to choose between different operators, but also between state basic schools. With the renewal of democracy and the socio-

economic transformation after 1989, parents gained the opportunity to choose the school of their preference, and the school market has opened up to new operators (Walaszek and Bakowska 2016). This led to the re-establishment of church schools and the opening of entirely new private schools. Of course, these processes also brought the accompanying negative phenomena known from previous experiences abroad: in particular, polarization of the school network, unequal access to education, competition at the expense of educational content, etc. (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2012 and Zancajo and Bonal 2022).

According to the type of operator, the basic school network in Czechia is predominantly composed of public schools operated by municipalities (91.8%). Church schools (1.1%) and private schools (7.1%) cover only a very small part of the offer. This is mainly related to the historical development mentioned above. Despite this, their different development trajectories are visible. While the number of church schools is stable, private schools experience a dynamic development (Fig. 3). Compared between the school years 1995/96 and 2021/22, the number of church schools increased by 92%, from 25 to 48 schools, and private schools increased by 244%, from 81 to 279 schools. Whereas the number of church schools increased mainly during a short period in the early 1990s, on the contrary, a significant increase in private schools is evident in the last ten years. The data thus indicate that the supply of private schools is on the rise in Czechia. However, what causal mechanisms lead to the increase in the number of private schools needs to be further investigated. In general, it can be assumed that they are responding to parental demand, local lack of capacity, dissatisfaction with the character of education in public schools, a different pedagogical procedures or simply reflect the economic intention of the operator.

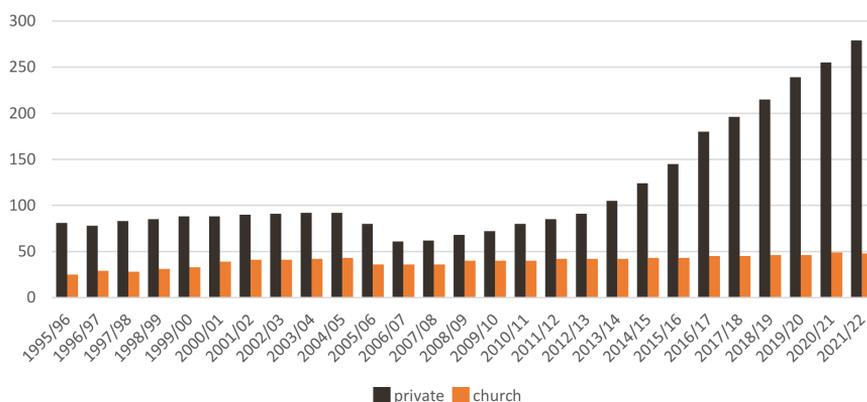


Fig. 3. Development of the number of private and church schools in Czechia during the school years 1995/96 – 2021/22

Moreover, the spatial distribution of church and private schools varies. In general, basic schools are located according to the main source of the educational market, i. e., the distribution and number of students (Maroy and van Zanten 2009). Nevertheless, Czechia, is characterized by its administrative fragmentation into very small municipalities in terms of population (median number of inhabitants 443). This causes, among others, that 58% of public basic schools are located in

rural municipalities (those with less than 3,000 inhabitants). Church and private schools, on the other hand, are more concentrated in population centres than public schools (Fig. 4). For church schools, the relation to church infrastructure, which tends to be localized in urban areas, may be a factor. About a third of private schools, then, are located in the four largest cities in the country. This may reflect the more market-oriented behaviour of private operators, which seek market resources, sufficient demand or prestigious location. However, 15% of private schools were identified in rural areas. Although this implies some potential of rural areas in the field of education, the other issue is what real impact the presence of private schools in rural areas can be expected to have. Whether the school will be part of the local community, or whether it will merely be an educational destination for surrounding towns and cities and attended by students with different economic and socio-cultural backgrounds (Bagley and Hillyard 2015).

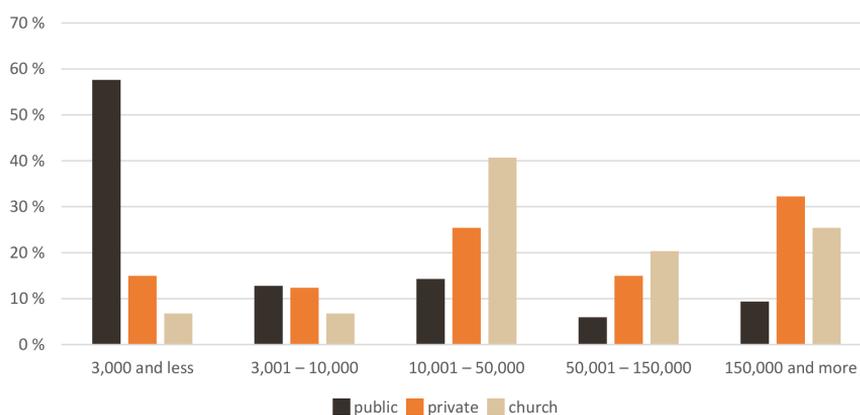


Fig. 4. Distribution of schools of individual operators in Czechia by population size of the municipality in the school year 2022/23

### Current challenges

In recent years, Czech basic education has experienced several significant changes. Among these changes we can include in particular a change in the financing of regional education, the ongoing revision of the Framework Educational Programmes (Trahorsch and Korvasová 2023) and the development of a new education policy strategy until 2030 (MŠMT ČR 2020). The school network can be affected either directly or indirectly through processes occurring outside the schools themselves. It is thus difficult to define all the aspects that may currently influence the development of the school network. Nevertheless, several problems and challenges, that the school network has been facing, can be highlighted: 1) extreme fragmentation of educational provision, 2) underestimated school capacities planning and 3) temporary fictional change of permanent residence within the system of school catchment areas.

1) The Czech education system is one of the most decentralised in Europe (OECD 2018). The first decentralization of competencies concerns the two-stage development of educational content through The Framework (defined by the Ministry of Education) and School (defined by schools themselves) Educational Pro-

grammes. Furthermore, individual schools can organise their internal structure, constitute their pedagogical team, and are responsible for the administration and disposal of financial resources. The operators are obliged to financially ensure the operation of the school, provide teaching and other facilities, to employ or dismiss the headmaster, and can close the school they founded. These duties also require certain competences and adequate staff resources. As already mentioned, Czechia has an extremely fragmented structure of self-government municipalities and a large number of basic schools are located in small settlements. Both, these municipalities and schools may struggle to ensure effective administration of a given school just because of the lack of human capital (Veselý 2021). Principals (but not only of these schools) are often more preoccupied with activities related to school administration than with pedagogical aspects such as pedagogical development and leadership. Therefore, there have been debates in professional communities about the delegation of certain competences back to the central level (e. g. Hřebecký 2019, Kitzberger 2019 and Veselý et al. 2019). One of the bases is the implementation of the tool so-called the “middle layer of support” – i. e. a link between the state and local level (regional education), which is part of the document Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic 2030+ (MŠMT ČR 2020). Its main objective should be to improve the quality of education through a comprehensive system of support for schools in managerial and non-pedagogical work. This should create conditions for schools to better focus on their educational function. In recent months, tenders for regional staff are in progress and their activities should start from the new school year. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the introduction of the middle layer of support into practice will not be without problems, misunderstandings, formalism, etc. For many representatives of local authorities (also in reminiscence of the former directive central settlement units policy), any bundling of individual institutions or any limitation (even if only apparent) of their decision-making powers is politically problematic (Perlín 2006).

2) The issue of capacity planning (Hřebecký et al. 2022) did not only affect basic education a few years ago (Tesarčková and Hulík 2009), but in accordance with the progression of demographic cohort (see Fig. 1), it also has a strong impact on secondary education. Thus, large population-based years of birth cohorts regionally reinforced by internal migration and recently by war refugees from Ukraine, have on the one hand highlighted the unpreparedness and rigidity in capacity planning of regional education, and on the other hand have drawn attention to other systemic barriers: e.g. administrative and time-consuming aspects of new constructions or the extension of existing capacities, lack of financial resources (Vácha 2023), spatial planning not related to the development of necessary infrastructure, and misleading planning databases caused by school catchment tourism (see below) or unregistered permanent residents (Meyer 2023). High basic school utilization has a typical spatial pattern. These include mainly the migration to attractive regions in the wider hinterland of the capital city of Prague and generally in the areas of the largest settlement concentrations, such as regional cities, as well as large cities in formerly heavy industrial areas (basins under the Ore Mountains and the region of Ostrava) – Fig. 5. However, it is still necessary to consider the heterogeneity of these territorial units, even up to the between-school differences.

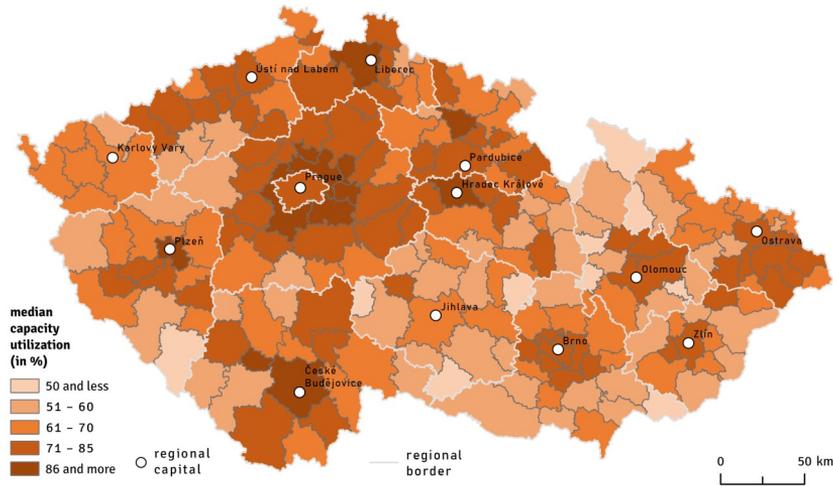


Fig. 5. Median capacity utilization of basic schools in AD MEC\* in Czechia between school years 2016/17–2021/22

\*Administrative districts of municipalities with extended competence.

3) Within Czechia, a system of catchment areas is used for the spatial organization of education, through which every child is guaranteed a place in basic school. However, this system has not been systematically monitored in the long term (Meyer 2023). As a result, there is little evidence on how the system works in practice and where its weaknesses are. One of the typical weak points is the well-known phenomenon of so-called “school catchment or enrolment tourism” (Hřebecký et al. 2022). This phenomenon of temporarily overwriting one’s permanent residence to get a place at a preferred basic school cannot be described as a merely present trend, as this strategy of parents has been known in Czechia for a long time. A more legal variant of this phenomenon can also be observed abroad, where a place in a preferred school is obtained by purchasing or renting a property in the catchment area of the school (Holme 2002 and Calsamiglia and Miralles 2014). In general, the existence of school catchment tourism has become a problem in urban areas where basic school capacities are more utilised. Parents cannot rely on available capacities, so they choose this strategy to achieve a place in their preferred school (Hřebecký et al. 2022). The capacities of schools in rural areas are usually not completely utilised, so on the one hand it is not necessary to deal with it, and on the other hand parents do not even need to use this strategy, except if they intend to place their child in a city school. Czech legislation does not yet consider these practices to be illegal, so the operators or the schools themselves do not have many means of dealing with it. However, there is currently a case in progress where one Prague municipal district has decided to actively fight against school catchment tourism by checking the length of permanent residence of enrolled students (see e. g. Seznam Zprávy 2023). On this basis, the school excluded several dozen catchment tourists from enrolment, who surprisingly did not appeal against this decision to the administrative authority. The result and media publicity of this high-profile case can be seen as a gamechanger that, on the one hand, points to a possible way to reduce the phenomenon of school catchment tourism, and on the

other hand, has started the debate among many concerned authorities on possible legislative changes. School catchment tourism is far from being the only problem associated with the catchment area system. Another is the non-declaration of permanent addresses which distorts the real numbers of students living in a catchment area, leaving the local authorities without sufficiently reliable data for their planning. On the other hand, municipalities without an basic school (60% of Czech municipalities) in many cases have long-term problems entering into a common school area agreement with those municipalities that operate a school. This is mainly due to the capacity of the school or due to the unwillingness of the operator to agree on a common area, most often for political reasons. A high share of municipalities without schools, along with a fragmented self-government, makes it impossible for some local authorities to ensure full compulsory school attendance in the nearest school. These municipalities are thus not part of any catchment area and their school-age children often have to travel long distances.

## DISCUSSION

To sum-up the results of the description of school network development in Czechia, firstly the number of schools over the last three decades can be described as relatively stable. A certain exception is the beginning of the 1990s, which, however, can be perceived more as a remedial transformation of the planned development during the communist regime (Hampel et al. 1999, Kučerová 2012 and Kučerová et al. 2020). The most dynamic trend can be identified as the increase in the number of private schools, again corresponding with the transformation of Czech society towards a geopolitically Western one (cf. e. g. van de Werfhorst 2014 and Koinzer et al. 2017).

In the context of selected factors influencing the development of the school network, it is evident that the numbers of schools during the studied period did not always sufficiently reflect the demographic development (Tesárková and Hulík 2009). In the second half of the 1990s, in response to the low birth and fertility rates of the previous years, the school network was being optimised in relatively timely manner (NPI 2009). In recent years, a slight increase in the number of schools has been observed, but this did not sufficiently reflect the emergence of larger population-based birth cohorts. On the contrary, the number of common public schools steadily declined over that time. This late response can thus be identified as one of the causes for the problem of insufficient school capacities. It would also be necessary to identify whether the new schools were established in locations where there was a real demand for an increased capacity. It should be added, however, that an insufficient capacity can (and more often than not) be solved by construction adaptations to existing buildings, not just by building new schools. However, according to Vácha (2023), this is also connected to barriers in the inappropriate legislative system of funding local governments in Czechia. On the basis of our other findings (e. g. Hřebecký et al. 2022 and Meyer 2023), it can be concluded that the capacity problem in general reflects a lack of consideration of external factors of education.

Although there has been a steady year-on-year increase in private schools in recent years, their position concerning the capacity and number of students within the school network is not yet significant. However, it can modify the local context e.g. by redistribution of students (outflow of students from other schools) and thus

delimitation of new catchment areas. However, private schools in Czechia are not part of the system of catchment areas, so in terms of law they are not limited geographically (through permanent residence) in the enrolling students.

In terms of the OECD future education scenarios, there is no obvious trend even in the case of Czechia. The growth of schools with a private operator could indicate a gradual marketization of education (“education outsourced”), justified by the right to multiple organizational forms available to individuals, demanded by a certain part of society (Straková and Simonová 2015) and more flexibly responding to demand. This is facilitated by the extreme fragmentation and decentralisation of the school network, where the influence of central policy is limited, and operators as well as providers have a great deal of power (although such freedom also brings difficulties in terms of management, administrative tasks, etc.).

The consequences of these freedoms are also apparent for central governing authorities – especially the difficulty of regional coordination of educational subjects (e.g., planning school capacities or reducing inequalities in the system). In recent years, therefore, there has been a tendency to unify and control some practices; this can include the idea of the middle layer of the support tool. This is somewhat opposed to the former trend of strengthening the free educational market (cf. strengthening of centralization in other countries referred by Solstad and Andrews 2020). It is not yet possible to judge whether the steps will lead to a stronger role for traditional administrations and an emphasis on conventional functions of schooling systems, or rather to greater flexibility of schooling arrangements responding flexibly to a changing local demand, community involvement, sharing of know-how and human capital between schools. However, according to Zancajo et al. (2022), it can be expected that most educational systems are strongly path-dependent and inertial. This corresponds to the fact that even though Czech schools have freedom within decentralization, mostly replicate proven patterns of behaviour. Those schools that are successful in their strategies and demand then transform the local educational landscape from the bottom-up, e.g. in directions of students’ commutation flows (see e. g. Svoboda et al. 2022).

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the article was to present the development of the basic school network in Czechia over the last three decades in the context of wider external conditions for schooling. Attention was paid to the change in the number of schools and the structure of operators. The two main identified trends are a ceasing decline in the number of public schools, i.e. their stabilisation, and an overall slight growth in the number of schools, which is mainly caused by the establishment of private basic schools, usually located in urban areas and a rather smaller capacity.

In the second part of the article, selected current challenges and problems of Czech basic school network were presented, in particular: 1) extreme fragmentation of educational provision, 2) underestimated school capacities planning, 3) temporary fictional change of permanent residence within the system of school catchment areas.

One way to overcome fragmentation of the system is the idea of the implementation of a middle layer of support (hierarchically between municipalities and the state), which is relatively common part of foreign education systems as well. Its main goal is to create conditions for schools to focus more on their educational

functions. The lack of capacity planning for schools is an example of not considering external factors in education (e.g. demographic development and housing construction). Although, the other causes are spatial planning which is not based on the development of the necessary infrastructure, and the local government funding system. The last presented issue was the so-called school catchment tourism as a strategy of Czech parents to achieve a place in their preferred basic school, which has been used for quite a long time. However, with regard to regional capacity shortages, the impact of the school catchment tourism has intensified and highlighted the need for its solution or regulation.

Czech education system still has the conditions to develop to varying degrees according to future scenarios outlined by OECD expertise. Spatially, there will probably not be extreme changes in the already three decade stable school network. However, changes in the structure of operators and some of the central educational policies may bring spatially differentiated changes of relations in local school markets.

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## VÝVOJ SÍTĚ ZÁKLADNÍCH ŠKOL V ČESKU V POSLEDNÍCH TŘECH DESETILETÍCH: PROMĚNY A SOUČASNÉ PROBLÉMY

Cílem článku je představit hlavní vývojové trendy sítě základních škol (ISCED 1 a 2) v Česku v posledních třech desetiletích, které uplynuly od rozdělení Československa na dva samostatné státy. Zdůrazněny jsou současné problémy a výzvy související s prostorovostí ve vzdělávání, konkrétně s nerovnostmi v geografickém rozmístění poskytovatelů základního vzdělávání a s měnící se strukturou zřizovatelů. Tyto procesy jsou posuzovány v kontextu expertizy OECD nazývaných scénáře budoucnosti vzdělávání (OECD 2001 a 2020).

Byly sledovány vybrané charakteristiky regionálního školství, a to jak jejich vývojové tendence, tak územní specifika. Jako hlavní zdroj kvantitativních dat byly použity: 1) údaje

o jednotlivých školách z Rejstříku škol a školských zařízení (tzv. rejstříková data), 2) průběžné informace z neveřejné databáze, které každá škola každoročně poskytuje ministerstvu školství (výkazová data) a 3) související data o obyvatelstvu poskytovaná Českým statistickým úřadem. Významným zdrojem informací vysvětlujících vnější rámce dat byly debaty a přímé dotazy na experty z praxe v regionálním školství a školské politice.

Vývojové tendence sítě základních škol jsou v souladu s dalšími hospodářsky vyspělými zeměmi (srv. např. Solstad a Andrews 2020), ale uplatňují se některá specifika post-socialistické transformace společnosti (blíže Hampl et al. 1999) a dědictví historického vývoje školské sítě (Kučerová et al. 2019).

V posledních třiceti letech lze síť základních škol v Česku v kontextu dlouhodobého vývoje označit za poměrně stabilní. Jako hlavní trendy byly identifikovány: 1) snižující se pokles veřejných základních škol, tedy jejich stabilizace a 2) celkový mírný růst počtu základních škol, který je způsoben především zřizováním privátních škol. Privátní školy jsou častěji lokalizovány ve městech a mají spíše menší kapacitu. I přesto se 15 % z nich nachází na venkově, což naznačuje určitý potenciál venkova v oblasti vzdělávání (srv. Bagley a Hillyard 2015).

Jako hlavní výzvy, kterými se česká školská síť aktuálně potýká, byly diskutovány:

1) Přílišná fragmentace vzdělávací služby: Český vzdělávací systém i soustava lokálních samospráv patří k jedněm z nejméně decentralizovaných v Evropě (OECD 2018 a Kučerová et al. 2019). Ředitelé (zejména malých venkovských škol) jsou přetíženi administrací školy na úkor pedagogického rozvoje a leadershipu. Mezi experty se proto vedou jednání o možnostech přenesení určitých kompetencí směrem k centrální úrovni řízení (Veselý et al. 2019). Pro mnoho představitelů místních samospráv je však (i s ohledem na historické zkušenosti s direktivní politikou komunistického režimu – viz Perlín 2006) politicky problematické přijmout jakékoli svazkování jimi zřizovaných institucí.

2) Podceněné plánování kapacit škol: Populačně silnější ročníky, regionálně zesílené vnitřní migraci (a nejnověji též příchodem válečných běženců z Ukrajiny) na jedné straně poukázaly na nepřipravenost a rigidnost v plánování kapacit regionálního školství, a na straně druhé upozornily na další systémové bariéry (Meyer 2023, srv. Vácha 2023). Jedná se např. o administrativní a časovou náročnost nové výstavby či rozšiřování stávajících kapacit škol, územní plánování nenavázané na rozvoj potřebné infrastruktury, zkrslující datové podklady pro plánování.

3) Fiktivní přepisování trvalého bydliště žáků v rámci systému spádových obvodů škol: Na nepřesnost dat má vliv i tzv. spádová/zápisová turistika (Hřebecký et al. 2022). Ta značí dočasné fiktivní přepisování trvalého bydliště žáka pro získání místa na preferované základní škole. Poslední mediálně sledovaný případ městské části, která přijala aktivní opatření proti tomuto fenoménu, lze vnímat jako prvek měnící pravidla hry (tzv. gamechanger), který podnítil debatu o možných legislativních změnách na tomto poli.

Některé tendence školské sítě tak mají blíže vývojovým modelům popisovaným expertizou OECD jako uplatňování tržních principů (např. mírný, ale pozvolný nárůst privátních zřizovatelů základních škol, vysoká míra decentralizace rozhodování ve školském systému). V jiných ohledech lze pozorovat opačný trend posilování role centrální moci, veřejného zájmu a unifikace některých opatření (např. zavádění tzv. středního článku podpory).



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