Availability of Czech School Play-Centres [1]

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Abstract: The scholarly literature generally acknowledges the positive effects of participation in organized afterschool programs. Such programs are, besides other facilities, offered by the Czech school play-centres, which are a traditional part of the education system providing afterschool care for primary school pupils. The study aims to analyze the availability (capacities, vacancies, enrolment rates of schoolchildren etc.) of afterschool programs offered by the Czech school play-centres overall and in socially excluded areas. To achieve the goals of the study, the statistical information collected by the Ministry of Education in yearly reports of school principals was analysed. Overall, the capacity of school play-centres is sufficient (about 8 % of participant slots are vacant), however the free capacity is unequally distributed (about 40 % of school play-centres are full or exceed their capacity). The findings suggest that the planning of the school play-centres capacity should be more effective. The utilisation rates are generally lower in socially excluded areas, and strategies to increase the demand for afterschool programs offered by the school play-centres should be implemented. Further research should focus on the quality of afterschool programs provided by the school play-centres.

Keywords: school play-centres, afterschool programs, educational planning, equal educational opportunities, socially excluded areas

Contemporary western society is marked by changes in family structures and higher participation of women in the labour market, both of which fuel the need for the care of children in the time after school hours, when parents are often still at work, and children left unsupervised during afterschool hours may often fall prey to deviant or harmful behaviour (Fashola, 2002). The emergence of formal after-school programs providing organized leisure time activities for youth is one of the ways to respond to these challenges. Many types of such afterschool programs exist abroad, and the range of their institutional providers is quite extensive. In the Czech Republic, such

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formal afterschool programs providing structured leisure time activities for schoolchildren are offered by non-profit organisations, the public sector, by the church or by private companies. Afterschool programs are also provided by public institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) and according to the Czech *Education Act* (Act No. 561/2004 with later amendments, MŠMT, 2004), these facilities offering afterschool programs are leisure-time centres (*střediska volného času*), school play-centres (*školní družiny*), and school clubs (*školní kluby*).[2]

This paper focuses primarily on school play-centres, which are facilities for afterschool care for primary school children. Czech afterschool programs offered by the school play-centres have been affiliated with basic schools, and the way of functioning of these facilities has been rather neglected by Czech educational research. This concern was echoed by Minárechová and Bánovčanová (2016, p. 247), who attribute it to the fact that these facilities are "traditional", directed by the state and by the founder and that neither parents nor the wider public question their legitimacy. So far, the research on afterschool programs and organized leisure time activities has originated mostly from the USA and has been rather scarce in Europe (Baďura et al., 2016, p. 2) including the Czech Republic. The ambition of this paper is to open the debate and to provide some general starting points for further research on the function and roles of school play-centres and school clubs in the Czech Republic. Czech scholarly literature has not yet thoroughly discussed the issue of availability of such facilities, nor has it examined the socio-economic backrounds of the children who use them. Foreign scholarly literature has identified the strong potential of some afterschool programs in mitigating the socioeconomic inequalities and equalisation of differences in the social background of pupils, a topic which has not been *adequately addressed* in Czech scholarly literature. Bearing this in mind, the objective of the paper is to analyze the availability of afterschool programs offered by the Czech school play-centres (capacities, vacancies, enrolment rates of schoolchildren) overall and with a particular focus on socially excluded areas.

The paper is structured according to a standard IMRaD scheme. The first part introduces afterschool programs, shortly describes the effects of participation in such programs and barriers and factors underlying the

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[2]   In the *Education Act*, they are listed as facilities for providing an „education developing personal interests".

participation, it then turns to the Czech context, more specifically the role of school play-centres in the Czech education system and related research findings are presented. The second part focuses on methods of inquiry and the sources of data used for the analysis. The third part deals with the overall availability of school play-centres and then focuses on these facilities in socially excluded areas. The fourth section discusses the results and provides suggestions for further research focus in this area.

1 Afterschool programs

The broader focus of the paper is on formal after-school programs, which can be defined as "an array of safe, structured programs that provide children and youth ages kindergarten through high school with a range of supervised activities intentionally designed to encourage learning and development outside of the typical school day" (Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2007), they are "…supervised by adults…" and "…occurred during after-school hours during the regular school year. To distinguish after-school programs from other content-specific or sports-related extra-curricular activities, an after-school program must have offered more than one activity" (Kremer et al., 2015, p. 8). The features of formal afterschool programs, sometimes also referred to as "out-of-school time" programs, are usually a) regular operation during non-school hours throughout the academic year (e.g., daily, weekly, after school, before school, weekends), b) supervision by adults, c) offer of more than one activity (e.g., homework help, recreation, arts and crafts), and d) involvement of other youth (i.e., group based); as multi-service programs, they can be provided by schools or community-based agencies (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009, p. 7).

Many kinds of afterschool programs exist worldwide; they may have different organisational, curricular or institutional background, or may serve primarily different purposes or emphases. E.g., in the USA, these include *day-care programs* for pre-schoolers to third grade, usually with no academic focus or goals, providing care between 3 and 6 PM; *afterschool programs* for children 5–18 years old emphasising academic as well as non-academic activities providing opportunities to explore and develop skills, talents and hobbies; or *school-based academic extended-day-programs*, which typically take place in the school building, provide a mixture of academic, recreational, and cultural programs, and have mainly academic focus related to what happens in school

during the day, i.e. provide remedial or enrichment tutoring (Fashola, 2002, p. 7–8). In Germany, so-called *Ganztagsschule* (all-day school) is an example of a school-based afterschool program, which provides structured activities for schoolchildren for at least three days per week, and besides other features includes lunch of teachers and pupils together (Klemm, 2014). Besides these kinds of all-day care for children in Germany, there are also school clubs (Hort), which care for children in afterschool time.

Czech schoolchildren have a multitude of possibilities to spend afterschool time, and in the Czech Republic, there are various facilities which provide formal afterschool programs and organized leisure time activities. The ways of spending the free time among Czech youth has been a subject of several research projects (Jíra, 1997; Kolář, 1997; Pelka & Ondrušková, 2000, 2002; Sak & Saková, 2004), whose findings are unfortunately already outdated. Among the more recent research findings on the topic, one can mention the research of Bocan, Maříková, and Spálenský (2011, p. 102–105).[3] Their research also concerned school-based afterschool programs provided by the facilities for development of personal interests (including school play-centres and school clubs), however the information about afterschool programs provided by these facilities were reported as aggregated data about afterschool programs regardless of their providers and they did not focus on the specific role of school play-centres and school clubs, which are in focus of this article.

Research findings usually show that participation in afterschool programs has a positive impact on school absenteeism, school achievement, on work and study habits, helps to prevent crime and drug use, promote health and wellness and contribute to good social and emotional development (see Mahoney et al., 2005, p. 8–9; Little et al., 2007),[4] and that participation in out-

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[3] A mixed-method research using data from questionnaire survey of 2 238 respondents (selected based on quota-selection) and 12 focus-groups with 103 participants thematically focused on a wider domain of value orientations of 6–15-year old youngsters. According to the research findings, about 74 % of children regularly visit an organised leisure time activity (OLTA) at least once per week. Most often, these activities were attended by children aged 11, the least often by 6 and 15-year-old children. The most popular activities were sports (73 % of respondents, who attend OLTA), music and drama (35 %), education-oriented activities (26 %) and art-oriented activities (25 %). Sport activities were more often visited by boys, girls participate more often in music and drama-oriented programs.

[4] However, the evaluation of afterschool programs is challenging and the research evidence often shows ambiguous or inconsistent results (Little, 2007; Fashola, 2002, p. 6), because the

of-school activities may have a potential to close the attainment gap between children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and children with more family resources (Chanfreau et al., 2016). In the Czech Republic, Baďura et al. (2016) focused on the effects of participation in organized leisure-time activities (of which afterschool programs can be an example). Their analysis showed that participation in organized leisure-time activities was associated with higher school engagement, lower levels of school-related stress and better *perceived* academic achievement regardless of gender and age.[5]

As Gardner et al. (2009, s. 7) acknowledge that it is not possible to suppose that afterschool programs alone can significantly decrease the achievement gaps among pupils. However, they may especially help pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged environments with lower SES. We must therefore consider not only the impact of afterschool programs attendance, but also the sociocultural background composition of pupils who attend these programs. Similarly as Steiner (2009, p. 94) poses a question regarding the German Ganztagsschulen, that is whether "the all-day schools are attended preferably by the pupils, who need special support," an analogical question can be imagined in case of Czech afterschool programs, or more specifically Czech school play-centres.

Participation/attendance in afterschool programs may be associated with multiple factors related to the demand (that are factors associated with pupils or families and their characteristics, i.e. socioeconomic status, the work status of parents, age or gender) as well as to the supply side (that are those related to the quantity, capacity and affordability of afterschool programs). These factors and potential barriers of participation in afterschool programs will be further discussed in the following paragraphs.

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focus and quality of afterschool programs may differ (Little et al., 2007, p. 5) as well as the intensity of participation.

[5] Their sample consisted of data from 10,483 adolescents (49.2 % boys) aged 11, 13 and 15 from the *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* data collection in 2014. The academic achievement was not measured in Baďura et al.'s (2016) study, but only self reported perception.

1.1 Barriers and factors associated with participation in after-school programs

Research on afterschool programs often focused on the participation of *various sociodemographic groups*, as fees charged for participation in the afterschool programs may be problematic for low-income families (Gardner et al., 2009, p. 13). The results of previous research on participation of pupils from different social backgrounds on different afterschool programs are unambiguous. Little (2007) observes, in the USA, that participation in afterschool activities reveals a consistent pattern of "winners and losers". Winners are in this case the children from the families with higher education and income), who are more likely to participate in afterschool activities, with greater frequency during the week in a greater number of different activities within and are more likely to participate in enrichment programs. Similarly in the UK, Chanfreau et al. (2015) found a strong link between economic disadvantage and lower participation in out-of-school activities, which the authors attribute to the costs related to the program participation. On the other hand, the school-based clubs (especially the breakfast clubs) which are either low-cost or even free, were the only organised out-of-school activity in which participation did not vary by economic disadvantage; 31 % of both disadvantaged and more affluent children aged 11 attended after school clubs at least weekly. In the Czech Republic, participation in organized leisure time activities was found to be related to parental education – among children of tertiary educated parents, only 13 % of children do not attend organized leisure time activities compared to 38 % of children of parents with maximum apprenticeship certificate. The influence of parental education was not proved only in case of sport activities; on the other hand, it was very strong in case of music, art and educational activities. The information regarding the socioeconomic background of children attending the school play-centres was not reported by the authors of the cited research (Bocan et al., 2011, p. 102–105).

Among other important factors associated with afterschool-programs attendance are opportunities of parents or guardians of the child to take care of them after school (full-time employed parents working until late afternoons are usually more likely to seek some kind of structured leisure time programs for their children, especially in case of children of lower age, e.g., Steiner, 2009, p. 96; Chanfreau et al., 2015, p. 3), number of siblings (adolescents with employed, low-income parents were unable to participate

in after-school activities because they were responsible for caring for younger siblings while their parents worked, see Gardner et al., 2009, s. 14), or logistical barriers such as difficult transportation to and from the afterschool programs, especially those located outside of the school buildings (Little, 2007, p. 2).[6]

Besides the logistical barriers to participation, Gardner et al. (2009, p. 12) mention also the *poor availability of programs*, that may be a significant factor limiting access to after-school programs, and the debate is about whether the supply of after-school programs seems sufficient to meet the demand, both among disadvantaged youth and youth in general. If the institutional offer of leisure time activities and afterschool programs is not sufficient in the locality, the youth may become involved in activities which are often socially undesirable (Pelka & Ondrušková, 2000, p. 28). The availability of afterschool programs is especially important in areas with high concentrations of socially and/or economically disadvantaged pupils. Based on extensive fieldwork in years 2014–2015 in the Czech Republic, Čada et al. (2015) identified in sum 606 socially excluded areas in 297 towns; about 95–115 thousand residents live in these socially excluded areas. These researchers found, that in about 68 % of such areas, the offer afterschool activities exist, and in about half of such areas, there are at least two institutional providers of afterschool programs. Although these afterschool activities are often offered right on the spot, the local stakeholders agree that the capacity of most of these services is insufficient (p. 81–82).

1.2 School play-centres in the Czech Republic

There are various formal afterschool programs in the Czech Republic which would fulfil the above-mentioned definition of afterschool program and which are organized by various institutions. One such entity is the school play-centre (*družiny*), which is a traditional provider of afterschool care in out-of school time serving mainly primary school pupils. These facilities have a long history, as they emerged during the First Republic (1918–1938) by transformation of so called "school havens" (*školní útulky*) for children (for

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[6]   Czech school play-centres are, compared to other out-of school leisure time activities, usually located in the school premises or nearby. Pospíšilová and Komínková (2015) observed, that one of the sources of the high demand for the school play-centre they studied may be "important percentage of commuting pupils" (p. 18) and it seems easier for parents to let the pupils in the school play-centre and pick them up personally after work than to let them travel home alone.

details see Hájek & Pávková, 2011, p. 19–22). School play-centres are available right after the end of school instruction and their afterschool programs provide leisure time activities as well as "preparation for school instruction" (*Ordinance nr. 74/2005*, par. 8). The care in school play-centres (as well as in other school institutions for afterschool care) is provided for a fee, its amount is however limited by the law and can be even waived (the par. 11 anticipates such cases, e.g. pupils whose families are in financial problems).

A comparative study of Czech/Slovak school play-centres/school clubs and similar facilities providing the afterschool care for children and such facilities in selected English-speaking countries, was provided by Minárechová and Bánovčanová (2016). Based on the analysis of education policy documents and other sources, they found that the education processes in such facilities providing afterschool programs in English speaking countries are more focused on academic skills, remedial or enrichment tutoring, compared to educational activities in Czech school play-centres, where these activities have a different character. The authors observe that although the child's preparation for school instruction may be a part of the program in the Czech Republic, the educators in the school play-centre must not correct the pupil's homework, they may at most alert the pupil about a mistake and allow the pupil to find it (ibid, p. 245).

Despite the long history of school play-centres, the research evidence related to school play-centres and has been rather scarce, most often it was an object of study of bachelor or master final theses (e.g. Rabušicová, 2009; Zapletalová, 2015; Vilímková, 2014; Vanišová, 2016), which most frequently dealt with various aspects of functioning of these facilities, their educators or activities provided in their afterschool programs. An ethnographic study of Pospíšilová and Komínková (2015) focused on everyday processes on a micro level and mediated the "insider" view of pedagogical workers. The authors focused on various domains in the everyday functioning of one specific school play-centre, and extensively described their work during the school year. The school play-centre in focus was in great demand by the parents, and although the capacity was increased, it did not manage to meet the demand. The centre was attended very often by children of high SES parents (doctors, managers, lawyers, company owners etc.), whose work time was quite extended and thus were keen to use the morning as well as afternoon care for their children. Another reason for very high demand could be a significant proportion of pupils commuting to school from nearby villages (p. 18).

2 Research questions, data and methods

This paper is focused on the availability of Czech school play-centres for primary school pupils. Because the poor availability (insufficient supply of afterschool programs that does not meet the demand) presents a significant barrier to participation (see above), the first research question is interested in the availability of the school play-centres for the pupils in terms of overall numbers and capacity and their geographical distribution. One of the principles of Czech education policy is fairness and equal opportunity, which the school system should provide. School-based facilities providing afterschool programs with voluntary participation of pupils are thus especially needed in locations with higher concentration of socially disadvantaged children.

This leads to following research questions:

1) Is the supply of Czech school play-centres sufficient? How does it vary geographically and from the perspective of demographic evolution?

2) How does the supply of school play-centres (available slots, utilisation rates etc.) associated with schools in socially excluded areas differ from the supply of the school play-centres associated to schools outside of socially excluded areas?

In order to answer these research questions, statistical information collected by the Ministry of Education was analysed. The database of the Czech Ministry of Education (MŠMT, 2017a) offers aggregated historical data on the number of school play-centres, pupils frequenting these facilities or total number of pupils. Data are collected each year, statistical "performance" reports (*výkonové výkazy*)[7] are filled by the school principals and collected back by the Ministry's statistical department. For each reporting unit (school play-centre), the database contains information on its capacity, number of subscribed participants and also the number of pupils attending the school.[8]

Both research questions are addressed by descriptive analysis of data from MEYS. To measure the availability of afterschool programs, hitherto studies so far used at least two different methods for estimating supply and demand.

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[7] For the purpose of the study, most of the data came from the form *Z 2-01 Výkaz o školní družině – školním klubu* (MŠMT, 2017b).

[8] The author would like to thank Jaromír Nebřenský from MEYS for his cooperation and provision of the source data.

The first option is to compare the number of school-aged children in a given region to the number of available slots in after-school programs. However, that method often leads to result that supply is insufficient to meet demand, because it makes far too many assumptions about the extent to which all school-aged youth need or demand after-school care. The second option is to analyse the extent to which the participant slots in existing after-school programs go unfilled (Gardner et al., 2009, p. 12–13). The latter indicator, computed as total enrolment in afterchool programs (facilities) divided by their total capacity is denoted by Seppanen et al. (1993, p. 30–31) as *utilisation rate*. The dataset from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports contained information on the maximum capacity number of attending pupils for each school play-centre as well as number of pupils attending the associated primary school, thus allowing both methods to be used for evaluation of availability.

The second research question implies the identification of schools (and school play-centres associated to them), which are located in socially excluded areas. The list of such schools is based on a field research project "The analysis of socially excluded areas in the Czech Republic" performed by the GAC agency under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA) in the years 2014–2015.[9] Researchers have defined the socially excluded area as "an area (house, street, district) whose residents have signs of social exclusion. These areas are negatively symbolically denoted by the surrounding citzens ('wrong address', 'problematic place' etc.)." (Čada et al., 2015, p. 14). For further identification of such areas, the researchers used explicit criteria related to a) the exclusion of the residents from the labour market, b) contact with a social vicinity, c) access to public services, d) ways of solving personal situations, and e) the rate of political participation (for further details on identification of such areas, see Čada et al., 2015, p. 19 onwards). In sum, the list contained 96 schools, which were located in socially excluded areas.[10]

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[9]   The author would like to thank dr. Karel Čada (the project manager) for providing the list of schools located in socially excluded areas.

[10] Commonly known examples of socially excluded areas are e. g. housing estates Chanov (in town Most) or Janov (in town Litvínov), both in Ústí region.

3   Results

3.1   Availability of school play-centres

The availability of school play-centres was first analysed in a time series, the focus was on aggregated data for the whole Czech Republic. Figure 1 shows overall capacity of school play-centres, number of enrolled pupils, number of primary school pupils and number of operating school play-centres.

The evolution of number of primary school pupils, target capacity and number of school play-centres in time series
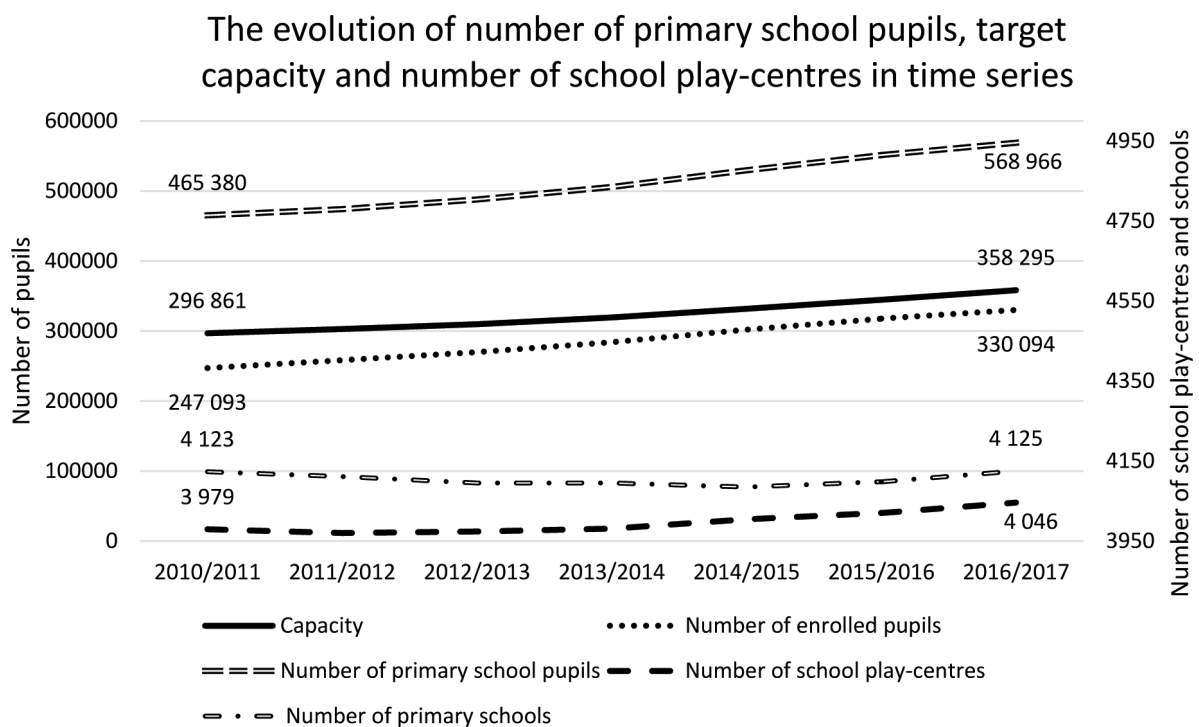
Figure 1. The evolution of number of primary school pupils, capacity and number of school play-centres in time series.

Figure 1 shows that the increasing number of primary school pupils (from academic year 2010/2011 onwards, the average yearly increase is of 17 264 pupils to 568 966 pupils in total in academic year 2016/2017) is accompanied by the increasing capacity of school play-centres (on average 10 239 slots per year). Apparently, the total number of enrolled pupils is inferior to the total capacity of school play-centres during the analysed years. As the total number of primary school pupils in the education system

increased over time (from 465 380 pupils in academic year 2010/2011 to 568 966 pupils in year 2016/2017), the proportion of primary school pupils enrolled in school play-centres increased as well (from 53 % in academic year 2010/2011 to 58 % in academic year 2016/2017). However, the increase of available slots in school play-centres was slower than the increase of number of primary school pupils, the "free capacity" (unoccupied slots/total slots in school play-centres) has been steadily decreasing over time. Whilst in 2010/2011, there were about 17 % of free slots, only 8 % of free capacity was available in 2016/2017. In a hypothetical case when the totality of primary school pupils would like to enrol in school play-centres, there would have been 210 671 missing slots in 2016, meaning that 37 % of the primary school pupils' cohort would not be admitted.

The total number of school play-centres has increased over time (from 3 979 school play-centres to 4 046) and their number converged to the number of schools (in 2010/2011, there were 144 schools more than school play-centres, compared to 2016/2017, when the difference decreased to 94), the increase was slower than the total number of pupils enrolled in them. As a result, the average "size" of school play-centres is increasing (from 62 participating pupils in 2010/2011 to 82 in 2016/2017).

Geographically, the proportion of pupils enrolled in the school play-centres varies significantly. In school year 2015/2016, in total 56 % of primary school pupils were enrolled in school play-centres, that is, approximately 2 in 5 pupils do not for any reason make use of this service. This proportion differs regionally – whilst the highest proportion of enrolled pupils is found in Prague (67 %), in the rest of the Republic it is between 47 % (Ústecký Region) and 60 % (Olomoucký Region).
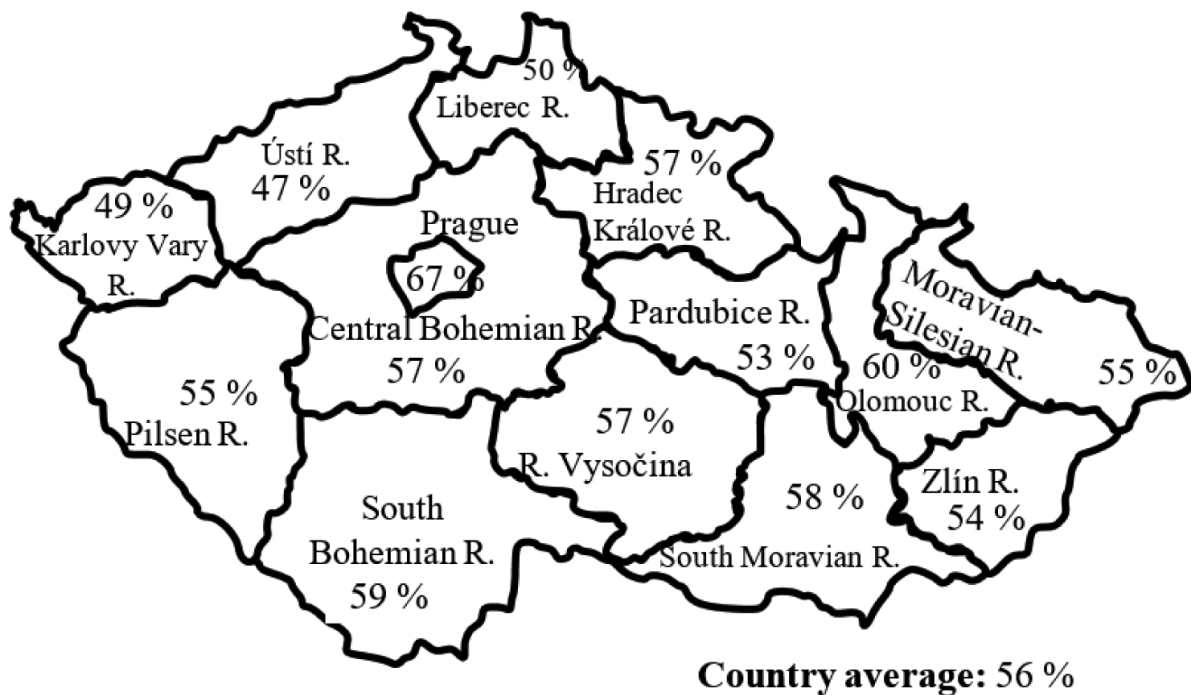
Figure 2. Regional overview – school play-centres enrolment rates (pupils enrolled in school play-centres / primary school pupils in the region, academic year 2015/2016).

Out of 4 046 school play-centres operating in academic year 2016/2017, almost 56,9 % had free slots, 35,7 % had their capacity full (no vacancies), and about 3,7 % of school play-centres even exceeded their capacity by allowing to enrol more pupils than the official capacity.[11] Excluding school play-centres, which were about to be closed (n = 148), the median utilisation rate (measured as number of enrolled participant divided by the total available slots of the afterschool facility) was 96 % and average utilisation rate 89 % (SD = 18 %) (see Figure 3). Vysočina region has proportionally most school play-centres with exceeded capacity (about 13 % of school play-centres located in this region are overfilled), on the other hand, most school play-centres with free slots can be found in Prague (about 82 %), which had overall 13 % of the free capacity slots left compared to the country average of free capacity slots (8 %). Despite the fact that Prague has highest enrolment rate in the regional comparison, its supply of school play-centres is the least used.

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[11] In such case, the school does not receive funding for these extra pupils and has to find the funds elsewhere.

Utilisation rates (2016/2017)
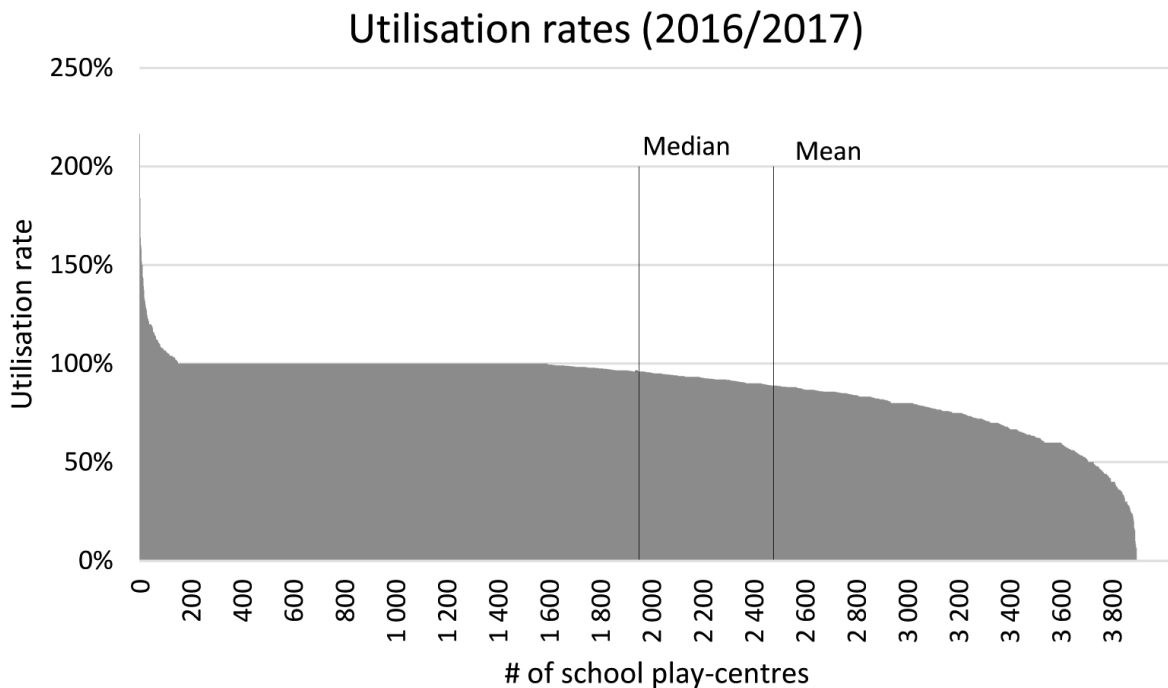
Figure 3. Utilisation rates of school play-centres (# enrolled participant / # available slots of the afterschool facility, academic year 2016/2017).

A significant indicator, which can also partly explain free slots in some school play-centres, was the enrolment rate (computed as number of pupils in school play-centre divided by number of pupils in the associated primary school; median 0,63; mean 0,68; standard deviation 0,31). As Figure 4 shows, this ratio varies significantly, in some schools the ratio is as low as 9 %, on the other hand, in about 3,8 % (n = 155) school play-clubs the ratio exceeds 100 %, which implies that in the particular school play-centre, also lower-secondary school children from other school(s) may be enrolled.

Enrolment rates of school play-centres (2016/2017)
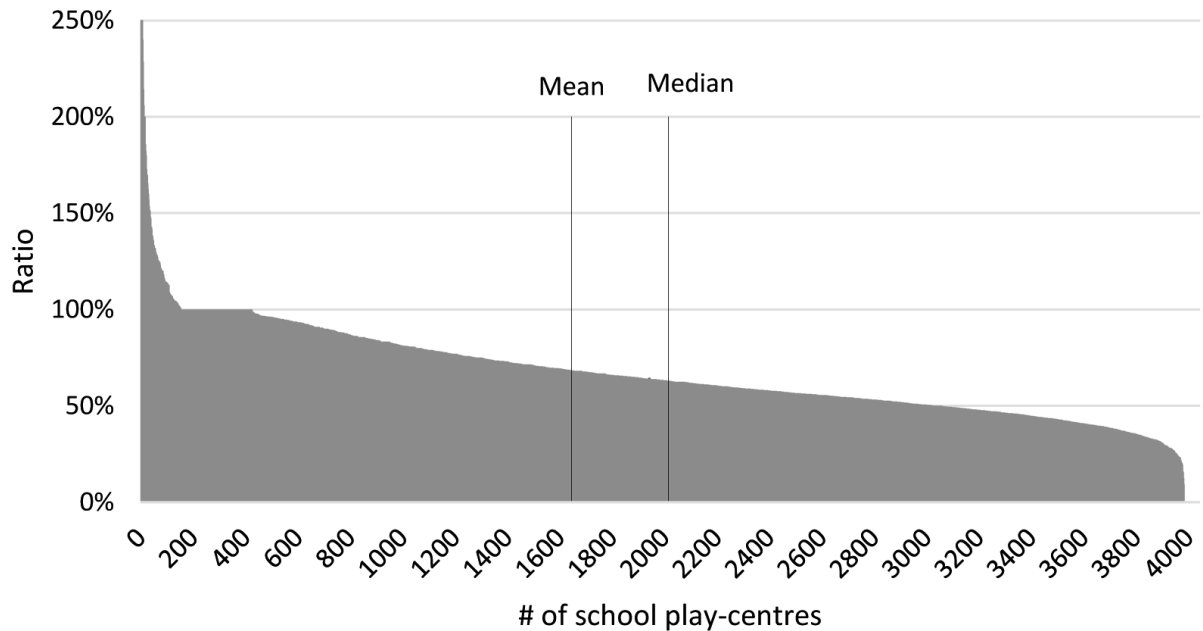
Figure 4. Enrolment rates of school play-centres (# pupils enrolled in school play-centre / # pupils in the associated primary school, academic year 2016/2017).

3.2   *School play-centres associated to schools in socially excluded areas*

To answer the second research question, further analysis focused on socially excluded areas, more specifically it compared school play-centres associated to schools in and outside of such areas. The list contained 96 schools operating in socially excluded areas, out of which three schools did not operate this afterschool care facility under their auspices.

Table 1

Comparison of school play-centres associated to schools in and outside of socially excluded areas

	Outside socially excluded areas	In socially excluded areas
Number of school play-centres	3 953	93
Mean of utilisation rates	89 %	81 %
Mean of enrolment rates[12]	59 %	43 %
Mean of number of slots in school play-centre / total number of primary school pupils of the associated school	64 %	53 %
Part of school play-centres with 100 % or more utilisation rates within the category[13]	40 %	29 %

Source: author's calculations based on MEYS data (academic year 2016/2017)

Data in table 1 show significant differences between school play-centres associated with schools in excluded and non-excluded areas. School play-centres in non-excluded areas are on average more utilized than school play-centres in segregated areas (on average, 11 % of available participant slots of school place-centres associated with schools in non-excluded areas is vacant compared to 19 % in segregated areas) and that is also reflected by the higher proportion of full or overloaded school play-centres associated with schools in non-excluded areas. A higher proportion of pupils from schools in non-segregated areas (compared to pupils of schools in segregated areas) participate in afterschool programs offered by their school play-centres.

4   Discussion

The analysis confirmed that this "traditional" facility for afterschool care for primary school children in the Czech education system is widespread and very common – most Czech basic schools incorporate the school play-centre as an integral part of their educational offer, and on average more than one in two pupils participates in the afterschool program offered by the school play-centre. It was observed that the proportion of available "free" slots in school

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[12] Enrolment rate of primary school pupils = number of subscribed participants / number of primary school pupils of the associated school.

[13] Part of SPs with 100 % or more utilisation rates = number of SPs with 100 % or more utilisation rate / total number of SPs within the category.

play-centres is decreasing.[14] On the other hand, demographic trends should also be taken into account when evaluating the degree to which the supply of available slots corresponds to the demand. One of the aims of 5-year term plan of development of the public education system (for 2015–2020) in the domain of education developing personal interests was the increase of school play-centres' capacities, which should "correspond to the pace of increase of primary school pupils" and which should "take into account the current repletion … of school play-centres." (MŠMT, 2015, p. 34). Overall, the analysis results seem to confirm that the plan is being filled on the nationwide scale, although the increase of capacities was somewhat slower than the increase in the number of pupils in primary education. According to the prognosis (ibid, p. 10), the number of primary school pupils should be culminating in 2017 and should start further decreasing. This means that even if the capacity of school play-centres is not going to increase in years-to-come, the current capacity should be sufficient for the future pupils' cohorts under the condition that the demographic forecast is accurate.[15]

The analysis also found significant regional differences in enrolment rates. The higher proportion of enrolled pupils in Prague may be partly explained by the characteristics of capital city population – parents living in Prague more often than parents living outside Prague have non-manual professions, with worktime rather later in the afternoon. In addition, many people have relocated to Prague because of job opportunities, and their parents, who could potentially take care of the primary school children after school, may live in other parts of the Czech Republic. As it would have been logistically difficult for grandparents to take care of the schoolchildren, parents in Prague may tend to make use of the school play-centres more often than parents in regions.

Although the overall number of available slots exceeds the demand, the geographic distribution of the "free" capacity is relatively unequal and almost 40 % of school play-centres are full or the number of subscribed participants exceeds the official capacity. This may lead to decreased availability of these facilities and further limitation of participation for certain pupils (e.g., on the

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[14] If the trends in number of enrolled pupils and the capacity were lineary extrapolated, the free capacity would (ceteris paribus) have reached 0 % in 2023/2024.

[15] Of course, the forecast may not include some unprecedented events like the big migration wave of immigrants coming to Europe in 2015, which could lead to the increase in the total number of pupils in basic schools.

basis of age, as described by Pospíšilová and Komínková, 2015, p. 17). The above findings suggest that more effective planning of capacities is desirable, and that all stakeholders included in the planning should cooperate more closely to avoid extremes (overfillment or high free capacity).

Hennessy and Donnelly (2005, p. 3) argue, that "…children living in socially and economically disadvantaged areas have been identified as standing to benefit (from after-school service) more than most other groups". Bearing this in mind, it would be desirable to assure the availability of such services especially in these disadvantaged areas, where children often do not spend their leisure time in a desired manner. The analysis showed that the utilisation rates of school play-centres in socially excluded areas are on average lower compared to other school play-centres, but also have substantially lower proportions of associated primary school's pupils participating in their afterschool programs. As observed by Kisker et al. (1991), low utilisation rates suggest that the available supply is more than adequate to meet parents' needs or that some parents who demand formal care are unable to access the current supply. To distinguish among these potential explanations, closer information on unmet demand for formal care by the parents of young children is necessary (p. 28). Especially in socially excluded areas, low utilisation rates could be caused by a lack of interest of the parents or by incorrect setting of the fee policies. Socially excluded areas are characterised by a high concentration of unemployed residents; thus, parents arguably have more available time to care of their children during out of school time and thus are not seeking afterschool care, at the same time, they may possess fewer financial resources to invest in such afterschool programs compared to employed parents. In order to attract more pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to the participation in the afterschool programs of school play-centres, it would be desirable to review the fee policies in school play-centres associated to schools in socially excluded areas to ensure that the fee does not represent an obstacle for participation. More research is needed to find out about the reasons of low utilisation rates on the demand side. Then, a "pull strategy" may be envisaged to increase the demand for unfilled slots, e. g. the teachers may try to motivate the parents to subscribe the pupils in the afterschool programs offered by their school play-centre.

Another factor influencing the participation in afterschool programes of school play-centres is the quality such programs. Previous studies (e.g.,

Hall & Gruber, 2007; Hirsch, Deutsch, & DuBois, 2011; Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007; Shernoff, 2010) indicated, that mere attendance of a specific afterschool program does not guarantee a positive impact on cognitive as well as non-cognitive areas, and that the quality of afterschool program is of great importance. According to Balková (2006, p. 9), the school play-centres should not be a mere "repository" of children assuring their surveillance in afterschool time. On top of that, the quality of provided afterschool programs can differ even within one school play-centre, e.g., Pospíšilová and Komínková (2015, p. 23) observed, that due to organisational reasons, some groups of pupils were excluded from using some parts of the school play-centre, which they viewed as unjust.[16] Thus, more research attention should be paid also to the quality of the afterschool programs provided by school play-centres and related effects of attendance on students' cognitive and non-cognitive characteristics should be further investigated. An interesting research problem also concerns the relationship between parents' decision to enrol their children in an afterschool program and (perceived) quality of afterschool program. One of the anonymous reviewers observed, that the quality of the afterschool programs may be especially important in the decision for the parents with higher SES, however, research evidence to support the claim in case of Czech school play-centres is yet to be presented.

Both in and outside of socially excluded areas, full or overloaded school play-centres were found, with higher proportion of such school play-centres outside excluded areas. Such high utilisation rates indicate that the supply just meets parents' needs or is insufficient to meet the needs of all parents desiring afterschool care for their children (Kisker et al., 1991, p. 28–29). Again, the demand for additional slots should be analysed on the local level and if it turns out to be relevant, the capacity of these school play-centres should be increased. Especially in the socially excluded areas, such situations should be avoided in order to grant access to afterschool programs to all eligible children.

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[16] The issue of the variable quality of school play-centres is also reflected by parents, e.g., on a forum www.rodina.cz. On one hand, parents reported that they pay "80 CZK per month, but actually, it is only about surveillance for a moment after school, no enrichment activities, nothing, for these we pay extra", on the other hand, parents also reported that they "pay 200 CZK per month, but I am a bit angry, because my son was not allowed in this year, but I have to say that they really care about children and my son loved the school play-centre… all-year competitions, painting, sports – he was not bored a moment."

One of the declared principles of the Czech education system is "to provide quality education accessible to all" (MŠMT, 2016, p. 8) and its objective is "to reduce inequalities by *strengthening* the quality of the whole education system" (ibid, p. 13). So far, the (research) focus in the Czech Republic was mainly on schools and school education, and less on other state-supervised facilities for afterschool care (i. e. school play-centres), which may also contribute to closing the achievement gap between pupils with different social backgrounds. The author hopes that this study will draw more (research) attention to this sometimes "neglected" institution of the Czech education system.

Moreover, for further research endeavours not only in this topic, the author would like to stress that much of data about the Czech education system centrally collected by the MEYS are *underutilized* (their deeper analyses are, to date, very scarce in the Czech scholarly journals) and the potential of their secondary analysis for research purposes is yet to be discovered. In the developed countries, huge datasets about the education system are available not only for internal purposes of the state authority, but they are often used by the researchers and analysts in the field of education. In France, for example, data are collected by the ministry and used for analyses by the employees of the ministry[17] as well as by university scholars. This study, which is based exclusively on data collected by the ministry, will hopefully inspire Czech researchers in education field to benefit more from the opportunity of analysing large datasets describing the Czech education system, as is usual abroad.

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[17] Examples of such analyses can be found at www.education.gouv.fr/pid34210/les-publications-de-la-depp.html

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Dostupnost českých školních družin

Abstrakt: Odborná literatura obecně hovoří o pozitivních efektech účasti v organizovaných volnočasových aktivitách. Ty jsou, kromě jiných aktérů, nabízeny českými školními družinami, které jsou tradiční součástí vzdělávacího systému a poskytují péči o žáky 1. stupně. Cílem příspěvku je analyzovat dostupnost (kapacitu, volná místa, míru zapsanosti žáků atd.) v družinách celkově a specificky v sociálně vyloučených lokalitách. Pro dosažení cílů byla analyzována data sbíraná centrálně Ministerstvem školství prostřednictvím výkonových výkazů. Celkově je kapacita školních družin dostatečná (přibližně 8 % volných míst není naplněno), nicméně tato kapacita je nerovnoměrně rozprostřena (přibližně 40 % družin je plných nebo překračují svoji kapacitu). Na základě těchto zjištění by mělo být plánování kapacity družin efektivnější. Míra využívání je v průměru nižší v sociálně vyloučených lokalitách a bylo by vhodné implementovat strategie pro zvyšování poptávky po volnočasových aktivitách nabízených družinami. Další výzkum by se měl zaměřit na kvalitu volnočasových programů nabízených družinami.

Klíčová slova: školní družiny, volnočasové programy, plánování ve vzdělávání, rovné příležitosti ve vzdělávání, sociálně vyloučené lokality
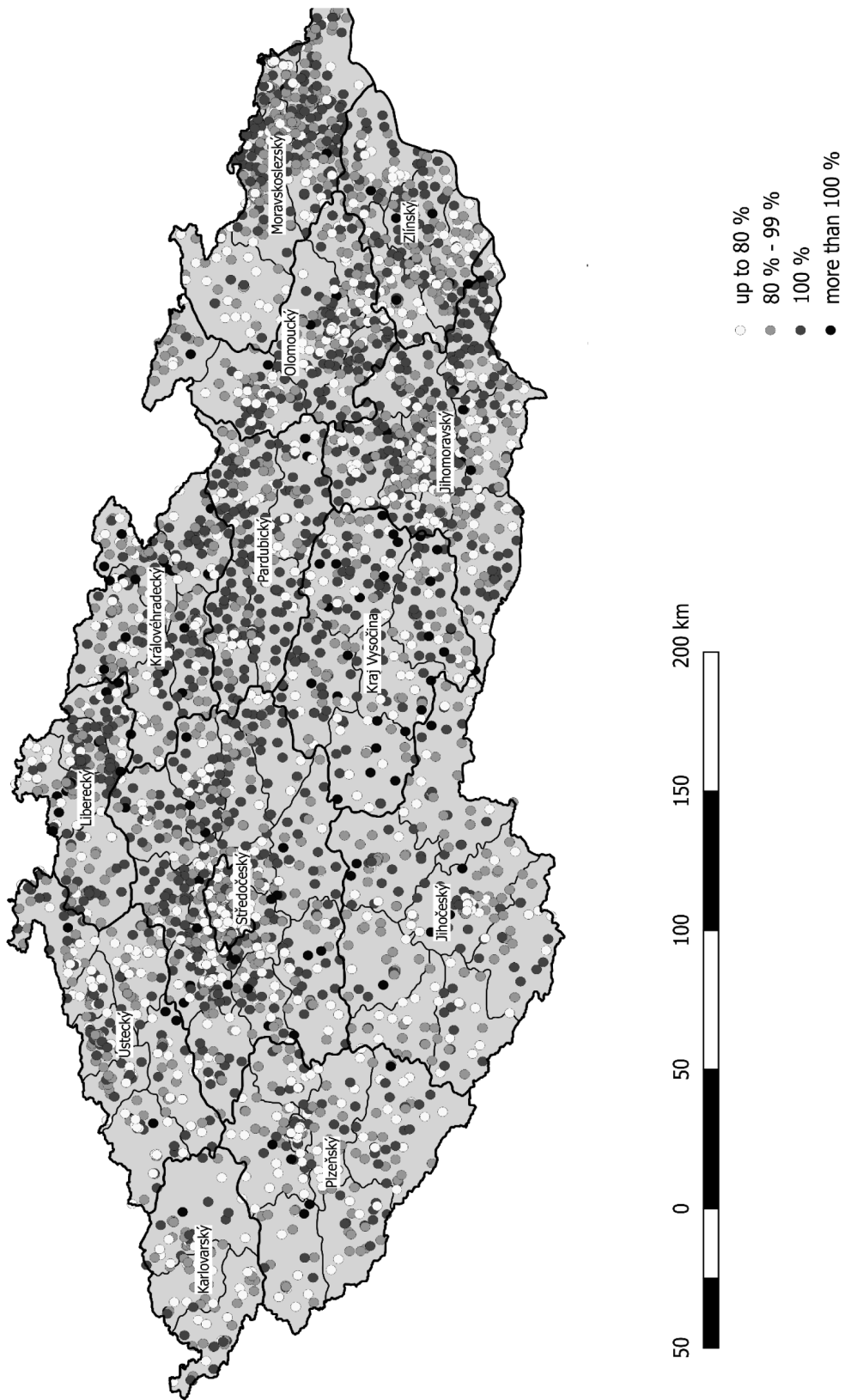
Appendix

Figure 5. Map of school play-centres according to utilisation rates. Source: MEYS, author.