Mobility Shortages During Financial Crisis.
Restrictive effects of income insufficiency

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Abstract: This paper presents the results and conclusions from a survey undertaken in Blagoevgrad municipality, Bulgaria, in May 2013. The aims were to reveal the dependencies between population mobility (within the urban areas and abroad) and the income shortages. The attention was focused on the question: are people less mobile in the conditions of crisis? Does it affect their daily life, their future incomes and habits? Does it affect the environment?

Keywords: mobility, crisis, changes, urban population, environment, trends

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on an author’s personal survey, held during May 2013. It concerned some economic and daily changes in people’s lives during the past few years. In the year 2013 the incomes kept loosing purchasing value (ranking last place in the whole European Union), unemployment hit levels of 13,8% and more than 456 000\(^1\) for a country with a population of 7 282 041\(^2\). Undoubtedly, there is an economic and financial crisis in Bulgaria at the present stage. The survey aims to reveal how people are driving, moving and travelling in these new conditions, which of their habits are changed, how these changes impact them, do they affect nature and economy etc.

2. METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research is based on the highly reliable statistical method, the method of sample-size surveys and the method of comparison. To achieve the best results, the most accurate

\(^1\) According to CROSS Agency, an article, based on the National Statistics Institute for 2013, title: “More than 456 000 unemployed for the first quarter of 2013” http://www.cross.bg/trimeschie-purvoto-vuzrast-1366246.html#axzz2Xy52Fwp1

\(^2\) According to National Statistics Institute for 2013, www.nsi.bg
sources of information are used. These are the data-bases of National Statistic Institute of Bulgaria. A sample size survey was held among 80 students, studying in Blagoevgrad and their families. Participants come from the whole country, living in villages, small and big towns. They live under the same legislative, tax, and social circumstances as all other Bulgarian people, which allow accepting the results as representative at a national level. This survey was anonymous and paper-based.

3. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper reveals part of the information received. All the answers and the results refer to the 12 months preceding the month of May 2013.

At the first stage we aimed to figure out the participant’s self-estimation about the dynamics of their lives. We asked them: “Do you consider you have a dynamic way of life?” The results are shown at Figure 1.

Subjectively, participants perceived themselves more like intensely moving, leading a relatively active lifestyle. This is understandable since the focus group of the study is comprised of young, regular students. Normally, the young lead most dynamic lifestyle.

The second stage of survey asked the participants if they use urban transport, and, if they do – how often?

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**Fig. 1** Do you consider you have a dynamic way of life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>□ not at all 10 %</th>
<th>□ not exactly 15 %</th>
<th>□ average 20 %</th>
<th>□ almost 25 %</th>
<th>□ yes, definitely 30 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Fig. 2** Do you use urban transport, and if you do - how often?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>□ no 88 %</th>
<th>□ yes How often?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ daily - 2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ 2 – 3 times in a week – 10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ a few times monthly – 0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results we received at this stage (Fig. 2) are far from representative at a national level. Obviously, the students in Blagoevgrad use urban transport **limitedly**. The possible hypotheses are:

- **Smaller distances** – Blagoevgrad is a small town with a population of approximately 100 000 people and the infrastructure – both social and technical, is centrally concentrated. There aren’t long distances to overcome.

- **High prices of the public transport** – they are comparable to these in the capital city of Sofia (Blagoevgrad - 0.80 BGN for one-way trip; Sofia - 1.00 BGN). In the same time, distances travelled are up to 10 times shorter, and the living standard is much lower.

- **Lack of a variety of lines and means of transport**. There are not more than 2 or 3 major bus lines. There is no subway or other means of urban transport.

- **Inexpediency**. This is very typical for most of the small towns in Bulgaria. There are no electronic signs to show the arrival time of the bus. This makes urban transport inconvenient, especially in hard climate conditions like hot summer and cold winter, typical for these latitudes.

- **Combination of reasons**. The most probable hypothesis is that the lack of usage of urban transportation among young people is a general reason, caused by the most of above-mentioned ones combined.

At **stage 3** we asked the participants: “Did the way you move drive and travel change during the last 12 months?”

About 5% of the participants provide answers such as:

- "I walk and ride a bike often"
- "I have a daily walk in the past few months"
- "Over the past year I try to avoid any transport as much as possible, and impel by walking”.

“Has not changed” - thus have answered the majority of participants (about **95%**). Probably the habit of walking, shared in the next phase of the study began earlier, before the last 12 months.

At **stage 4** the topic to reveal was: “Do you **walk** more often now, than you used to do in the past?” Here we intentionally missed to limit the period to the last 12 months, considering this will let participants compare easier the periods: “now, in the crisis” with “before the crisis”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>□ almost never</th>
<th>□ rarely</th>
<th>□ up to 2-3 times a week</th>
<th>□ every day</th>
<th>□ other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>98 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3 Do you walk more often now, than you used to do in the past?
The results of this phase of the study (Fig. 3) speak for themselves. In times of crisis the desire of reducing the cost of transport is evident.

The results of this stage only concern particularly urban environments, where distances are shorter. Walking requires good health and a little more free time (or better time management).

Preliminary results of the study confirmed the expected link between some qualitative and quantitative aspects of daily life.

The quantitative changes like: loss of income and purchasing power, cost of transport, etc. resulted in qualitative adjustments, such as: changes in the ways and habits of movement, choice of vehicles and others.

As a whole, during an economic crisis, people prefer the cheaper ways of transportation in urban environment. The survey confirmed our preliminary expectations. On one side – this is slower way of movement, like walking, instead of vehicles, as well as urban transport instead of personal car or a taxi. On the other side, these new habits are healthier and more environmentally friendly.

The other stages of the survey, their results and conclusions will be published soon.

4. REFERENCES

1. http://www.cross.bg/trimesechie-purvoto-vuzrast-1366246.html#axzz2Xy52Fwp1

2. www.nsi.bg