

Prague-Smíchov – Summary

The area of present day Smíchov, occupying the left bank of the Vltava River south of the Petřín Hill, was formed by the streams that flow in the western-eastern direction into the Vltava River and that sculpted the deep valleys.

The area of present day Smíchov has been continually occupied since the Neolithic period. Since the 14th century, the focal points of later urbanization, an older village Újezd and then a newly planted Smíchov, were located in a short distance from each other, in the plain not far from Vltava's bank, separated by the Motolský Stream. There were also homesteads scattered in the hills, and the landscape had for long centuries an agricultural character.

In the early modern period, the northern part of the present day cadaster of Smíchov, separated since the end of the 17th century from Prague's Malá Strana with a massive baroque fortification, was transformed into a recreation zone of the leading noble families, who built follies and villas with decorative gardens here. These recreation and representative complexes thus complemented – as they did in other metropolises – the structure of the settlements of the leading noble families. The original of Dientzenhofer's villa is the only one that remains to the present day, although only as a torso – it is known as Portheimka (named after the Porges of Portheim, family of entrepreneurs, who had purchased the complex in 1828.) These and other follies and gardens became social centers. Villa Bertramka serves as a good example from the end of the 18th century. It is well known thanks to visits by W. A. Mozart (in 1787 and in 1791). Later on, in the 1820s, the Kinský family built a villa on the hillside of Petřín; it dominated the surrounding romantic park.

Two islands (Dětský and Císařská louka) in the Vltava River are a part of the Smíchov cadaster. Smíchov's life was not as closely bound to the river as was the case of Podskali on the right bank – in spite of the existence of numerous mills and the Malostranská water work. However, without the adjacent river, Smíchov would never have in the 19th century become an industrial town.

The immediate vicinity of the metropolis and the close relationship that bound Smíchov to Prague influenced its formation in several different ways. The area of Smíchov, as well as the entire region of Prague, suffered significant damages several times in the course of the early modern period, especially during the siege of Prague and during repeated battles for the city (in 1611, in the course of the Thirty Year War, 1741–1742 as well as two years later, in 1757).

The 19th century brought a massive transformation: Smíchov became an industrial district. The growing importance of Smíchov was caused primarily by the development of textile, chemical and food industries. The most important operation in Smíchov, the factory making machines and wagons of František Ringhoffer, was founded later, in 1852. The brewery corporation, later called Staropramen, also developed successfully there. The rail road played an important role in the development of Smíchov. The train station of the Česká Západovní Line was opened in 1862 as the foundation of a quickly growing complex of train station, which filled the entire southern portion of the cadaster. Smíchov's leaders began, since the end of the first third of the century systematically to build public buildings. The flat areas of Smíchov were filled with continuous, several story high blocks of buildings; Smíchov was gaining an urban character.

What is extraordinary, in comparison with the majority of urban settlements in the Czech Republic, is that Smíchov lacks an unequivocal city center. And even though three squares were formed in the course of the 19th century, only one of them was of a medieval origin (Kostelní/Arbesovo Square) and, what is more, after some hesitation that lasted decades, it was not chosen to be the main public space of the new suburb (town). The new center was placed in the vicinity of the new Catholic Church (built 1881–1885) and the town hall (a reconstructed older building near the north-south road, present day Nádražní and Štefánikova Streets) – the square was later called 14. října Square.

In the rugged terrain of the valleys of the the Motolský and Radlický Streams and, generally, in the more elevated areas, the building boom did not begin until after the creation of Czechoslovakia and after the creation of Greater Prague 1920/1922). The roads, especially those going in the north-south direction, starting from Újezdská Gate in the direction of Zbraslav and of Plzeň, branching off from the aforementioned road at the intersection U Anděla, were for centuries the main axes of the urban development of Smíchov. In the second half of the 20th century, however, the planned development of transport infrastructure threatened to extinguish extensive parts of the district. These area reclamations were, however, realized only in part. Smíchov retained its industrial character; it transformed to serving primarily residential and commercial-administrative functions only at the turn of the 20th century. The industrial complexes were replaced by distinctive multi-story buildings serving office-commercial functions in the central part of Smíchov. The block called Zlatý Anděl, which dominates the historical intersection, had become its symbol. In relation to the metro station (Anděl /Moskevská/ opened in 1985) and along with the adjacent public space, at the beginning of the 21st century, it fulfills the function of the actual center of Smíchov. In the context of all of Prague, Smíchov is important for its traffic function and is characterized as a residential and administrative-commercial district.

Smíchov had since 1838 been a suburb (which was in 1849 designated the site of the district hetman) and since 1903 an independent town. In 1920 (effective in 1922) Smíchov became a part of Greater Prague. At the beginning of the 21st century, Smíchov is one of Prague's administrative districts; specifically, it is a part of Prague 5. In 2011, there were 33,172 inhabitants living on the area of 705.1 ha; the population density was 4,705 inhabitants per km². The local geographic name Smíchov comes probably from the personal name Smiech (which means laughter, gaiety), the name Smíchov, therefore, means belonging to Smiech (Smiechův) or to Smích (Smíchův). However, different interpretations exist as well. In 1993, an urban protected zone (of 220 ha) was created in Smíchov; it includes all of central Smíchov, the Malostranský Cemetery, the Kinský Garden and others.