



# Housing affordability, quality of life, and residential satisfaction in the Austrian cross-border suburban region of Bratislava, Slovakia

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## Abstract

*Bratislava's satellites have experienced massive development in recent years. The population of a regional centre has moved into its Slovak hinterland. However, Bratislava's cross-border suburbs have recorded spectacular population growth too. After 2008, housing in the EU became more affordable due to rising incomes and decreasing bank interest rates. Yet, the housing affordability index in the EU (and in the studied area) decreased in recent years due to increasing property prices and, more recently, a reverse tendency in bank interest rates. Through a questionnaire, we sought to establish a link between housing affordability and suburban residents' expected quality of life. We assumed that a large proportion of the population had moved here specifically for a higher quality of life (residential satisfaction) and more affordable housing. Indeed, these were among the most common reasons for moving, with a large proportion of respondents choosing at least one. The Mann-Whitney U test showed that residents who moved to the Austrian suburbs of Bratislava for affordable housing were more satisfied with living in the municipality and housing costs. The article tries to fill the gap in the literature on housing affordability in suburban areas and on the quality of life of cross-border suburban residents.*

**Keywords:** housing affordability, quality of suburban life, residential satisfaction, cross-border metropolitan region, suburbanisation, Bratislava, Slovakia, Austria

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## 1. Introduction

With border controls in the EU being mostly history, cross-border consumer and commercial mobility increased over time, although cross-border residential suburbanisation might still be a rarity in Europe at present. To mention a few, this list includes Luxembourg (Dörny & Decoville, 2016), Salzburg (Hamedinger, 2011; Chilla & Heugel, 2018; Štefkovičová & Koch, 2022) or the so-called Eurometropolis Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai at the French-Belgian border (Durand & Perrin, 2017). The Slovak capital, Bratislava, borders two countries which formed a single country in the past. The Bratislava granularity pulls many economically active inhabitants behind its boundaries and those of Slovakia. The Bratislava region's average annual GDP growth in recent decades was one of the most substantial across Europe (Eurostat, 2021a). It is primarily affected by the city's location within Slovakia and in transnational terms, as well as by other factors (Michálek & Výboštok, 2019). This growth relates to migration to the city and its hinterland.

The suburbanisation processes of Bratislava started in the mid-1990s (Šveda, 2019). Consequently, their intensity slowly accelerated and affected larger and broader areas around the city. The migration into Bratislava suburbs is driven by the city-core population and the population from other Slovak regions. These

groups differ in housing preferences, with the population from “the regions” preferring to live in areas with longer distances and commute times to Bratislava. The preference for housing location and quality is impacted mainly by housing (un)affordability.

Property prices in Slovakia have strongly increased in recent years (Datalan, 2022; see Fig. 1). That led to a warning from the European Systemic Risk Board (ESRB) on overpricing property prices in Slovakia and the vast indebtedness of households, even until retirement (Apolen, 2022). According to the letter, these factors might impact financial stability and lead to economic issues (ESRB, 2021). The increase in property prices, the de facto non-existing affordable public housing (Meyfroidt, 2017), the absence of regulations on private rental housing, and a slower increase in real incomes in the last five years have worsened housing affordability (Šveda et al., 2021, 12).

The first waves of Bratislava suburbanisation were related to a hunt for better housing and higher quality of life in rural areas (Šveda, 2019). Yet, recent migration waves to Bratislava suburbs might relate to worsening housing affordability in the city and its closest suburbs with excessive property prices (i.e. the first wave of intensive suburbanisation, according to Šuška et al., 2019).

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