

## **Greenfield investments in Budapest's environs**

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### **Introduction**

Budapest's shopping centres, built as a result of greenfield investments, are like the city itself: the city by night is impressive, but its daytime appearance less so. Many of our new city centres are formed basically by the retail centers. This is detrimental to the very foundation of a multicentral settlement. Although the opportunities for development of these big-box retail centers would be endless, the end result is negative. The open spaces provide the potential of practical, recreational usages. Shady pergolas covered by plants, benches, fountains, anything else could be easily placed along the facades, creating a more graceful transition from the urban landscape. Spectacular elements lure people towards the entrance gates, but leaving the inner city, in the direction of the suburbs we find dilapidated sites. According to the research carried out for this paper, problems arise both from within and outside.

### **Background and Literature Review**

After the political and economical changes of 1989, the shopping centers proliferated around the Hungarian capital. Initially they appeared mostly within the inner areas of the city, but after then they moved onto the city edge or totally out of the city's boundaries altogether. The initial, first generation period (the 1970s) can be characterized as the 10,000 square meter period (SKÁLA Budapest, Flórián). The second-generation centers of the 90s increased in. But even these did not cross the 100,000 square meter threshold, nor did they organize into a thematic retail park system (Dékány T., 2001). In the middle of the 90s they begin to move out from the inner part of the city to the urban edge. Urban plazas were established partly at this time (Eurocenter, Lurdy, WestEnd etc.). Development then took place at the western boundaries of Budapest (Törökbálint, Shopping City Center, Budaörs with its „Commercial Gold Triangle“, and at the other city gates (towards Budakalász, or Fót or Soroksár).

The shopping centers over 20,000 square meters required an environmental impact assessment to get the environmental license (later the new regulation (Gov. Decree No. 20/2001. (II. 14.) on EIA) decreases this size to half). The settlement plans in that time did not require the SEA process (environmental assessment for plans and programs), because this environmental instrument was practically unknown yet, as the SEA process was required only after 2005. The consequence of this deficiency was that the developments next could expand in the city outskirts areas to extreme sizes, and reach the size of a postmodern “thematic park” category (X generation shopping centers), far above even the 100,000 square meter limit. Naturally, the differentiation of land develops the rest of the zones: the shopping center zones are

situated between the urban habitats and the logistic and industrial centers, drawing the city's centre outward (Kiss G. 2004). City edge centers are mostly of the centralized type, according to Dawson's categorization (Sikos T. T. 2004).

The growing of the newly built-up areas influenced the green area too, as shown in the study of Studio Metropolitana carried out in 2006 that was based on satellite image uptakes (Gábor-Jombach-Ongjerth 2006). The increase in the intensity of green surface was perceivable only in the housing estates' areas – around the residential parks and shopping centers it decreased, particularly in the agglomeration. Interestingly, the authors concluded that even in the 15-year period some sites suffered green surface intensity loss, but some green surface increased at other areas, like parks around the housing estates built under the socialism. The authors asked: it is possible that the green surface will increase over time in new locations like shopping centers after some decades?

### Goals and objectives

The green areas, considering that they were designed under socialism, were done with relative care. Planting of trees was done in an evenhanded way, if not qualitatively, at least quantitatively. Since then, many green areas may also be renewed. The main questions are:

- do the commercial centers fulfill the conditions mentioned above?
- are these trade centers suitable / sustainable the way they were built?
- do they have green reserves sufficient for them to become new "green islands" in the next 15 years?
- does their design offer the potential for increasing the area of green space for the future?

### Method and case studies for the Budapest area

The main centers were located in areas around the capital's fringe.

Parameters for the case studies:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— how is the accessibility (<i>motorized, not motorized, public transport</i>)?</li> <li>— is there a good structure for exploration?</li> <li>— are there continuous green areas?</li> <li>— how is the vegetation maintained?</li> <li>— are there any disturbing elements causing visual pollution? (Figure 6).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— how does it fit to the structure of the town? (<i>surfaces and structures</i>),</li> <li>— how does it fit to the city's edge?</li> <li>— Is the remaining area heterogeneous or is it a sort of theme park?</li> </ul> |
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## Results

Examining the significant sites in Budapest and its agglomeration, we find an exaggerated functionality. Weeks or months after the opening of a site, deterioration can already be seen. The consequences of a cost-saving approach to construction show up quickly after the opening.



**Figure. 1. a) Dust and asphalt around a new pink coloured metal box (shopping centre)– Construction of the AUCHAN at the boundary of North Buda; b) Closed pedestrian entry at Fót Shopping City Center (photos: József László Molnár)**

### *Vegetation surrounding areas*

From a distance the bushes look green, but upon close examination we can find garbage; and the pedestrian traffic contributes to deterioration of the lawn surfaces. The area adjacent area, slated for construction, is covered with weeds or crops such as sunflower, rape and corn from the previous harvest. The condition of most crops is weak, sickly and neglected. Automatic irrigation systems are out of order, a lot of the vegetation dries out quickly, the waters drain away, and the asphalt makes the air hot.



**Figure. 2. CORA Center at Fót with park-like conditions, compared to the everlasting monotony of AUCHAN Budaörs (photos: József László Molnár)**

### *Vegetation - car park afforestation*

In the parking space the conditions of the trees are miserable, and does not change with the years.



**Figure. 3** The “desert“ of Elektroworld’s parking lot at Budaörs, compared to the lush conditions at Cora in Fót (photos: József László Molnár)

### *Inner structure and circulation*

The opportunities for pedestrians are limited (*Figure 3.b*), the pedestrian paths do not even lead where they should, the paths are unbelievably chequered, and access to public transport is missing. There are no facilities for bicycle parking.

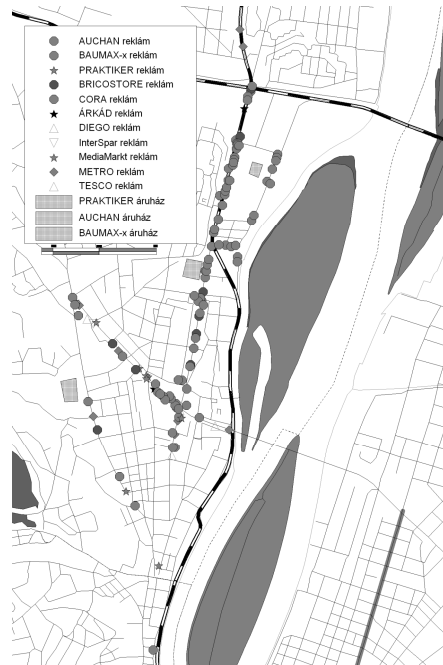
### *Visual pollution*

Visual pollution has several components. The sight of the building is bare, the numerous billboards can be found soon several kilometers before the shopping centers (*and around it*). The light pollution is rapidly increasing (*Kolláth, 2008*).

### *Settlement structure*

The inner structure problems mean more significant troubles because these enormous buildings destroy the traditional, historical construction of the settlement. The missing vegetation could soften and relieve the harshness of the new buildings and help them fit better into the existing built environment. We see examples from history of large, conspicuous new buildings having to be fitted into an existing site (i.e. a castle or fortress). The post-industrial civilisation has produced its own specific structure, even in Hungary. They proliferated following the political transformation in the form of mass commercial quarters which are organized around the settlement’s edge sites, forming “thematic park”-like ones. The whole idea of organic growth and construction has been neglected. Parking lots dominate, rather than streets. It’s a homogeneous space, which does not at all conform to the traditional settlement construction – it is a negative space designed only to promote consumption. The roads are defined by the site’s inner construction, or for directing

mass traffic in and out – to the detriment of all else. A variety of heights and planes around the box-like building is minimal. “Space” is formed by the undifferentiated mass of the boxes, the monotonous structures and surfaces (typically: sheet metal casing. The new unit can never become an organic part of the adjoining settlement. Its access roads can be used only with motor vehicles (as the pedestrian road actually leads nowhere). The “negative space” invasion has far-reaching negative effect well into the more valuable areas of the city.



**Figure. 4. Visual pollution caused by billboards around Praktiker, Obi and Auchan in district III. (edited by József László Molnár)**

These adverse changes may be felt for kilometres around, since these establishments flood the nearby settlements with advertisements to draw business from the city.



**Figure. 5. a / b . New widespread monotonic greenfield areas at the south-eastern (Soroksár) and at the north part of Budapest agglomeration [Budakalász and Fót] (source Google Maps)**

## Discussion and conclusion

The research explored the need for measures to save the characteristic elements of the landscape in the peri- and suburban areas, which are quickly vanishing away. The green area indicators of new establishments varies widely. Most of them are poorly designed green spaces. The functional green surfaces and public spaces are missing, and the traffic construction is completely subordinate to the motorization. The rehabilitation of the surrounding areas is deficient. It is very poorly fitted into the existing settlement structure.



**Figure 6. Same place? New town centres with more greenways? Development area under the Törökugrató-Hill in 1995 compared with the Terrapark Office and Housing Center greenfield investment area in 2006 (upper image) (photos: József László Molnár)**

It is verifiable that the building of greenfield trade centers of the last two decades has taken place with little or no care for the environment. The planning principles are not based on sustainable development. The developments were not steps towards a healthier city. Instead, they generated new problems for planners to solve. The “humanization” of these sites is necessary with the tools at the disposal of the landscape architecture profession, since it is not the process of greenfield investment that is a failure, but rather, its implementation

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