

THE REGENERATION OF A HUNGARIAN CITY CENTRE FROM THE 1990s TILL NOWADAYS

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Abstract: In the first part of this paper, I would like to introduce the renewal of some Hungarian historical cities. The reconstruction of Debrecen's city core is discussed in detail in the next part. As regards the paper's topic it deals mainly with the renewal of the built environment. In Debrecen's case the preparation of the city centre's regeneration began in the 1990s and bigger morphological changes could happen only during the last one and a half decade. Naturally those changes, which have led to the city centre's alteration have had effect on the city's development and its future possibilities as well.

Key words: urban regeneration, city renewal, built environment, city morphology,

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INTRODUCTION - SOME WORDS ABOUT THE BACKGROUND OF THE INNER CITY AREAS' REGENERATION

Every essay which deals with the city renewal usually tries to give certain definitions in relation to city regeneration. We usually mean by this the declined quarters' houses, public institutions and their infrastructure's restoration and reconstruction, when we try to maintain the area's typical texture, building method and the valuable part of its building stock (Egedy and Kovács, 2005).

City regenerations occur mainly in those areas where old decayed houses and their surroundings need renovation and modernization. Sometimes the infrastructure of these areas are also insufficient and out-of-date. The major part of the houses was usually built in these districts before the World War II. Smaller size, fewer rooms, lower comfort and often the unhealthy environment are the general features of these buildings. Because of these circumstances primarily the low-income families, which are in bad conditions remain in these districts. Because of the unfavourable demographic figure (e.g. aging population, the high rate of people with low-income and lower school qualification), the local authorities have to face with different social problems (the question of aids, illegal house occupations, crime, etc.).

Since an area's physical restoration does not go with automatically the area's revaluation and its rise, so real success can be achieved only by the social, economic and physical regeneration's common, integrated adoption (Egedy, 2009). Consequently, the renewal itself is a complex, multi-factor, complicated process. Every person's careful and concerted work is needed

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in this process. Different organizations and people can participate in it (local authorities, designers, technicians, contractors, people who work for protection of historic buildings or in city development, lawyers, different civil organizations, etc.). A complex plan of action of city development should be worked out, which can help in the projects' achievement. Nowadays the ideas and plans of renewal or regeneration / rehabilitation do not concentrate only on the buildings' renovation and the alteration of the city construction, but the social and environmental questions connected with the quality of life are getting bigger and bigger importance (Kondor, 2007).

The renewal of a quarter can increase its competitiveness considerably and can improve the perspective of the quarter's development in the future. An ordered environment with a modern, well built infrastructure attracts the investors as well. A settlement's attractive force and its success can be measured by different objective index-numbers. Such a numerical item can be the increase of the real estates' price, the number of the investments, the different (cultural) programmes, the growing of the tourist attractive force and the improving statistical data of the population. The enhancement of value of a quarter can be measurable well by the number of people of higher classes who move into this area. In this case the urban regeneration can lead to almost the entire exchange of the population. We usually call this phenomenon gentrification.

CITY REGENERATION IN HUNGARY

In Hungary, in comparison with the Western European countries, the city regeneration (or renewal), which is an important section of the modern urbanization, was developed late. In contrast with the North American and Western European cities, there was not paid yet the required attention to the regeneration of the historical city centres of the Hungarian cities in the 1960s and 1970s.

After some failed attempts the regeneration project of Middle Ferencváros in Budapest started in the second half of the 1980s. Although the project was suspended during the change of the political regime, but the district already decided to continue it at the beginning of the 1990s. It was a necessary step because by that time, from the technical-physical, social and economic point of view, the whole district's one of the characteristic features was the advanced decay of the urban texture and its prestige decreased a lot (Bajnai, 2007). It also played role in the continuation of the regeneration that after the privatisation lots of real estates could be left in the local authority's property (Meggyesi, 2005).

During the area's regeneration one part of the buildings was partly or entirely renovated, in the place of the neglected and demolished buildings new houses were built, the public places were also renewed and the local services grew and it has a higher quality now. On the vacant sites usually dwelling houses, commercial or cultural institutions were built. The financing of the project was ensured by the sales of these vacant sites and it was also important that the biggest part of this project was carried out by private firms (Kovács, 2005). Beside the participation of private capital, the carrying out of the regeneration project was supported considerably by the sources of the capital city's regeneration funds (Tomay, 2010). Seeing the success of this regeneration project the involved area was later expanded. The Middle Ferencváros regeneration, which is quoted frequently in the scientific literature, is considered (among others) by the experts the most successful project and this regeneration has given example for every other similar project in Hungary.

During the last more than twenty-five years, which has passed since the change of regime, many regeneration projects were launched in Budapest's other districts as well. Similar to Middle Ferencváros, the considerable part of the flats remained in the local authority's property in Újpest, where the regeneration could start only in the second half of the 1990s. In Middle Józsefváros the regeneration started with chosen buildings' restoration at the end of this decade. Later the regeneration continued in the Magdolna-district, which finally completed in the Corvin Promenade Project (Egedy, 2008). Naturally it can be an important goal from the point of view of the local authorities that with minimum effort can get spectacular success. The case of Middle Józsefváros

can be an example for it, where beside the better opinion the local management also expected that the regeneration would have positive effect on the district's demography processes (Egedy, 2005).

Owing to the different developments, which were realized in Budapest's inner quarters, we could be witnesses the slow revaluation of the building plots and the real estates in the last one and a half decade. One of its sign is the big developments, which have appeared in the 19th and 20th century-built inner city surroundings and which have brought with itself not only the residential buildings but office blocks and big supermarkets as well (Csizmady, 2010.).

There were some other attempts on the regeneration of the Hungarian historical city centres in the 1980s. One of the best known examples from this decade is the regeneration of the centre of Győr. The success of this regeneration could come from the fact that it happened with state guidance and financing. The Hungarian city renewal projects' characteristic feature was that "these programmes focused expressly on the restoration of the built environment at that time" (Egedy, 2009, pp. 70-71).

Based partly on the successful and later completed city regeneration projects in the country towns (Eger, Győr, Pécs, etc.) we can say that the renewal of the historical centres of these cities before the change of the political regime could help them to preserve their prestige both as dwelling places and business quarter and these areas did not deteriorate to such an extent as some quarters in Budapest (Erő, 2005).

Although the regeneration of the historical city centres (mainly because of financial reasons) stopped short at the period of the change of regime, then (connected with the better economic circumstances) it started again in the second half of the 1990s and it changed up after the millennium. The restoration of some Hungarian cities' city centre (Debrecen, Székesfehérvár, Miskolc, Nyíregyháza, Sopron, etc.) can support this process (Egedy, 2009).

Naturally the reconstruction projects had to be fitted into the settlements' short or long term development concepts. After the change of the political system, the fast headway of the business and financial sector could be observed in the inner cities of the Central European countries (Enyedi, 1998). In the hope of the fast returns the city centres' plots with good conditions could get easily new owners within a short time. Since the beginning of the 1990s lots of modern office blocks, bank buildings and shopping centres, which contrasted with the old, tumbledown buildings of the city centre, have been built in Hungary, as well. The market economy's institutions (commercial banks, shopping centres, the headquarters of transnational companies, etc.) have been occupying bigger and bigger areas within the central parts of the cities and they have also often entered deep into the inner zone of the dwelling-houses. To quote Enyedi: "the new institutions, while they often violate the usually weak restrictions of city planning, they look for, because of prestige reasons, the city centre's symbolic parts with high status" (Enyedi, 2007, p. 17).

In recognition of the historic city centre's regeneration, Győr won the Europa Nostra Award in 1989. The reconstruction works in the city continued in the 1990s. Owing to the renovation, the renewed and newly built houses became more and more colourful and interesting in Győr (Winkler and Kurcsics, 1999; Egedy, 2007). In the reconstruction projects, instead of public financing (as opposed to the previous method) the private capital has played bigger and bigger role from the '90s. The renewal of the city centre was also helped by the fact that the houses and flats were in a high rate in the hand of the local authority. One of the local features was that (if it was possible) the residents' view was also asked in some questions. The success of the renewal in Győr can be traced back to the fact that the city already had a modern and professional reconstruction strategy in the 1980s, which got ahead of its age and whose principles are valid in practice till now (Egedy, 2007).

The strengthening of the tourist positions has played important role during the execution of the restoration projects in Pécs. Similarly to other Hungarian cities, it was also noticeable that the places of the old fashioned one-storied houses were occupied by modern block of freehold flats. On the first floor of these buildings different kind of shops were formed in many cases. "The historical city centre of Pécs with its changing functions, slowly changing population and attractive continually modernizing environmental culture becomes more attractive investment area" (Tóth, 2007, p. 260).

The regeneration and the spectacular rebuilding of the city centre of Szeged (in conformity with the quarter's detailed development plan) took place between 1998 and 2003 and it was the first step of a long-term restoration project. The renewal of Szeged's inner city was promoted by the fact (which could be also observed in the case of some restoration projects in Budapest) that the majority of the real estates was in the ownership of the local authority. The historical centre's detailed development plan was finished in 2000 and in the same year the authority regulated by decree the protection of the local built heritage, as well (Egedy, 2007). "Szeged's city centre's renewal is one of the most beautiful examples in Hungary" (Egedy, 2009, p. 122). It shows the international appreciation of the city restoration, that Szeged got the European Union's Prize for Cultural Heritage (Europa Nostra Award) in 2003.

During the last decades the Hungarian city centres have usually undergone quite spectacular transformation. "The process of renewal is not only the market transition's returns, but very often the local policy also helps it with its prestigious-like investments and main square projects" (Kovács, 2008, p. 16).

THE REGENERATION OF THE CITY CENTRE OF DEBRECEN

The historical city centre of Debrecen has been formed as a result of an organic development spanning several centuries. The genuine network of roads and streets, despite the destruction it had been subjected to during the time of World War II, was easily discernible in the maps drawn even after 1945. The area of the former settlement core, which is identified as the historical city centre of Debrecen, was also transformed as a consequence of the major construction projects implemented in the city during the 1970s and 1980s. The residential buildings and blocks of flats built in that period with the technology dubbed LPS (large-panel system) appeared at several sections of the historical city centre of Debrecen. As a result of the less than thoroughly considered interventions, the street blocks of the historical city centre were significantly disrupted at several locations, while the age-old network of streets disappeared, and the morphological features also changed. Due to these alterations, a part of the historical city centre got not only transformed but was also "modernized". The most recent consequence of this is that, in the case of certain individual city centre residential areas, because of the transformation mentioned above, the use of the attribute "historical" sounds quite anachronistic today. LPS blocks of tenement buildings were constructed in the north-western (in and around the street called Bethlen utca [Bethlen Street]) and the south-eastern (the area of Wesselényi lakótelep) parts of the former city centre, as well as at certain sections of the streets Kandia, Klaipeda, Burgundia and Csapó. These constructions had an effect not only on the inner parts of the historical city centre but also on its former boundary-line, which used to be the area of the corresponding fortification and ditch, the result of which has been that it is rather difficult to even recognize the borderlines around the former city centre that used to be the historical city centre.

Well before the establishment of the trail followed by the so-called nyugati kiskörút [western (minor) circuit], the Municipal Government had passed a general assembly resolution on the denomination of the various parts of Debrecen (Debrecen Municipal Government Resolution 92/2004. /IV. 22./ és 282/2005. /XI. 17./ Kh. on the Denomination of Parts of Debrecen). According to this resolution, and referring to the changes taking place in the previous decades, the official Belváros [City centre] was, in fact, "the middle part of the ancient city", whose boundary was marked by the streets Mester utca – Hunyadi utca – Rákóczi utca – Burgundia utca – Klaipeda utca – Sumen utca – Wesselényi utca – Erzsébet utca as well as the newly emerging formation identified as western circuit (Papp, 2007). [Although the name "western (minor) circuit" is widely used, it is a collective noun, which refers to those streets that form the western boundary of Belváros].

Pursuant to the provisions in this General Assembly Resolution, the term Belváros today officially refers only to the area bordered by the so-called kiskörutak [minor circuits]. (Although the establishment of western circuit has not been completed yet, its emerging shape gradually reflects the western borderline of this district). The traditional small-town quarters located between

the minor circuits and the former fortification line (which used to belong to the historical city centre previously), are identified today in official statistics as traditionally constructed inner residential area. At the north-western and south-eastern parts of the former settlement core, there are blocks of flats today, which are called lakótelep in Hungarian. The former of these comprises the southern part of the current Vénkert and Libakert, while the latter makes up Wesselényi lakótelep.

THE CONDITION OF DEBRECEN'S INNER CITY BEFORE THE REGENERATION (1960-1980)

In the decades following the Second World War, there was a housing shortage in Debrecen. The destruction caused by the war was obviously responsible for this situation but the majority of the housing facilities available in the 1950s and 1960s was also outdated and badly in need of renovation. In order to satisfy the growing demand, it was necessary to initiate a shift in general attitude on the one hand, while on the other hand, new industrial construction technologies had to be introduced. By the 1960s and 1970s, the focus on quality had been replaced by the demand for quantity and speed. "As a result of the expectation to build as many flats as possible and as fast as possible, the construction of new flats came to the fore, while the maintenance or the renovation of the already available housing facilities was put on the back burner, due to partly financial, partly considerational reasons" (Béres, 1996, p. 71). While in the 1970s and '80s, huge sections of blocks of flats were constructed in various non-central parts (like, for example, Dobozi lakótelep as well as Vénkerti and Újkerti lakótelep-s in the 1970s, and then Tócsókerti lakótelep in the 1980s), a large part of the city centre area was under a construction ban. The idea behind the construction ban was that the municipality was planning a later reconstruction of individual parts of the city centre area in order to increase the built-up density by constructing LPS high-rises to replace the old and outdated single-storey buildings. In the end, the complete reconstruction of the city centre area, despite what had been planned, "was implemented only partially because of the high demolition ratio" (Süli-Zakar, 1996, p. 249). One of the negative consequences of the construction ban, which had been in effect until 1981, was the reduction of the volume of real-estate turnover and the onset of unfavorable demographic processes. What triggered the unfavorable demographic processes was the fact that the outdated and decaying city centre residential environment could satisfy the citizens' demands less and less (Szűcs, 1978). All this meant that the deterioration of the physical environment was followed by a social deterioration. As a result, a phenomenon that was also prevalent in other Hungarian cities could be observed here; namely, the restructuring of the inhabitants. To quote Kovács: "the economically active, more educated, young(er) layers with higher income brackets moved to the new blocks of flats (...); replacing them, appeared the older generations with lower incomes (old-age pensioners), and the ethnic minority". The author also points out that, in a certain part of the city centre section, there is a high risk for the development of ethnic segregation and for a potential process of ghettoization (Kovács, 1998, pp. 129., 131).

In the decades preceding the change of the political regime in the 1990s, the inner settlement core lost quite a lot of its significance as a residential area. At the same time, however, most of the municipal institutions and the commercial establishments continued to remain here. Most members of the population took care of their matters of official nature as well as of their major shopping activities in city centre Debrecen (at least, before the advent of the major shopping malls and commercial centres, which were built next to the busy thoroughfares). This, however, with the growth of automobile saturation, led to frequent traffic jams during rush hours, while parking difficulties also became a problematic issue in the city centre (Süli-Zakar, 1996).

Although, as a result of the major construction projects of the 1970s and 1980s, the overall structure of the city had undergone a significant transformation, due to a relatively minor degree of the destruction of the historical settlement core, "the ring-shaped radial structure of the city, which was regarded to be a part of its traditional historical legacy, did not change fundamentally" (Süli-Zakar, 1996, p. 249). I would also agree with the contention of Zoltán Kovács, according to which one of the main reasons for the deterioration of city centre areas in Hungarian cities was the effect

of official municipal and residential policies developed and practiced during the decades preceding the change of the political system in the 1990s (Kovács, 1998).

THE SITUATION OF THE CITY CENTRE BETWEEN THE 1990S AND THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

In Debrecen, at the beginning of the 1990s, apart from the need to take action about a growing number of the old and outdated buildings that required either renovation or demolition, it was also necessary to repair public grounds, to reform the system of local transportation, and to raise the level of provision and services, as well as to stop the deterioration of demographic trends (including an ageing population, emigration, etc.). The declining economic condition of Hungary at the beginning of the 1990s (resulting from the loss of the eastern markets, the closing down of plants and factories, the increasing unemployment, the general lack of financial stability, the growing costs driven by inflation, etc.) also resulted in a difficult situation for the municipality of Debrecen as well.

Although there were instances of building reconstructions in the section of the city under scrutiny, a complex program for rehabilitating the city centre area could not be launched in the midst of the economic difficulties listed above. What is more, as time passed by, the overall situation got even worse because of the growing numbers of automobiles and the canceled or postponed infrastructural developments. A few years after the change of the political regime, one could read that “the city centre, just like other parts of the city centre area, is in a rundown and dilapidated condition, and it is also burdened with unsolved problems of road traffic and transportation” (Süli-Zakar, 1994, p. 207). Experts involved in researching the city of Debrecen pointed out the necessity of pulling down the “outdated buildings which cannot be used any more”, the significance of opening up new streets that make it possible to explore inner areas and, thus, the launching of necessary developments. They concluded that the problems listed “could be ultimately solved effectively depending on the recovery of the economy” (Süli-Zakar, 1994, p. 208).

Recognizing the necessity for introducing changes, the General Assembly of the city committed itself to city centre block regeneration in a resolution at the beginning of 1993 (Kozma, 1999). In the next couple of years, “the municipal leadership endeavored to establish the funds and the institutional background required for the proper implementation of the projects, as well as to prepare the plans for reconstructing the city centre area” (Kozma, 1999, p. 75). Among other things some plans were born in relation to the main street’s northern part’s closing and about the forming of a pedestrian zone in 1990s. Some of them were about the reconstruction of minor squares in the centre as well. But the local government neither under its own power nor from external state sources could find the necessary money for developments.

However, because of the economic hardships mentioned above, the majority of the Hungarian settlements in the middle of the 1990s had to focus almost exclusively on the preservation of their operability and ensuring the viability of their institutions. Since the successful regeneration of the individual districts and the implementation of urban regeneration is “primarily, a financial issue”, to quote Kondor, the municipal government had to be patient and wait before launching the necessary projects (Kondor, 2007, p. 74). In this period, there was less money allocated for cultural developments, and the advancement of tourism in the city was definitely less than desirable (Süli-Zakar and Kecskés, 2014).

THE TRANSFORMATION OF DEBRECEN’S CITY CENTRE: STEPS TAKEN IN URBAN REGENERATION

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PEDESTRIAN ZONES AND STREETS

The first half of the 1990s was not exactly the best time period for implementing major infrastructural investments or urban regeneration programs. Amidst financial pressures, the most the municipal government was able to cover in the city centre section was preservation and condition maintenance, with a few occasional instances of building or façade reconstruction.

It was at the beginning of the 1990s that Batthyány Street, connecting Kossuth and Szent Anna streets, was designated to be a pedestrian street (as the very first of its kind in the city centre area). When redesigning it, ample emphasis was laid on introducing urban green spaces, installing various items of street furniture, and redecorating the buildings, in addition to laying the special paving stones. There are, among others, facilities like a restaurant, a tea house, a confectioner's, a travel agent's, a bookstore, and a clockmaker's operating now in Batthyány Street. Its name has come up repeatedly in the past couple of years during the course of the city block rearrangement related to Gambrinus köz [Gambrinus Passage-way]. However, for quite a long time after the inauguration of the first pedestrian street, there were not a lot of similar projects.

In Debrecen, just like in the case of other Hungarian cities, special significance was attached to the reconstruction of the main street (main square) of the settlement. A salient feature about the street structure forming through the urban development of Debrecen was that there was no genuine central square developing in the city centre. Instead of a market square, there was a market street, which broadened into a square only in front of Református Nagytemplom [Reformed Great Church] (formerly Szent András templom [St. Andrew Church], then András templom [Andrew Church]). The problem about this on the one hand was that, in the historical settlement core, there was no central square or space where the citizens or tourists could take their time to sit down in order to chat a little or just take a few minutes' rest, etc. On the other hand, however, the real problematic aspect was that Piac Street [Market Street, the actual main street of Debrecen], which broadened into a square in front of the building of Great Church, had suffered from the environmental burden of ever growing traffic for several decades. Finally, it was at the end of the 1990s that the opportunity for redesigning this area became available for the municipal leadership. According to their plans, a main square was to be created in the centre of the city in which, by way of increasing the public green space, people could relax, have fun, and recharge their batteries through participating in colorful activities. As a matter of course, this resulted in the banning of vehicles from the central area with the exception of tram traffic. (It was, in fact, the closure of traffic in the upper part of Piac Street, which used to be the north-south transportation axis in the city of Debrecen, that made it necessary to build the western circuit.) The reconstruction works commenced in the year 2000, and the (new) main square of the city was inaugurated as early as less than a year afterwards (figure 1).

Thus, the first, truly important, step in urban regeneration was the inauguration of the main square (officially: Kossuth tér [Kossuth Square]) in 2001. The establishment of the main square itself created a new tourist destination in the heart of the city. Besides the building of Reformed Great Church, which is considered to be the symbol of the city (and a significant place of interest itself for the tourists), the square was also fitted with new public space elements. Among these, the most notable ones are the municipal coat-of-arms in front of the renovated Kossuth Statue, the glass pyramid constructed next to Great Church (as part of the reconstruction of the remnants of the former church building in what is called Romkert [Garden of Ruins]), and the two fountains built in Renaissance style. The newly installed green areas, together with the fountains are expected to facilitate the recreation efforts of not only the local inhabitants but also those of the tourists and visitors. "The intention of the municipal government and the architects preparing the reconstruction plans was evident. They endeavored to enhance the historicizing effect of the main square of Debrecen through the new public space items as well as to create an environment for the major cultural events hosted or organized by the city" (Biczó, 2005, p. 88). Naturally, when designing a public space like a square, a lot depends on the intention of the architect responsible for it concerning what kind of (potentially new) role he or she assigns to the reconstructed or rebuilt area or what kind of new additional functions he or she would like to introduce into the project. For example, in the course of establishing a main square, "urban planning can help by creating an environment that produces an ambiance for engendering a sense of community" (Lukovich, 1997, p. 124). Thanks to the alterations, Debrecen's renascent (or rather, perhaps, newly created) main square became suitable for hosting cultural events of varying magnitude.

During the past fifteen years, the square has been the site for numerous cultural, touristic, sports, etc. events (including military tattoos, choir contests named after Béla Bartók, book-week events, events related to the annual flower festival, streetball tournaments, ice skating events, etc.). Apart from these, memorial services and meetings as well as political rallies can also be held on the square. One of the former functions of the (main) square is revived through holding a fair before Christmas. An indication of the growth of the touristic significance of this area is indicated by the fact that there were several coffee houses and restaurants opened here in the time period mentioned above.

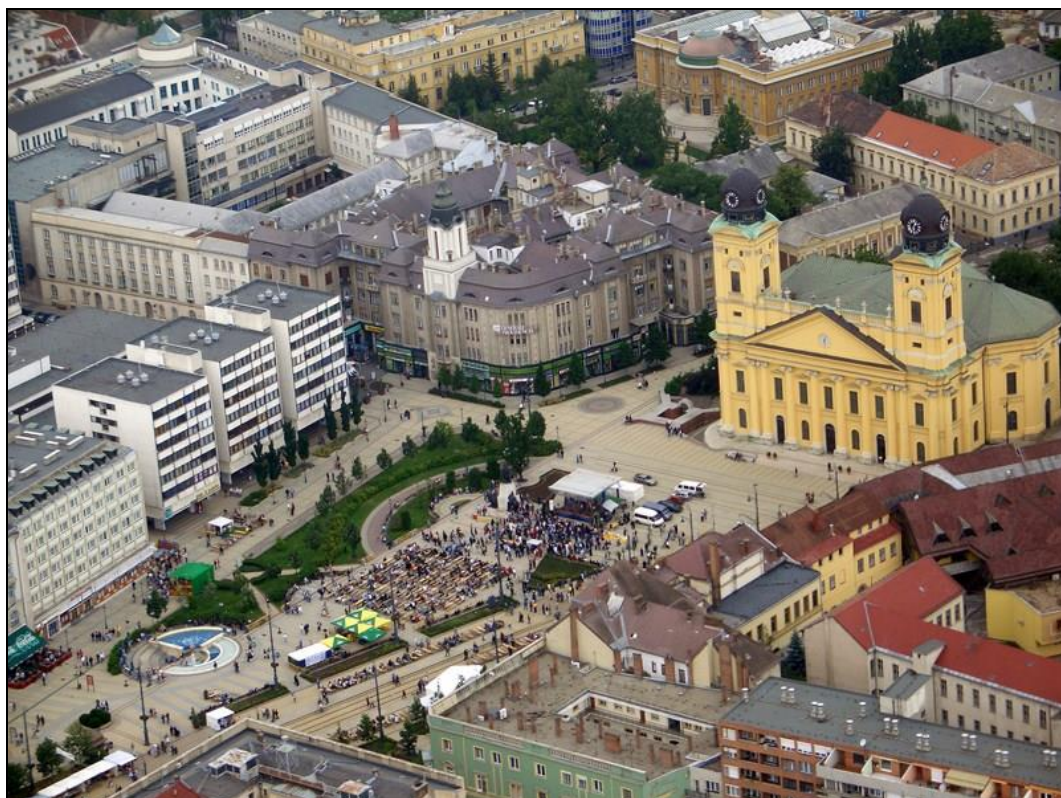


Figure 1. Renewed city centre with the Reformed Great Church ¹

The green spaces and parks in the vicinity of the main square have an important recreational and touristic role. Kálvin [Calvin] Square (i.e., the area comprising Emlékkert [Memorial Garden] and Romkert [Garden of Ruins]), located right next to the main square, has undergone a significant alteration and reconstruction recently. The project related to the functional expansion of Debrecen's city centre was launched in 2009. As an organic part of this project, the reconstruction of the area behind Great Church was completed in 2011. It involved the restoration of the lawn and plants as well as the installation of walkways, new benches, and lighting fixtures. Beyond the refurbishment of Garden of Ruins, there were new service providers (an art gallery and a coffee house) opened here. In addition, the area of the redesigned park is now protected from uncongenial nocturnal visitors with a wrought iron fence.

Close to Kálvin Square, there are two other public squares: Déri Square and Baltazár Dezső Square. Both of these are connected to prominent cultural institutions. Déri Square houses Déri Múzeum [Déri Museum], while Baltazár Dezső Square provides the visitors of the art gallery

¹ www.pulykanapok.hu

MODEM (among others) with possibilities for recreation and repose. In the case of Déri Square, the primary objective of the alterations was to retain its original function of providing recreation and tranquility. Its reconstruction was completed after the inauguration of the main square. In addition to the restoration of the green spaces and the overhaul of the bubbler, the old benches were replaced with new ones. Baltazár Dezső Square is one of the most recently built public squares in Debrecen, which displays signs of modern architectural concepts. Its genesis is closely connected to the building complex housing Kölcsey Központ [Kölcsey Centre] and MODEM [an acronym of Modern Művészetek, Hungarian for Modern Arts]. Among other things, it serves as the open-air venue for accommodating cultural events hosted by the institutions mentioned above.

During the course of the past couple of years, there have been several other streets and public squares renovated or created (within the framework of function expanding urban regeneration projects). The transformation of a part of Csapó Street has also been partially related to the (re)shaping of the main square. Even more important than that has been the introduction of a pedestrian zone between the streets Vár and Rákóczi. A good opportunity for these transformations was provided by the construction of the monumental building of the shopping mall called Fórum. In this modern pedestrian zone, which evokes a Mediterranean atmosphere in the summer, the old buildings are gradually restored and the stores offer new kinds of services. The pedestrian zone no longer serves as a location for the former street market. Some of the street vendors have moved into the building of the new Nagypiac [Big Market], while a part of the former flower market has been relocated to the area between Vár Street and Piac Street.

Another one of the most recently established pedestrian zones of the city centre area comprises the street Simonffy utca and the neighboring area of Hal köz [Hal Passage-way]. The touristic appeal of both of these locations has grown significantly. Following their recent renovation, the twin tenement buildings of Simonffy Street now display their original beauty: apart from the restoration of their facades, the roof structures have also been overhauled and the former turrets have been replaced, too. The reconstruction of the upper part of Simonffy Street was completed in 2004, while the redesigned and expanded Hal Passage-way area was opened for the general public in 2010. In addition to the new pavement, modern benches and lighting fixtures were also installed. Along Simonffy Street, a single file of trees were planted, whereas Hal Passage-way was fitted with a spectacular fountain. It should also be noted that during the course of these alterations and pedestrianization, a new access was also opened directly between Hal Passage-way and Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Street.

Consequently, all this definitely increased real estate values in the immediate neighborhood on the one hand, while on the other hand it also meant that the area could become part and parcel of the overall touristic package offered by the city centre. An impressive development recently has been the proliferation of coffee houses with patios and terraces for the customers to sit outside. The words in a recently published study also seem to support this, stating that although the most popular and frequented location for restaurants and other types of catering businesses is Piac Street, more and more of these have appeared in smaller streets, too (OTP Hungaro-Projekt Kft.) (figure 2). On the basis of the above facts and the outstanding role of the city centre area, it is not at all surprising that the relative value of shops and businesses of catering here is the highest in the city of Debrecen (Euro-Régió Ház Kht., 2008).

This neighborhood is also fairly popular among those who intend to buy a flat or an apartment. More and more of the old and crumbly buildings are getting replaced by new and fashionable condos. The development project covering Simonffy Street also includes the restoration of its stretch between Hal Passage-way and western circuit. During the course of the investment process that started at the beginning of 2014, the road surface has been repaired, together with the sidewalk, while the old plants have also been replaced with new ones.

A task for the near future will be the reconstruction of Petőfi Square, a square located “at the southern gate” of the city centre area. As I have pointed out earlier, although there have been developments implemented during the course of the past few years, “the square in its entirety still

reflects a rundown condition even now”. In addition, in its present condition, the square attracts shady and untrustworthy characters from the nearby railway station (Nagyállomás [Big Station]) and its surroundings. Naturally, it is also important what sort of an image it is that arrivals at the railway station usually get about this part of the city and what their first impressions happen to be (Kecskés, 2011). A solution for this problem may be the establishment of the so-called intermodal community transport centre, as the area of and around Nagyállomás is planned to be significantly transformed and modernized through its construction. According to the current plans, there will be an opportunity at that time for the proper reconstruction of Petőfi Square.²



Figure 2. Simonffy Street with its coffee bars is one of the most popular places in the city centre

It is important in connection with the regeneration of the city centre area that, “through the establishment of pedestrian zones and streets, there should be an urban design that, at least partially, resurrects the former ambiance of Debrecen, in which both the members of the local population and the visitors from other locations to the city feel fine” (Süli-Zakar, 1994, p. 225).

URBAN BLOCK CONNECTIONS AND BLOCK REGENERATIONS IN DEBRECEN’S CITY CENTRE

The part of the city centre area in which the (more or less single-storey) houses of the inner residential circle are located, displayed a generally lower level of saturation before the turn of the millennium as compared to the other districts. A study published in 1996 notes that “there are quite a few lots in the city centre area that have significant parts still available behind the residential

² www.dehir.hu 2015.07.24.

buildings". The study also adds that most of these lot parts are used by the inhabitants or by the owners as vegetable gardens (Béres, 1996, p. 84).

During the past fifteen or twenty years, not only the streets, public squares, and individual buildings have been restored but there have been block connections and block regenerations implemented as well. I do not wish to repeat here the formerly included definition concerning block connections and block regenerations but note that an integral part of it is related to the rational utilization or recycling of the usually rundown and not properly used inner parts of the lots.

In the case of the Batthyány Street pedestrian zone, which was inaugurated in 1994 (and which for a long time used to be the single public area of this kind in the city centre section), the inner yards were explored, repaired and, in many cases, connected. As a continuation of this effort, a plan was prepared about the stretch between Gambrinus Passage-way and Batthyány Street for pulling down the dilapidated backyards and the relevant crumbling building parts and for constructing a passageway between the two areas. As a part of the regeneration of this neighborhood, the surrounding real estate property pieces were also to be restored and new parking places to be established.

In Debrecen, the first area destined to undergo the process of block regeneration following the change of the political regime was the zone bordered by Révész Square – Széchenyi Street – Mácsai Sándor Street – Arany János Street – and Piac Street. At the relevant section of Széchenyi Street, there were several run-down residential buildings demolished as early as during the second half of the 1990s. The building complex housing Táblabíróóság [Regional High Court] was then constructed in what used to be a part of this zone. Nevertheless, even today, almost twenty (!) years after the demolition of the old buildings, there are still unused and empty lots in this city centre part.

As a consequence of the block connections opened in the area of Hal Passage-way, "the price of the hitherto unkempt but favorably located buildings has gone up" (Szinyei, 1998, p. 82). Here, it is the coffee shops, galleries, etc., that provide new perspectives for development. It is also true for Debrecen that "due to the fact that the streetfront real estate pieces in the city centre area are all occupied, there is an enhanced investment attention observable concerning the yards, with an eye to the possibilities of how to build them in. This is also true for minor commercial, catering, office, and service providing business functions as well as for building homes" (Tóth, 2007, p. 259). In Piac Street, too, there have been more and more inner yards restored or renovated during the course of the past couple of years. There are small business streets established behind the streetfront gates. At various parts of the city centre, several building restoration projects have been implemented and the portal structures of a number of old buildings have been renovated.

In the central part of Debrecen, one of the most significant block regeneration effort has been launched in the zone bordered by the streets Arany János Street – Piac Street – Miklós Street. Through the course of the rehabilitation of the so-called Apolló tömb (which was named after the movie theater situated on the corner of Piac and Miklós), the objectives were to build in the empty lot located behind the movie theater and to construct a new shopping mall and an underground parking garage, among others. This investment project was supposed to facilitate the provision of those living in the vicinity and to alleviate the parking issues. The foundation stone of the institution that was named Apolló Superior was laid in September 2008 but (as opposed to the original plans), out of the three projected buildings of the commercial centre, only the one on Miklós Street has been completed. For the most part, the building of Apolló Üzletház [Apollo Business House] is empty today, and the planned restoration of the façade of the movie theater is also lagging behind schedule. The investing legal entity has explained the reason for the delay and the stopping of the construction through "lack of interest in the commercial centre".³

As part of the block reconstruction at the location of the former market hall, the construction of the building of Debrecen Fórum Kulturális és Kereskedelmi Központ [Debrecen Forum Cultural and Commercial Centre] was completed in 2008. The grandiose building of Fórum

³ www.dehir.hu 2012.08.27.

indicates its leading role in the commercial life of Debrecen through its impressive size and parameters. Debrecen's new marketplace was then built next to Fórum, which has taken its original place, to replace the old and outdated two-level parking facility. It was officially opened at the beginning of 2008. It was also within the framework of the same block reconstruction project that Pulykakakas Üzlet- és Irodaház [Gobbler Business and Office Centre], in which commercial enterprises, service providers, residential apartments, and offices are located was completed (Euro-Régió Ház Kht. 2008). These construction projects have immensely influenced the morphology of this section of the city.

MORPHOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE CITY CENTRE OF DEBRECEN

From the time of the change of the political regime onwards, and as a result of the political and socio-economical transformations, there have also been significant changes in the urban planning and construction of Hungarian settlements (primarily, the cities). As of the beginning of the 1990s, instead of the centrally planned huge blocks of flats, built with LPS technology, there have been more and more condominiums and houses, constructed by private building contractors primarily out of brick. During the past ten or twenty years, there emerged and became widespread the so-called (gated) residential communities, too, which strengthened (voluntary) social segregation. Concerning the regeneration projects of city centre or inner city areas, the general practice (primarily, in Budapest, but also in several major cities apart from the capital) has been that, for the majority of the extremely outdated and run-down buildings, the only solution left was partial or full demolition. At certain locations, it was possible to initiate block regeneration and infill residential development of vacant lots between existing buildings. In the time period under scrutiny, the proportion of constructing continuous (unbroken) developments of multi-storey buildings in the cities grew considerably. This is due partly to infill residential development, partly to the practice that, in order to replace old single-storey buildings, multi-storey buildings were constructed. In the city centre areas or of some of our provincial towns, the typical single-storey houses are now mostly replaced with multi-storey condominiums, apartment or tenement buildings, community buildings, or office buildings. (Several, mostly deteriorated, detached houses were pulled down in Debrecen around the streets Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Street and Pásti Street. Their places were taken over by 2 or 3 storey high apartment buildings. As regards the location of the former single-storey market hall, there is a high-rise shopping centre there today.) The urban regeneration projects that aimed at transforming and developing the inner-city areas have, to a considerable extent, managed to change the morphological features of these areas. Although these projects did not always fully appeal to everybody (by which I mean aesthetic differences in taste), the relevant statement, according to which "with more advanced technologies and building materials, more aesthetically appealing buildings of higher quality are constructed" is generally true (Csapó, 2005, p. 22).

In Debrecen, the characteristic feature of the central section of Piac Street and its surroundings is exactly continuous (unbroken) developments of multi-storey buildings. The typically 3 or 4-storey high buildings of this relatively small area (city centre or settlement core) were mostly built at the end of the 19th or at the beginning of the 20th century. These buildings (Püspöki palota [Bishop's Palace], Vármegyeháza [County Hall], Arany Bika Szálló [Golden Bull Hotel], etc.) are rather heterogeneous from the aspect of architectural style. The "modern" buildings of the settlement core were, almost without exception, constructed after the Second World War, in lieu of those destroyed during the war. Quite a lot of these are located in the vicinity of the railway station (Nagyállomás), which was bombed, on nearby Petőfi Square and in its immediate neighborhood. During the past decades, the buildings in the central part of the city centre area (primarily, on Piac Street) have retained their original form (with the exception of some minor or major alterations). The urban regeneration efforts of recent years have had a number of different effects on these buildings. A part of these buildings have been renovated (wherever it became necessary) and, if it was possible, a building reconstruction also took place. It was in the framework of this that the turrets of the twin tenement building on the corner of Piac

and Simonffy streets were restored and the beautiful portals of the former tenement building on the corner of Piac and Kossuth streets were repaired. There were also cases when the restoration went hand in hand with a shift in function. An example for this could be the building of Fazekas Mihály Általános iskola [Mihály Fazekas Elementary School] on Simonffy Street, in the case of which the building was transformed as part of the urban regeneration project. The Ifjúsági Ház [Youth Centre] located and operating here hosts, among others, an office for the prevention of and providing information on drug abuse, but the community spaces of the building are also regularly used by civilian societies, artistic ensembles, clubs, and other societies.⁴

Related to the urban regeneration projects of the past few years, there has been a number of new shopping centres, office complexes, and residential buildings completed in the central part of the city. Perhaps, one of the most controversial buildings among these is the huge block-like edifice of Fórum shopping centre, due mainly to its sheer size. One of the characteristic features of Debrecen's city centre is that 3 or 4-storey high buildings, constructed before the Second World War, are located almost along the main street and in one or two side streets, branching off it. As one moves further away from Piac Street, the number of storeys of the buildings decreases drastically.

In the area making up the old historical urban core, there are still some examples of the old single-storey *cívís* [roughly: middle-class, specifically in the city of Debrecen] houses that are typical of small towns. A few of these are located in the streets called Hatvan, Széchenyi, and Miklós, and in the smaller side streets (Garay, Csók, Zsák) or in their immediate vicinity. However, the buildings located here (in a way similar to the city centre part) are rather heterogeneous from the aspects of architectural value and their general condition (figure 3).



Figure 3. Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Street with old single-storey middle-class houses.

The road with the pavement and plants were renewed in the near past

⁴ www.ifihazdebrecen.hu

Apart from the old *cívus* houses, there are also less valuable single-storey houses here, which are very often not fitted with all modern conveniences. Quite a few of these have been pulled down during the course of the more recent construction projects (related partly to the urban regeneration program) and the setting of the route for western circuit. There are street parts (like, for example, a section of Bethlen Street) where entire rows of houses were replaced in past years. What Ferenc Erdei noted back at the beginning of the 1970s concerning how in Debrecen (and in Szeged, too) “the atmosphere of the old middle-class houses” is retained only by a few short street sections is still valid and true today (Erdei, 1974, p. 123). The demolitions were primarily aimed at the houses of neglected condition and without modern conveniences. They have been mostly replaced by condominiums of two or three storeys but there are also large and vacant lots left empty and still waiting for potential future investors.



Figure 4. A typical (renewed) dwelling house in Jászai Mari Street

The block development method in Debrecen (just like in most of the other Hungarian cities) spread after the Second World War, especially as of the 1960s. Although the construction technology changed several times (brick – prefabricated panel – brick), what is common in these buildings is that they were originally planned to be fully residential. However, it can very often be the case today that, in one part of the buildings, the lower levels (especially the ground floor) apartments are rented out for the purpose of rendering business services, operating as office venues or doctor’s surgeries and waiting rooms. In the past couple of years, wherever they could afford it, a proportion of these buildings have been renovated, and their mechanical and heating systems were upgraded. In general, it may be stated that the buildings that were produced as blocks in Debrecen’s city centre miniature blocks of flats could be regarded as a novelty (concerning their morphological features) and oftentimes did not fully harmonize with their environment. Their

presence in the specific parts of the city centre area, however, has become less conspicuous by now, and a sharp contrast between them and their neighborhood can be noticed only where these high-rises are located in streets where there are also older houses or vacant lots. Typical examples for block development in Debrecen would include the neighborhood of Jászai Mari Street and Vármegeyháza Street, as well as the streets called Bethlen, Hajó, and Csetete (figure 4).

In the historical city centre, there are also occasional terraced houses, too. A characteristic feature of the houses in this category is the continuous (unbroken) rows and that there is a small front garden in front of them. Houses of this kind can be either single-storey or two, maybe, even three storey high. Another one of their salient features is that although this mode of construction had also been present in Hungary beforehand, they became popular again around the time of the change of the political regime.

THE CONTINUATION OF URBAN REGENERATION: IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

According to Új Főnix Terv [New Phoenix Plan], which was announced and presented in June 2016, within the European Union budget period ending in 2020, there are going to be development-related investments in the value of HUF 200 billion implemented at various parts of the city. As it is made clear in the plan, which may be regarded as the city's own vision of the future, a part of these investments are going to effect the city centre area as well.

As regards the so-called constructed environment of the city centre, there are going to be expansions administered to the pedestrian zones therein, public squares are planned to be restored and/or transformed, and buildings will be reconstructed, too. The actual plans for converting the areas around Dósa nádor Square and the Csapó Street block. As it is evident in the intention of the municipal leadership, the principle identified as "from grey to green" is going to be followed, and there would be an even more expanded pedestrian area in the city centre parts concerned, with more green areas (Zöld Város Projekt [Green City Project]). Besides decreasing the parking space at ground surface level, there would be two new underground parking garages built. Work on renovating the building of the old town hall would be resumed, while the Csapó Street flower market would be restored and a music block (with a concert hall included in it) would be created in this area.⁵

New Phoenix Plan lays substantial emphasis on implementing cultural developments. Apart from the Csapó Street concert hall mentioned above, there are also plans for renovating the buildings of Csokonai Színház [Csokonai Theater] and Kodály Zoltán Zeneművészeti Szakgimnázium és Zeneiskola (Zenede) [Music School] on the corner of Csapó Street and Vár Street. For this latter renovation, the budget is around HUF 500 million and the work would be launched and implemented in 2017 and 2018.⁶ Among the plans, there is also an intention for completing the long-awaited theater called Latinovits Színház in the building complex of the shopping centre Fórum. The projected cultural developments may assist Debrecen in winning the title European Capital of Culture by 2023.

An important element of New Phoenix Plan is about the upgrading of the transport connections and facilities in our city, together with the related construction projects. At the gate to the city centre, a so-called intermodal transport centre would be established. Besides the construction of a new railway station, this would significantly improve the accessibility of Debrecen: among other things, the main railroad line (number 100) running into the city would be modernized and a direct road access would be established between the railway station and the airport. There would also be a modern transportation hub created close to the centre of the city. As part of this investment, it would also be possible to improve community transport facilities as well. In New Phoenix Plan, there would be as much as HUF 21 billion allocated for the completion of the new railway station. This is supposed to be one of the largest investments of

⁵ www.haon.hu 2016.08.25.

⁶ www.debrecenizenede.hu

the near future, which is also a part of urban development. (I have to refer to the fact that similarly to other Hungarian cities, the last years' developments – in contrast with the previous projects – could mainly be realised by the assistance of the European Union.) The construction of the station and the additional buildings will definitely result in further morphological transformations in the area concerned.

The ring road embracing the city centre will be fully completed through the construction of the northern section of western circuit. The section between Hatvan Street - Bethlen Street - Mester Street, constituting the third phase of the project, may also function as an alternative route for motorists. This section will hopefully decrease the traffic load and the time required to cover the same distance as well. Concerning the completion of this section, an amount of HUF 1.3 billion has been allocated for the purpose in Településfejlesztési Operatív Program [Settlement Development Operative Program] (www.ikk.hu). The construction and completion of this section will be finished in the near future.

New Phoenix Plan also contains the development of the local network bicycle routes, too. The central part of the city (and the major residential areas) are relatively well accessible by bicycle. Perhaps, this is the reason for the fact that future developments focus not so much on the city centre but rather on the parts at the edge of the city and in the suburbs. The developments detailed in New Phoenix Plan are also highly significant from the aspect of tourism in the city.

According to Mayor László Papp, the vision contained in New Phoenix Plan “will surely and definitely determine the image and future of Debrecen”.⁷

SUMMARY

In Hungary it can be traced back that, because of the failure of investments and developments, the environment's deterioration could be observed in the case of many cities and quarters at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. The negative effects occurred to an increased degree in the city centres. In the majority of the Hungarian cities the centres surrounding inner residential quarters (apart from some exceptions) declined in value by the time of the transition. In order to make the city centres more attractive for the investors (using of the international examples as well) it became necessary to elaborate the city restoration plans. In connection with the urban regeneration there were some experimentative attempts in the 1980s, but in fact progress could happen in this respect only after the change of the political regime (Egedy and Kovács, 2005).

At turn of the 1980-90 (similar to other Hungarian cities) the considerable part of Debrecen's city centre showed neglected, shabby-looking image and the regeneration of the area became more and more urgent. The process of regeneration could begin slowly when the economic situation became more difficult. While mainly the stagnation was typical in the early '90s, from the end of this decade the signs of progress became visible. From this time (in connection with the regeneration and modernization of the built environment) significant changes have happened. We could be the witnesses of these changes, from which some of them also had an effect on the city centre in the last 15-20 years. The forming of the main square between 2000 and 2001 was the first significant city regeneration project in Debrecen. Many reconstructions and process of constructions (in connection with the city renewal) have happened and are going on in this part of the city, as well. In the case of Debrecen, the block and building renewals usually connected with the forming of a (new) pedestrian precinct or zone. The birth of the main square anticipated the forming of the western minor circuit. The construction works alongside the western circuit also help the alteration of this quarter and its further development.

The city's morphological features changed a lot during the last decades, as well. The city centre's spectacular renewal and its different quarters' functional alteration has been lasting up to now.

The centre's regeneration has promoted the modernization of the infrastructure and it has also made important changes in the traffic conditions.

⁷ www.dehir.hu 2016.06.14.

We can conclude that similarly to other European and Hungarian cities' alteration Debrecen's city centre's renewal has taken place in the same way. Beside the reconstruction of the built surroundings and the infrastructure, in many cases the buildings and squares' function has also changed a lot. They often have got more new function, which can be known as function broadening city regeneration. In the case of Debrecen we could observe that because of the effect of more liveable surroundings, the social opinion of these areas has become better and real estates' value have become also higher. All this helped the moving of the educated people with higher income in the inner quarters. This phenomenon is called gentrification.

The city of Debrecen underwent so important alteration during the last almost twenty-five years, which can have influence on the image of the city and the direction of its development in the future, too. Since Debrecen's city centre's alteration (the regeneration of some inner quarters) have not finished yet so the city's renewal and its effects have further possibilities of research in store for those experts who would like to deal with this topic.

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