

HUNGARIAN CHALLENGES OF HOUSING BLOCK REGENERATION: A CASE STUDY OF URÁNVÁROS, CITY OF PÉCS

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Abstract

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As post-socialist suburbanisation is about to decline, and the buildings of cities start to age rapidly, more and more attention is focused on city rehabilitation in East-Central Europe as well, which will probably be continued in the near future by the rehabilitation of early housing estates. Through an example, the current study shows the challenges such an action faces. Based on the comparison of demands with scenarios that were drawn up from data bases originating from a diverse methodology, it appears that the most reasonable idea would be to generally apply the basic principles of diversification and selecto-concentration, but the uniqueness of individual housing blocks requires that planning is done on an individual basis.

Key words

Regeneration, planning, East-Central Europe, housing estates, selecto-concentration

1. Introduction

Just like the declining trend of suburbanisation – and associated city diffusion – (Duany et al. 2000; Bajmócy and Györki 2012), re-urbanisation is another feature that can be observed in Hungary (Szirmai 2011). New urbanism, green design, healthy communities etc. and other urban planning trends that intend to act against inevitably uneconomic suburbia that waste space, time and resources (Guhathakurta and Wichert 1996; San Martin 2001; Schuchmann 2001) lay emphasis on urban rehabilitation with a view to the (re-)utilisation of already built-in urban (residential) areas (Duany and Speck 2010).

In Hungary, because population decline and ageing have been in effect for three decades already, together with the increasing proportion of empty flats, the need for re-utilizing formerly residential areas is becoming more and more evident, as opposed to launching new green-field investments. Some elements of the European Capital of Culture 2010 project in the city of Pécs have also made an attempt to enliven urban spaces and revive the urban texture (Takáts 2005). In the case of de-central zones of the urban margin areas, including 'Uránváros'¹, one of the important housing estates, this was focused on certain core public areas only, and was mostly limited to repaving, landscaping and creating new parks, with the obvious aim to also boost associated private investments. During the still running post-project evaluation process with the involvement of an array of disciplines and the public, several conflicts and opportunities were pointed out, also calling the attention to the need of further research. The importance of research and new studies is justified by the fact that the new urban development concept and integrated urban development strategy are just being elaborated.

The primary objective of the current study is to explore about the general challenges in regenerating Hungarian housing estates, from aspects like factors to be considered, study methods to be applied, to the cardinal issues of planning and implementation. For better applicability, all these aspects are shown in our paper as a case study, through the example of 'Uránváros', an early housing estate.

2. Research methods

In order to survey the characteristics and perspectives of the city district (van Kempen et al. 2006, 30), we used different methods (both qualitative and quantitative) in several stages, with the inclusion of a substantial number of university students pursuing their studies in the field of geography and urban development. Among others, our surveys dealt with the housing block as a whole, the changes of social-economic structure, and the functional changes of public open spaces, buildings and institutions, as well as the typical traffic and transportation issues of the district. The surveys included field data collecting, questionnaires, internet database building and analysis, interviewing, mental mapping, as well as active participation in professional round-table discussions and public forums. As it follows from the age of the district, from the transforming composition of its residents and from the partial changing of its functions, first of all the authors wanted to gain an objective view of which types of spaces in Uránváros are used by what type of people, for what purposes and when. Accordingly, as part of field data collection, a group of 15 geographer MSc students performed a detailed survey with

¹ 'Uránváros' in Hungarian means Uranium City in English.

photographs on the current status of street furniture, vegetation, paving, traffic, environment (light, smells, sounds) and space users. The survey was conducted in two daily periods (one during the day and one in the evening), with the district divided into 140 spatial units². We asked a total of 40 local people of various ages, residence and social status to draw mental pictures about the district they are familiar with, either supporting or contradicting reality.

In order to be able to perform a more or less representative survey of the true population in the target area³, seven building type specimens were established (differing in their age, technology, structure and position), whose spatial structure and distribution pattern appropriately represent the residential units and the inhabitants of the entire district. A considerable proportion of students taking part in surveying activities live in the target area which was helpful for them in finding their way (and in raising trust), when they were surveying particular building types, blocks of flats or housing blocks. As part of such activity, they had to proceed from one flat to the other, collecting and recording the basic data of people living there. Although complete coverage was hard to achieve in this sample too, yet the recorded data allow for much more accurate estimations than those originating from a regular population census.

The information about the space use of Uránváros, as obtained from the actual picture was completed with data from a questionnaire-type but much simpler space use calendar, from which it is possible to see the space/time use data of an entire day of the population reached in Uránváros i.e. those currently using the district. With the help of the evaluated 210 questionnaires we could see an outline picture not only about the major everyday routes and mobility patterns of people living in Uránváros, but also about the spatial tracks of people staying there from other reasons, and their motivation. The obtained data were further refined by having questionnaires filled out by residents and private entrepreneurs⁴. Permanent residents of the Uránváros district were selected randomly and asked about the district, the use of public spaces, the physical condition of their homes, traffic routines and the effects of the ECC investments. The total number of people asked was 225, which sample size is more than 1% of the local population according to the 2001 census. In case of the questionnaires for the businesses, we were aiming at total coverage and thus contacted all the enterprises involved in economic activities, regardless of the profile, but the rate of refusal was high (about one third). Nevertheless, the mapping of businesses was accomplished, and the approximately 50 questionnaires completed by mostly small enterprises provided a good indication of changes in the conditions for local enterprises, as well as their customer distribution.

From the aspect of the future of Uránváros, we have considered it to be of key importance to know about the situation and potentials of flats in the estate market. Besides relying on questionnaire data, the authors wished to reach this objective most effectively by collecting data of estates and flats for sale or for hire on the

² Aiming at the highest possible resolution, three different types of areas were differentiated when designating the small units (normally around 0,5 ha in area) bordered by buildings: *inner court type*, *along traffic axis type*, and *other type*. Coverage was, however, not complete: public institutions, and areas occupied by main roads were not included in the surveyed areas.

³ As an important criteria of further planning, this was necessary because all the available statistical data were highly outdated, and there is illegal or semi-illegal flat hiring in the district, including a substantial, seasonally fluctuating pool of university students, numbering about 1,000.

⁴ This part of the survey was conducted with the help of first and second year BSc students.

internet into a database, by analysing these, as well as by making interviews with sales representatives of the four largest estate agencies. The database contains, among others, the district, size area, price, room numbers, wall structure and advertiser ID for all of the traded estates in Pécs, which thus allows for comparisons between city districts. The short-term measuring of temporal changes is made possible by a similar database completed a year before. The interviews, partly using directed questions, seek answers to the estate market position of Uránváros as a whole, to the general features of flats and residents, both from the side of demand and supply, and extended onto the better understanding of special local conditions. In drafting the various scenarios, the active participation in professional round-table discussions and public forums held as part of the local post-project evaluation of the ECC project also had an outstanding role, contributing to the research with a wide variety of new pieces of professional information and feedback.

3. Briefly about city district rehabilitation

As interpreted in our research, city district rehabilitation is virtually identical with urban rehabilitation (Roth 2004, 75), i.e. it is a modified version, emphasizing its partial spatial character and the importance of the need for it to be cautiously fit into the urban texture. Accordingly, what is understood as city district rehabilitation is “the renovation of the residential buildings, flats, community institutions and infrastructure of a worn-down district, during which the typical structure and layout of the district, together with the valuable buildings, are maintained”. City district rehabilitation includes a wide array of activities, differentiated on the basis of the degree, depth, “crudeness” and possible objectives of the interventions (Egedy and Kovács 2005, 9). Because city district rehabilitation concentrates on smaller units of the urban texture, it is essential that special emphasis is laid on the well-thought, complex development of suburbia and the environment of connecting axes.

The concept of city regeneration which has recently established itself in Hungary too, has its foundations in an integrated, wide approach (mostly along principles of social, economic and environmental elements) (Roberts 2000, 17; Egedy and Kovács 2005, 12). Accordingly, the planning for future and the actions of implementation must rely on a harmonic coupling of needs with major trends that are drafted with process analysis on the widest possible basis and with the largest possible number of layers. A high level of co-operation between governmental/local, business and civilian spheres, i.e. a partnership with a good division of tasks, has decisive importance in implementation. Moreover, when rehabilitating city districts, the effects on other parts of the city should not be overlooked either, meaning that planning should not be restricted to the actual implementation site only, and to the demands and expectations formulated by locals only.

Because the target area of Uránváros can actually be interpreted as one of the archetypal representatives of Hungarian large housing estates (LHE), it is worth introducing the city district rehabilitation characteristics of this housing environment form in a few sentences. One of the urban architectural values of Uránváros is just the fact that it is not a typical housing estate regarding its structure and integration into the city corpus, but instead it is much more liveable and colourful. One of the main characteristics of LHE's is their relative synchronism and uniformity considering both the flats and the residents, which fact influences subsequent actions as well (Csizmady 2003; Ferkai 2005). The renovation of flats and buildings becomes necessary at more or less the same time (Egedy 2001), and their resident

population of relatively homogeneous age structure and social status age together due to their reduced mobility, and enter together the stages of life that demand special requirements. The replacement of flat owners and the emptying of the flats also happen as a single major wave. Other characteristic features are density and bulkiness which characterise the residents, the flats and the values. All this requires and justifies grand, action-type management activities, which, however, are considerably slowed down by the fragmented nature of Hungarian property structure. Regrettably, the projects having been implemented so far by the government or the municipalities are not the least as complex as the ones at the time of the creation of these buildings, thus they have never reached the levels of value-enhancing renovations known from western countries (Egedy 2005, 241).

4. Characteristics of the district

The analysed city district was built in several stages between 1955–1974, but along a single concept. Its birth was related with the manpower need from the exploitation of uranium ore that had been discovered in the western outskirts of the city, and the associated improvement of urban functions causing a significant demand for flats. The district which is officially called Újmecekalja but conventionally called Uránváros by residents was built up from the south-west towards the north-east, proceeding from the fringes of the town towards the core areas. For the purposes of the housing estate, which was to accommodate about 25,000 people, a plain area was selected between the historic town and the planned mine. Initially, four-storey pitched-roof houses were built, with a network of small backyards, then in 1962 the individually designed 7-storey houses were completed, the system of service units was established together with the headquarters office building of the mining company, small shops, a clinic complex, confectioneries and a restaurant. The hierarchic system of residential units was created in a way that they integrated worker hostels, baby day care and kindergarten units, primary and vocational schools than later secondary grammar school and vocational grammar school as well. In the 1960s four- and ten-storey panel block buildings also appeared, and in 1969 'Mecsek Áruház', the most up-to date five-storey department store of the city and the region was opened. This was the time when the construction of the 17-storey block of flats was launched in the planned sub-centre of the district. The last concrete panel buildings were completed by the mid-1970s, contributing to the total of 7,350 flats completed until 1974 in the district. During the course of two decades, the exceptionally broad system of institutions was completed in the district of Uránváros, based on well-thought principles, so as to please the needs of uranium miners, a highly-esteemed class in the socialist era. Although some parts of the planned investments were eventually left out, nevertheless several emblematic locations and a significant residential focus point were thus created for the entire city of Pécs. Owing to the features of the district and the proximity of the university, it has remained a popular area among young people, and the liveability of its public spaces was further enhanced by its rehabilitation implemented as part of the Pécs ECC 2010 project (Bencze 2009).

Its peculiarity as a housing estate was ensured by the fact that although its creation was started early, it lasted through three decades, moreover, it is a district which is diverse despite being uniform, and has a privileged abundance of functions associated with its central and radial structure (Fig. 1.) Because it was built in stages through a long period starting in the mid-1950s, it now shows an unusually diverse picture regarding its buildings (wall material, physical and technical

condition, number of storeys, arrangement of buildings, etc.), its inhabitants (age, occupation, family status, incomes, etc.), as well as in its public spaces. Because of this diversity, Uránváros is a particularly suitable subject in the study and field research of development routes leading from traditional districts to rehabilitated housing estates.

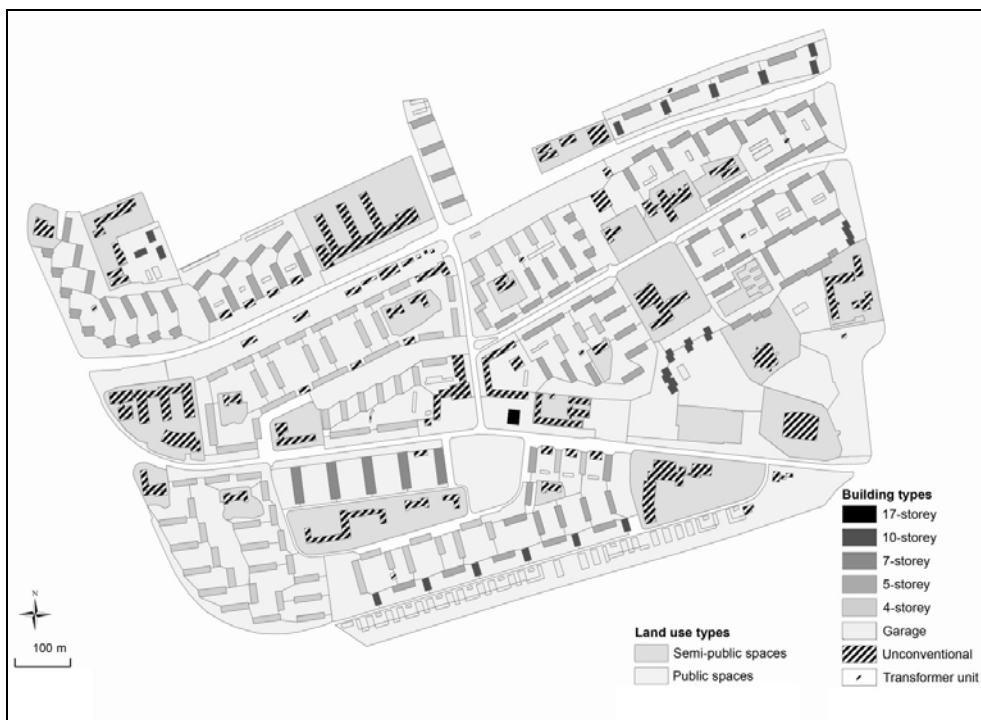


Fig. 1: The spatial structure and building types of Uránváros (ed.: Bognár Z. 2012).

The outdoor public spaces of Uránváros are generally in an acceptable state, due to (or sometimes despite) their public (local governmental) maintenance, but also there are many places that require renovation. The overall picture is generally uniform, with a few interesting, new-looking central spots, created as part of the ECC project, standing out from the east-west ageing 'slope'⁵. Facilities in these outdoor spaces are diverse in their types as well as qualities, due to the influence of the different communities living there, which is a partial indicator of the long-term transformation of the user populations. As regards the functions of spaces, they are almost exclusively characterised with pedestrian traffic and green areas, as well as with the facilities for public parking opportunities and communal waste collection. Playgrounds used to be all around the place, but these have almost perished, with only remains being present of what used to be facilities, sometimes in dangerous conditions, nowadays being used as dog toilets, bicycle stands or other destructive types of uses. Only about one third of them have been able to keep their original

⁵ The buildings and the original population of the district are oldest in the south-western part, turning into a younger composition in the north-eastern-eastern parts. Ageing does not always appear simultaneously on the general condition of buildings, sidewalks and public spaces, since the availability of financial resources initially allowed more serious and more diverse technical content than in the case of the most recent housing blocks that are mostly featureless or worn-down despite having been already renovated.

function, mostly with new or already renovated paving. Predominantly shaggy garages are found in 20% of the investigated areas, usually in smaller clusters of 5-10 units; however, the "forest of garages" in the spatial unit along the railway line marking the southern district border has a capacity of 300 cars, fulfilling the automobile storage needs of local residents that once was strong but has become reduced recently.

Based on our surveys, there appears substantial difference between the daytime and night-time public space use of Uránváros. Looking at either the spatial pattern of parking cars or the age distribution of people using these spaces it is found that the majority of employees commute to work to other parts of the town, but at the same time many people from outside Uránváros tend to use the services with wider attraction zones in the centre of the district (post office, clinic, offices, educational institutions). This finding is supported by data from the space use calendars: more than one third of responding people are not residents of the district, among whom 60% are of child age or students. The population that is present in the district in daytime hours is made up by older and middle-aged people (at rates beyond 50%), whereas evening and night-time hours show a dominance of younger adults (university students and working age people) who arrive home after work or school. It should be noted, however, that large numbers of young students are also present in the district in the daytime period, although not in public places but inside various institutions, thus they are considered as "transit population" regarding their space use, relying on other local services only partially. The centre with its multitude of restaurants, pubs, shopping, sporting and playground facilities has a dominantly all-day, central role. Other central points of density are major bus stops, the market, and, temporarily, the areas around kindergartens and schools.

According to the most recent official census data in 2001, the number of inhabitants in the 6,258 flats⁶ of Uránváros was 12,247 individuals. In one of our studies we estimated the permanent population to be much larger, at around 14–15 thousand (Orbán 2011). The difference of 2–3,000 is probably made up by the temporary tenants, mostly university students who tend to avoid census. It is a common practice that although three or four people live in a flat in order to cut down on costs, only one person is registered officially, or sometimes not even one of them. However, the population census data in the sample building type in our study highlight the fact that the wave of generation replacement takes place in the present decade in some parts of Uránváros, with a fading pattern from west towards the east. Thus, because of the often temporarily empty flats or ones with a widow owner only, the number of residents in the district nearly reached the figure of the 2001 census. To bring a typical example: the population of mostly elderly, single people and young newcomer residents with low income and level living in small families is enriched by university students with an occupation rate of 3-6 people per flat. Another effect of the changes is that the local community is now greatly influenced by the conflicts caused by extremities arising from differences in age, lifestyle and mentality. The proportion of old pensioners is estimated by our surveys at around 40% or even more, but university students also represent a considerable, nearly 25% ratio. The surprisingly low rate of employment is distressing. Families with small children, i.e. people who represented the target group of the high-standard service sector and public space system at their time of creation, are now

⁶ The figure of 7,350 built flats mentioned earlier decreased somewhat primarily due to conversions to shops and other business service units, and partly because of the fact that the official statistical demarcation of the Uránváros district is somewhat different from what was used in our study.

found in small numbers, mostly in local governmental flats, this fact generating a number of functional problems.

Data obtained from questionnaires (in excess of 200) do support in many respects the aforementioned information originating from other sources. An interesting fact is that because of the two-pole population in shortage of active working age people, the figure of 200–250 automobiles per 1000 citizens is only about two third of the average value typical for big cities. The relative shortage of automobiles is perfectly replaced by the availability of public transportation. With almost no exception, people replying to our questions are satisfied with the conditions in this respect, rating the accessibility of Uránváros higher than 4.5 (on a scale of 0-5). The rate of bicycle use, another type of modern urban traffic is quite low, owing to the age and general health status of residents: 62% of the population do not have a bicycle. The prerequisites of any further development, as seen by young people asked, is a more developed bicycle route network and more (closed) storage facilities.

The uniform identity conception of the housing estate is well reflected by the fact that the place of residence within Pécs, as specified by people in their answers to the open question, was Uránváros with almost no exceptions. Such a bold identity is not surprising, since Uránváros used to be probably the socially most cohesive district, some of its effects still being present. The high level of supply standards, regarding housing blocks in general, was supported by questionnaire data. Besides public transportation which was considered to be outstanding, educational, health and other services were rated with scores higher than 4, just like general shopping possibilities. More than 4/5 of people buy their supply of foodstuff locally, more than 2/3 have access to health services, 50% to education locally, but even clothing, hardware and entertainment products are purchased in situ by about 1/3 of the answering residents. Major causes of dissatisfaction by members of the community, include noise and air pollution, sanitary problems, and the lack of job opportunities locally, but even these factors were scored to somewhat higher than 3. Accordingly, less than 1/3 of the population would move from the district, given the opportunity. These people would move on because of reasons such as wanting a family house with garden, looking for a larger flat, or wishing to live a more dynamic life in a downtown area. Those wishing to stay are kept in place by familiarity, the quiet environment, family, friends or school in the neighbourhood, good traffic, and budgetary limitations. Uránváros is a place liked by its residents: the average score was good (4.04). The same finding is suggested by the information gained from the analysis of mental maps. Resulting from the well-planned, spatially clear arrangement, most of the people described is a liveable residential environment, well supplied with services. The vast majority of people consider the local investments of the ECC project and its effects in the district to be clearly positive, but when they are asked about examples, most of them will not be able to bring up anything else but the landscaping and livening up of the main square. Negative opinions highlight uselessness and the lack of new employment opportunities, whereas less intense criticism talks about the insufficiency of results, with the direction being considered to be right. Entrepreneurs, however, view the outcomes of recent developments more pessimistically, as shown by our questionnaires; to be more precise they do not really see any outcome that could help them crawl out from the harsh economic situation. The micro and small businesses most of which employ a few members of staff only, say that they are struggling for survival in a particularly price-sensitive setting, and do not plan hardly any investment. Most of the shops were established in the 2000s, relying on the prospective consumption of

the local population, and thus the majority of customers of these shops are local people. There are also some special profile stores in the district – taking advantage of good accessibility, an important aspect of choosing location for a business – whose target customers are from outside the district or even from outside the city. Despite the generally sombre situation, people that were asked are looking forward to, most of all, the renovation of streets and public areas, and the shifting of population living in the area.

According to the opinion of estate agents, the foreseen future of the district will probably improve somewhat, due to the fact that Uránváros is already becoming more popular because of the availability of relatively inexpensive, small flats with low running costs and proximity to high standard service supply, sought after by young people and university students from other parts of the country. The negative part of the picture here is the horrible unemployment and debt conditions of the wider economic environment. It is saddening that even estate agents think that the only way of increasing the value of flats in the district is by minor (engineering) renovations, because concrete panels of the buildings are structural elements and thus must remain unmodified. They also believe, though, that there may be possibilities to expand the area of the district on neighbouring unbuilt areas, because this is the type of residential environment – with an abundance of greenery – that is most sought after in the city. In a real estate marketing slogan for Uránváros, they would emphasise the greener, more liveable, cheaper, more familiar environment.

The analysis of a real estate internet database seemed to support what was communicated by the agencies. The representation of flats in Uránváros in the real estate market is much greater, standing at a proportion of 1/7, than their share in the total number of flats in Pécs. This proportion has grown since the last figure measured a year before, with the prices per square metre having grown relatively, owing to the fact that prices have decreased significantly in other parts of the city. Flats with few rooms, slightly in excess of 50 square meter area are being advertised at prices around 28,000 EUR, but at the same time this is the district where a separate flat in satisfactory condition and in a good environment can be bought at the cheapest price – starting at around 17,000 EUR. NGOs operating in Pécs organised a programme series and round-table discussions as a follow-up activity to the 'Public spaces and parks' programme of Pécs 2010 European Capital of Culture project. Lead by the organisation 'Urbanista Konzorcium', and with the title '6xUránváros' a programme and public event series of 6 elements was organised in the spring of 2012 in the district of Uránváros. The main purpose of the action was to "strengthen the relationship between the local community and the completed investments of the ECC, and relying on this, open up new needs and directions for the community which could encourage co-operation between actors of the situation, at the same time drawing up outlines for the city about further development and investment tasks in the district" (Urbanista Konzorcium 2012, 6). Although the action has brought several interesting results and experience, these have stayed within the circles of professionals, as disinterest and passivity was sometimes outrageous. The majority of people articulate their opinion only when they feel that they are personally and directly affected, and even in such cases mostly against something. Whether or not it is really relevant to base the plans for the future on the opinion of a constantly changing, though significant part of the population whose representation is constantly decreasing, is another question.

5. Challenges (scenarios and demands)

As seen by the authors of this paper, the most probable future of Uránváros, based on the fundamental local tendencies and without any major interventions, is as follows. Looking from the perspective of demographic changes – one of the most important starting points – a substantial decrease is foreseen in the near future, due to the high representation of the age group of elderly, pensioner people. As old people disappear and people around the end of their active period move out to less costly living conditions offered by villages, the multitude of flats staying empty for varying periods of time will be slowly filled up by the younger generation. These people include university students and young individuals at the beginning of their career who move in from the countryside and use the relatively cheap Uránváros as a springboard, also low-income small families, and working age small families with children who are forced to leave their downtown or suburban houses or flats, maybe because of a mortgage bankruptcy. The generation shift must certainly be accompanied by the modernisation of flats and the partial renovation of buildings and their environment, the reconsideration of their functions. This, in many cases, would mean the flat-cost modernisation of space use infrastructure (e.g. playgrounds) that was originally planned for higher number of children, and it also inevitably means that new facilities are introduced in accordance with the already existing new lifestyles (dog walking areas, outdoor leisure areas for elderly people, parking areas, etc.). We cannot anticipate major transformations following demographic changes in the public institutional system of Uránváros, because there are no drastic changes foreseen in the age groups within area units used as a matriculation basis for public education services. In relation with favourable spatial conditions, further concentration and specialisation are expected in the institutions, and the decreasing numbers in the children age group and the population in general will not have a negative effect on the expansion of attraction zones. The age structure of the population will continue to strengthen in the near future which will call for the functional modification of certain public buildings, as well as the improvement of their accessibility. According to what is told by the owners of smaller local businesses in the market, recent times have taught them to respond and adapt quickly in a way that their profiles follow the changes in the structure and demand of local residents, thus the supply they provide is good both in quality and quantity.

We have now reached the cardinal issue of traffic. As the number of small families in the working age grows, the slow increase in the number of cars is expected, even if service supply and public transportation remains good and there is an advantage of central location. Considering the uneven distribution of parking areas, the growing rate of automobiles per thousand inhabitants can become a source of conflicts, even if the figure will keep lagging behind the national average. The situation can become even more complicated due to the fact that the number of bicycles grows as well, since the space occupation of bike parking facilities in the loosely built public areas is ensured even in the long run, but storage on the level of flats and houses might be a problem. As part of the scenario, a few other effects must also be mentioned whose predictability is much lower but their importance is equally high. Looking at workplaces which have full effect on the future of the district, we see different possible outcomes when we assume that prospective large-scale employers come into the scene (including mining which is currently being reconsidered), and when it is anticipated that others might continue to shrink (e.g. the university). However, the most important features of Uránváros (composition of estates, position within

the city structure) more or less determine the basic parameters of the residents moving here; whichever of the two employment scenarios comes true. The situation of possession relations and closely associated, the issue of communities also have a wide range of effects. Currently, the dominant type of possession in the district is private ownership and private flats/apartments, whereas residential communities hardly function at all, due to the high degree of fluctuation. Not only the proportion of the changes in this, but also their direction are an open question and are almost impossible to estimate. Thus, the strengthening of communities is possible either on a higher level of privatisation or as state / local governmental roles are increased, but the situation might as well turn to the contrary; nevertheless the main aim remains the same: making space use more intensive and more rational.

The possible scenarios are influenced by a number of different demands, originating from either the residents, private or public entities of economic life, or from the side of the natural environment within the district and beyond its boundaries. Most of all these different demands are expressed openly towards any designer by the residents, due to their numerosness and loud articulation (especially in a housing estate), therefore it is of primary importance to seriously consider these. In the case of Úránváros, however, it is not advisable to base the plans for the future on the opinion of such a currently existing generation that is disappearing slowly from the area. Because the intentions of the municipality regarding the district are not precisely formulated, and there is no significant investor or employer in view with plans for the area either, there is an exceptional opportunity for the designers of the rehabilitation to generate demands, cautiously regarding the requirements of the natural environment, and to capture and attract the most adequate population. The challenge in this case is how to harmonise the possible scenarios with the designer's ideas which are possibly similar in nature and take advantage of those scenarios.

6. Recommended intervention plan (diversification and selecto-concentration)

The authors hereby present their theoretical developmental recommendations, based on the findings outlined above. The suggestions do include some activities that appear to be difficult to implement, yet we believe that the district is highly suitable in its present status to receive complex, harmonised development. If the aim is to create a district that is more reactive and less prone to housing block demographic wave effects, then it should be a basic principle to establish a resident population which is sufficiently diverse, with variable lifestyles and different needs in many respects. As a response to the challenges, the planned interventions should include in their complexity the enrichment and diversification of real estates, the transformation of ownership relations, the broadening of traffic opportunities, and the transformation of a number of public spaces, as well as public institutions. Although increased diversity is suggested, yet the absence of real communities call for introducing selecto-concentration, a certain degree of clustering differences. Grouping together and selectively settling⁷ residents with basically similar lifestyles is necessary not only in order to enhance the establishment of communities, but also so as to rapidly, more adequately and simultaneously satisfy the space use needs of certain interest groups – which are often incompatible with anything else. In doing that, an element that is hardly transformable and is thus determinant for a

⁷ A direct method to be used in the case of a larger proportion of local governmental flats. In the current situation selective settling can be achieved by incentives that mean significant attraction to certain target groups.

long term due to high costs, is the separation of parts of the physical environment, i.e. the creation of specialised spatial arrangements and facilities. A differentiated space is sustainable only if there is sufficient mobility (moving to a different place as one's lifestyle changes), which is not really the situation nowadays in Hungary when people usually adhere to their private possessions and familiar environment. However, in a more diverse district, moving within the area⁸ becomes possible, meaning that mobility can strengthen, even if the proportion of hired estates does not grow.

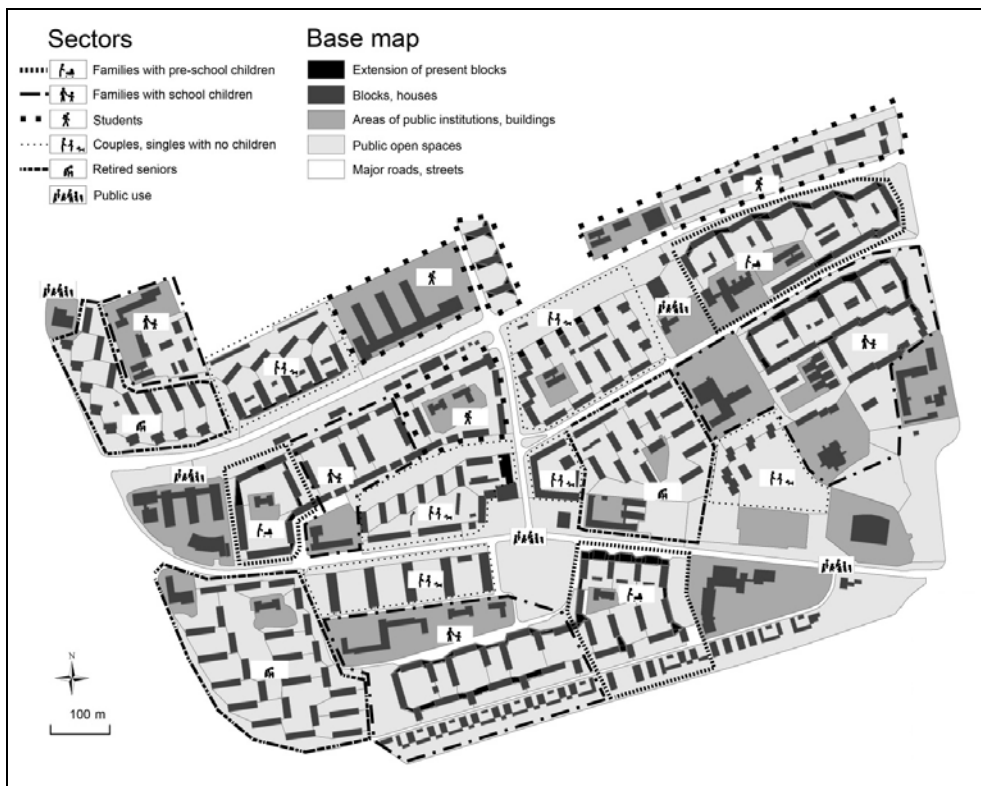


Fig. 2: A theoretical space use and functional map of a “selecto-concentrated” Uránváros (ed.: Orbán K. 2012).

In the example of Uránváros, five different sectors are established based on the lifestyle types with the most different space uses and spatial structure requirements (Fig. 2.). In each of them, development should be focused on the specified target resident group. The average home size and physical conditions are usually uniform within the categories, with only limited variability. Sectors for families with small children need a fully closed building framework, day care units, kindergarten facilities and maybe primary school lower classes, all based on local needs. Traffic of their inner spaces should be removed to the outside, re-landscaped playgrounds and bicycle storage facilities should be created in the place of most of the existing parking lots and garages. When restructuring the building frameworks, the inclusion

⁸ Due to the supply of flats and the strong identity feeling in Uránváros, there is considerable degree of internal moving, and re-settling after once having moved out (N. Kovács, Halling and Tirri 2008).

of elevators is essential, and it is also recommended to ensure the connection of ground level apartments with the backyards, even maybe with new patios. The fusion of smaller flats into larger ones is needed in small numbers only, but it is absolutely possible in this sector.

The sectors with partly closed building units for families with older children could be completed with spatially directly connected primary school (upper classes), secondary grammar school, and various types of sports grounds and facilities replacing the existing inner parking lots. The horizontal and vertical extensions of home units here could include and greatly need the fusion and enlargement of separate flats, and it would also be necessary to renovate and build new garage units in the margin areas. In the more open, busier sectors dedicated to university students, the number of apartments can be increased by the division of existing ones and by vertical extension. Their quality can be improved by the creation of rooms (kitchen, dining room, lounge) and buildings (entertainment, studying) for community use. Regarding mobility, the preferred type of traffic here is by bicycles, for which enclosed storage facilities should be created, linked to the community buildings.

Similarly, in spaces for working age people still or already living without children the main objective can be, besides maintaining open building unit structures, an increased residential density, but in this case, mostly by means of vertical extensions, by keeping and possibly diversifying smaller and larger apartments. Here, public transportation should have higher importance besides bicycle use, with respect to the assumed age composition. For this group, the spatial requirements represented by keeping household pets and going out with friends probably have a higher value too (dog walking areas, pubs, cafeteria, restaurants).

In the sector for older, pensioner people the requirement of partially closed structure, a prerequisite of quietness and silence comes to the foreground once again, together with the keeping of inner, recreational areas with restricted or no traffic, the creation of sheltered parks and the keeping of homes with small number of rooms. Parts of his area, where the buildings are gradually becoming values of heritage, are the most suitable for preserving the residential spatial structure and appearance that are so familiar and dear for elderly people. Accordingly, renovation is the choice of interventions here, with the reconstruction of building engineering structures and the inclusion of elevators being vital components. Because mobility is reduced in this age group, the easy pedestrian access and short distances to local public institutions (clinic, community activity house for elderly people, etc.) should be prioritised, with the availability of complementing public transportation facilities. The inner roads, parking lots and garages could be replaced with accessibility sidewalks, recreational facilities, benches, as there is no substantial automobile and bicycle use in the sector.

7. Implementation?

Implementation is the most critical point of development projects in Hungary, which is equally true for city district rehabilitation. The questionability of such a rehabilitation project is further increased by the almost total lack of practical experience. Although there is an increasing number of European examples for large housing estate rehabilitation, (e.g. Leipzig – Grünau), samples of comprehensive block regeneration are scarce in Hungary; the Ferencváros and Józsefváros

investments being the only examples so far. Occasionally it is possible to obtain useful information from specialist forums of smaller scale rehabilitation projects such as the post-project evaluation of the rehabilitation programme of public spaces in Úránváros.

Based on experience gained so far it can be stated that the competent municipality must take a fundamental initiator-organizer role in the implementation process of city district rehabilitation (whether it be housing block type or a more traditional one). A wide spectrum of professionals, potential investors, and local residents must be involved and made interested in co-operating broadly with each other. Even as early as during the planning stage attempts must be made to create a wide and co-operating array of specialists, and their knowledge should be utilised in the stage of having the plans produced. In raising the necessary funds, the involvement of the private sector is usually essential, including banks and/or for-profit investor groups, thus laying the foundations of economic sustainability in the long run. It is also crucial to actively involve the residents of the district, which is important in the stage of surveying the demands, and is an active community-developing facility contributing to the success of technical implementation. The complex of the aforementioned aspects can prove to be useful for any city district rehabilitation project, however, as the physical conditions of the spatial unit to be revived continue to deteriorate and as more drastic and complex interventions become necessary, the full utilisation of the entire spectrum of measures becomes increasingly indispensable. One of the most important requisites of success is continuous, diverse but reserved communication between all of the parties involved. Even if there is good general knowledge of earlier experience in other places, it must be remembered that all city districts, especially housing estates are unique and irreproducible (especially as time passes), meaning that their rehabilitation routes are different and highly specific (Hall et al. 2005, 354).

8. Conclusion

City district rehabilitation, although in various forms, starts infiltrating into Hungary, too. Besides abandoned industrial areas, there is an increasing demand for the rehabilitation of old, ruined city parts around downtown areas; moreover, there is an approaching need, to come within this decade, for the revival of other districts which are not completely concrete panel (prefabricated) blocks. From the post-project evaluation of the revival of public spaces within the ECC project in Úránváros, Pécs, a number of problems and potentials were pointed out. From these experiences we can find solutions to the special challenges of the rehabilitation of housing estates, and we can also draw general conclusions. The basic challenge of city district rehabilitation is to satisfy the assumed and evoked social needs of the target resident population, in good harmony with the well-surveyed physical environment, and to harmonise those needs with those of non-residential space users, with other urban functions and with the broader natural environment. Because in Hungary, due to speculation in the real estate market, it is mostly areas with buildings just before final demolition that are subject to rehabilitation, it is advisable for the sake of success that the conditions for an ultimate, "hard rehabilitation" to be ensured. Due to the size and complexity of the district, the role of initiator and co-ordinator should be taken by the public administration unit on the adequate level, who should make efforts even as early as in the planning stage to actively involve a broad and co-operative specialist and financial human basis, and to find out about the diverse opinions of residents – who are normally uninterested

at the level of city district. Negotiations with local estate owners are only relevant in the stage of planning for specific blocks or buildings. The specific features of the rehabilitation of housing estates originate from simultaneity and similarity/uniformity, density and bulkiness, as well as from the dominance of public spaces. Challenges associated with the wave-like ageing of flats and their residents call for breaking up such homogeneity in all aspects. However, the diversification of flats and their residents, the institutions, public spaces and services used by them cannot be implemented without a certain degree of clustering. This is justified also by the distressing absence of resident communities, by strengthening separation and alienation, intolerance and incompatibility. When planning the interventions, relying on the selecto-concentration method, a more reactive and more heterogeneous picture can be created on the city district level, from a harmonic mosaic of internally alike smaller sectors. The age of a housing district greatly determines the "hardness" of rehabilitation, and by the shifting of generations in its resident population, its optimal timing is also determined. The density and bulkiness involved in the rehabilitation sets strict lower limits to the reproduced values of the interventions, since the reproduced values per unit area should not be less than in the preceding situation. The directions and dimensions of development could include the enlargement of buildings and flats with horizontal or vertical extensions and fusions; the improvement of the already good public transportation with more frequent lines and electrification; the use of spacious areas and wide roads for building bicycle road network and storage facilities; promoting the taking over of non-functional public spaces into community use or possession even by partial privatisation; the continuation of increasing environmental energy efficiency by the inclusion of renewing energy sources. Besides the multitude of transformations and things to change, we must not forget about the value preserving duties of heritage protection – an aspect which is not yet seriously recognised in housing estates.

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HUNGARIAN CHALLENGES OF HOUSING BLOCK REGENERATION: A CASE STUDY OF URÁNVÁROS, CITY OF PÉCS

Summary

City district rehabilitation, although in various forms, starts infiltrating into Hungary, too. Besides abandoned industrial areas, there is an increasing demand for the rehabilitation of old, ruined city parts around downtown areas; moreover, there is an approaching need, to come within this decade, for the revival of other districts which are not completely concrete panel blocks. From the post-project evaluation of the revival of public spaces within the ECC project in Uránváros (Uranium City), Pécs, a number of problems and potentials were pointed out. From these experiences we can project solutions to the special challenges of the rehabilitation of large housing estates, and we can also draw general conclusions. In order to survey the characteristics and perspectives of the city district, we used different methods (both qualitative and quantitative) in several stages, with the inclusion of a substantial number of university students pursuing their studies in the field of geography and urban development. Among others, our surveys dealt with the housing block as a whole, the changes of social-economic structure, the functional changes of public open spaces, buildings and institutions, as well as the typical traffic and transportation issues of the district. The surveys included field data collecting, questionnaires, internet database building and analysis, interviewing, mental mapping, as well as active participation in professional round-table discussions and public forums.

The concept of urban regeneration which has recently established itself in Hungary too, has its foundations in an integrated, wide approach (mostly along principles of social, economic and environmental elements). As interpreted in our research, city district rehabilitation is virtually identical with urban rehabilitation. The basic challenge of city district rehabilitation is to satisfy the assumed and evoked social needs of the target resident population, in good harmony with the well-surveyed physical environment, and to harmonise those needs with those of non-residential space users, with other urban functions and with the broader natural environment. Because in Hungary, due to speculation in the real estate market, it is mostly areas with buildings just before final demolition that are subject to rehabilitation, it is advisable for the sake of success that the conditions for an ultimate, "hard rehabilitation" are ensured. Due to the size and complexity of the district, the role of initiator and co-ordinator should be taken by the public administration unit on the adequate level, who should make efforts even as early as in the planning stage to actively involve a broad and co-operative specialist and financial human basis, and to find out about the diverse opinions of residents – who are normally uninterested at the level of city district. Negotiations with local estate owners are only relevant in the stage of planning for specific blocks or buildings. The specific features of the rehabilitation of housing estates originate from simultaneity and similarity/uniformity, density and bulkiness, as well as from the dominance of public spaces. Challenges associated with the wave-like ageing of flats and their residents call for breaking up such homogeneity in all aspects. However, the diversification of flats and their residents, the institutions, public spaces and services used by them cannot be implemented without a certain degree of clustering. This is justified also by the distressing absence of resident communities, by strengthening separation and alienation, intolerance and incompatibility. When planning the interventions, relying on the selecto-concentration method, a more reactive and more heterogeneous picture can be created on the city district level, from a harmonic

mosaic of internally alike smaller sectors. The age of a housing district greatly determines the "hardness" of rehabilitation, and by the shifting of generations in its resident population, its optimal timing is also determined. The density and bulkiness involved in the rehabilitation sets strict lower limits to the reproduced values of the interventions, since the reproduced values per unit area should not be less than in the preceding situation. The directions and dimensions of development could include the enlargement of buildings and flats with horizontal or vertical extensions and fusions; the improvement of the already good public transportation with more frequent lines and electrification; the use of spacious areas and wide roads for building bicycle road network and storage facilities; promoting the taking over of non-functional public spaces into community use or possession even by partial privatisation; the continuation of increasing environmental energy efficiency by the inclusion of renewing energy sources. Besides the multitude of transformations and things to change, we must not forget about the value preserving duties of heritage protection – an aspect which is not yet seriously recognised among housing estates.