

Spatial Dynamics of Good Places in the Urban Development of Budapest¹

Introduction

The unification of Pest, Buda, Óbuda, and Margaret Island, decided in 1872² and implemented in 1873,³ was not only driven by immediate political reasons but also by a number of socio-economic arguments that justified the merger as a means of strengthening the capital of the Hungarian state.⁴ Among these were, explicitly or implicitly, the improvement of the inhabitants' quality of life, the raising of the level of infrastructure for receiving visitors interested in Budapest and, last but not least, the promotion of the city's position in the competition with Vienna, the Austrian capital.⁵ In this law and in its explanatory memorandum declaring Budapest a single unit of jurisdiction, the word 'beautiful' is the only word that suggests that it was the legislators' political will to create better living conditions. However, the mere fact that at the birth of Budapest as the capital of the Kingdom of Hungary, the General Assembly was given the power to 'beautify' Budapest is an indication of that. Furthermore, the leading officials of the Astro-Hungarian Monarchy emphasised the 'public entertainment' function of Margaret Island, owned by Archduke Joseph of Austria, and recognised the added value of the considerable private income spent on its beautification. Thus, it can be considered unquestionable that the well-being of society was one of the responsibilities assumed by Budapest's 'founding fathers' in terms of public law. The matter of liveability is not a new concept. As early as 1870,⁶ the legal basis for the later creation of the Budapest Public Works Council was provided by a law in which "the maintenance and spreading of public parks and tree plantations" and "the building in and lighting of roads, streets, squares, and entertainment areas, [...]" were among the high-priority tasks that were

¹ The exploratory research reported in this study was carried out with the support of OTKA project K134877.

² Act XXXVI of 1872 on the establishment and regulation of the Buda-Pest metropolitan legislative authority.

³ The recorded "banquet" of the newly elected representatives of the Budapest City Council took place on 17 November 1873 in the Vigadó in Pest, a day that historians consider to be the "birthday" of Budapest, despite the fact that the Council first met on 25 October 1873.

⁴ The so-called April Acts of 1848 named Pest-Buda as the seat of the Hungarian government (Act III of 1848 on the formation of an independent Hungarian responsible ministry).

⁵ RÁTH 1873: 521–522. See also Vasárnapi Újság 1873: 569–570.

⁶ Paragraph 17 of Act X of 1870 on the regulation of the Danube River near the capital and on the coverage of the costs of other public works to be established in Buda-Pest for the purpose of traffic and public communication, and on the means of implementing these public works.

intended to improve the well-being of locals. Budapest began its spectacular after the merger of the three cities a century and a half ago. The city leaders considered that the spaces of leisure time – somewhere in the common realm of the quality of life and liveability, expanding into the organic part of our way of living – namely the ‘good places’ would be the legacy of development. Thus, following the example of Paris and Vienna, the city leaders’ decision created a sound basis for the framework of a balanced urban development in which the shaping of spaces for production and consumption, for work and leisure served the quality of life for both the local society and visitors coming to the Hungarian capital for shorter or longer periods, even if the process was not always smooth.

Our analysis of the impact of leisure spaces on the urban development of Budapest is partly based on Oldenburg’s ‘third place’ theory, which claims that in addition to your home (first place) and workplace (second place), the informal spaces for pursuing community life make up the fabric of modern settlements that offer quality life.⁷ We also rely on Michalkó’s concept of ‘good place’, which takes into account not only the needs of the local society in leisure time activities, but also the consumer behaviour of visitors to a given locality and their reflections on their experiences of that space.⁸ In the regions that Wallerstein⁹ referred to as the core, the unwanted effects of urbanisation (e.g. public health problems, overcrowding, crime) were already evident in the first half of the 19th century.¹⁰ Therefore, in the peripheral (semi-peripheral) areas urbanisation being decades late in development learnt from the mistakes made by London and Paris, or at least attempts were made to remedy them.¹¹ In Budapest, the deliberate creation of leisure spaces and facilities started with the preservation of green spaces and the intention to build wide roads/streets that let in sunlight and air.¹² Budapest grew from a city of 400,000 to a metropolis of 2 million in scarcely a hundred years, and most of the basic functions of a settlement as defined by Partsch were used over time to serve the spending of quality leisure time.¹³

In the urban development of Budapest from 1873 to the present day, the venues of leisure pursuits have been shaped by conscious planning and development on the one hand, and by spontaneous, often community processes on the other. Their dynamism is reflected in both their geographical extent and their improving quality. Budapest’s leisure spaces gained their position, which are largely kept still today, due to their geographical location (e.g. near the Danube, in the Buda Hills), their historical heritage (e.g. Margaret Island, the City Park) or the logic of the metropolitan zoning.

However, urban development also created good places preferred by locals and tourists in line with the dynamically changing demand trends. In the range of good places, an outstanding role is taken by hotels and catering establishments and various leisure

⁷ OLDENBURG 1999: 269.

⁸ MICHALKÓ 2007: 81–87; MICHALKÓ 2010: 64–66; MICHALKÓ 2022: Chapter 5.3.

⁹ WALLERSTEIN 1983: 782.

¹⁰ LANDES 1986: 114–198.

¹¹ GYÁNI-KÖVÉR 1998: 356; BELUSZKY 2003: 568.

¹² GYÁNI 1992: 213; GYÁNI 1998: 216.

¹³ BERÉNYI 1992: 164.

facilities, which are attributes of the leisure industry, including tourism, and indicate the spatial dynamics of the examined function like signal buoys. This study seeks to explore how the leisure industry's signal buoys highlight spatial points interpreted as good places in Budapest's past, present, and future. In our analysis, apart from processing the technical literature, we will also give an overview of the works on the history of Budapest as well as the works that help introduce the dynamics of leisure and tourist spaces. We use photographs from the Fortepan open access photo database and maps made by ourselves as illustrations of the spatial processes of the capital's good places.

1. Good place – Better life

Good places are suitable for spending individual and social leisure time, pursuing active or passive recreational activities, and experiencing moments of joy and happiness.¹⁴ One of the essential components of a good place is that people who have visited it, talk about it. They share their experiences of it with their immediate or wider environment, and spread the information about its existence, value and accessibility, orally, through postcards, letters, newspaper columns, on the radio and television and on a wide variety of Internet platforms.¹⁵ A good place is basically a reduced axiological approach to all the qualities of the relevant facility that make it worth visiting, i.e. instead of a very detailed description of the numerous values (what it is good for and why), the communication is based on a simple but informative statement of facts.¹⁶ A good place is typically a facility outside the private sphere of the individual, but it is also possible that an inherently private space (property) may be used temporarily or even permanently for public purposes (e.g. as a festival venue, an apartment restaurant or an Airbnb accommodation).¹⁷ Communication on social media platforms contribute to making a good place commodified based on subjective value judgements. For example, on Instagram, one of the most popular photo-sharing platforms, there are thousands of hashtags with the term “good place”, and if we search for *#goodplace*, our hits will reach the magnitude of hundreds of thousands, so the combination of words expressing the core of the concept of a good place is by no means a specifically Hungarian characteristic, a ‘Hungaricum’.

The ‘good place’ is a tourism interpretation of the third place concept introduced by Oldenburg. Oldenburg himself used the term ‘great good place’ to refer to informal spaces beyond the realms of home and work that provide a possibility for living a community life.¹⁸ According to the theory of the American urban sociologist, it helps relieve the stress generated by the big city if people find a balance of everyday life, catalysed by the experience of living in the social sphere beyond the private and productive spaces as if being on a holiday. As Oldenburg puts it, third places are neutral gathering

¹⁴ MICHALKÓ 2007: 85; MICHALKÓ 2010: 65.

¹⁵ MICHALKÓ 2022: Chapter 5.3.

¹⁶ FARKAS et al. 2022.

¹⁷ IRIMIÁS 2016: 330; NÉMET–JUHÁSZ 2016: 168; DUDÁS et al. 2019: 10.

¹⁸ OLDENBURG 1999: 17.

places where individuals are free to come and go, they give the comfort of home, are predictable and equalising, free people from roles and obligations, offer inclusiveness, and give relief through conversation. The core of Oldenburg's theory lies in the social interactions combined with a change of the environment, which are essentially realised in the cafés, bars, bookshops and hair salons of the neighbourhood, most of which are also able to meet the needs of visitors arriving at the locality in addition to those of the locals. A noteworthy link is the effort of tourist accommodation establishments to expand their customer base by involving local people (by providing them with leisure services), a tradition that has been observed since the dawn of tourism and dates back even further in the traditional catering industry.¹⁹ People escaping from the drudgery of commuting between their home and workplace find the impulses in leisure spaces that can satisfy both their basic needs (e.g. food, belonging to somewhere) and their needs for growth (e.g. recognition, self-fulfilment), as well as being able to promote their personal development.²⁰ As Csíkszentmihályi describes it, "to make our lives better, we must make our experiences better", an idea that points to the increasing social appreciation of the role of engaging spaces that generate experiences.²¹

The special features of the metropolitan environment urge people to leave their everyday spatial routes and spend as much time as possible in spaces outside their homes.²² Most city dwellers find their space of relaxation in another city and visit facilities and use services for their leisure that were originally designed for the people who live there.²³ With the massive urbanisation that unfolded with the industrial revolution, one of the great tasks was to ensure that the labour force that flocked to cities could spend its leisure time there.²⁴ In the large European cities that today's tourists like, the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century saw the creation and development of most of the parks, spas, museums, places of entertainment, theatres, cinemas, amusement parks, zoos, cafés, various sports facilities, elegant department stores, shopping quarters, exhibition halls, places of excursions with good access by suburban railway, etc. These catered for the needs of the exploding number of inhabitants for quality recreation (beyond the world of drinking saloons and brothels). While the catering establishments rapidly growing in number primarily targeted the locals, the hotels providing night accommodation, which were initially concentrated around railway stations, served the needs of tourists who set out on their journey to enjoy the experience offered by big cities. Over time, the leisure function of big cities, in addition to enhancing the quality of life of locals, became an important instrument for boosting the economy, thus the government and the local authorities shared the responsibility for ensuring that their beloved capital was perceived by the public as a good place.

¹⁹ JUHÁSZ-DÓRA 2022: 19.

²⁰ MASLOW 2003: 376.

²¹ CSÍKSZENTMIHÁLYI 2001: 77.

²² PAGE 1995: 36.

²³ MICHALKÓ 1999: 168.

²⁴ EDGINTON-CHEN 2014: 203.

2. The good places of Budapest: A historical outlook

Taking a closer look at leisure-related good places in Budapest, there are different trends of the different periods. Leisure habits basically depend on the individual motivation, status, way of life, and the amount and division of their leisure time, while the framework is also influenced by economic and social conditions.

In Budapest, three main periods can be distinguished. During these periods good places do not only differ in their location and character, but also in the extent to which the preferences of locals and tourists coincide.

- In the period from the end of the 19th century to the Second World War, the most popular places were those considered good in a classical sense – related to promenading, cultural consumption, excursions –, which were partly created at that time and started their journey towards gaining popularity. Tourism was not dominant, so those places tended to be attractive that were primarily favoured by city dwellers, but which offered different opportunities in time, space and form of activity, depending on wealth and status.
- In the decades after the Second World War, the spaces of leisure came to be split as the leisure time controlled by the political system resulted in formal and informal places of leisure. Years later, with the increase of living standards and the emergence of tourism, the preferred places of city dwellers and visitors to the city became separated in their character and location.
- The period from the regime change to the present has been marked by the blurring of boundaries both in space and time, and increasingly in terms of use and users.

2.1. Good places from the late 19th century to the Second World War

The main features of the period were:

- rapid socio-economic development
- the level of literacy and general knowledge rose steadily because of the development of primary, secondary and tertiary education
- in big cities, work and leisure were separated from each other, whereas work continued to be dominant in the lives of traditional agricultural communities
- different social groups spent their leisure time separately from each other
- entertainment opportunities included a mixture of elements of the modern metropolis (theatres, cinemas, music halls) and the countryside (saint's days, festivals)

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, work and non-work time gradually became separated, even if at different rates and to different degrees in individual

social groups. Because of the considerable differences in wealth and income, different social groups' way of living – thus the patterns of leisure time use – differed greatly, and different strata of society were also spatially separated in their leisure time.²⁵

In Budapest, at the end of the 19th century, similar to other industrial cities, time spent at work dominated the everyday life of the lower social classes that made up the majority of society.²⁶ During this period, physical workers and employees worked 10 to 12 hours a day, while workers in the printing houses of Budapest and the shipyard in Óbuda worked 60 hours a week or more, and Sunday as holiday was not generally accepted. In Hungary, Sunday has been a weekly holiday for workers since 1891, and St Stephen's Day was also declared a public holiday around that time. In the 1920s and 1930s, working hours were reduced to 8 hours a day, and a few days of paid summer holidays were introduced. The resulting leisure time brought new opportunities and significantly transformed the daily lives of the masses: in this period, leisure became the counterbalance of work, and it was increasingly intended to give time to people to regain their energy.

There was rarely a chance to relax during the week in a big city for the masses, and leisure time was mainly embodied in the Sunday rest day. Until the First World War, the primary entertainment for the masses in Budapest was provided by the funfairs in the City Park and the People's Park and the zoo, which were visited by tens of thousands of people on a summer day. These leisure activities were themselves made up of a mixture of urban and rural elements: at the funfairs, the whole family "dressed up to spend their savings, looking for the thrills, the colourful and scary attractions, just as they did at the village saint's days".²⁷ After the First World War, the cinema became the number one place of entertainment for the masses, and in the 1920s, almost 90 cinemas attracted 13 million visitors a year in Budapest.²⁸ During this period, in addition to the usual leisure activities of going to cheap theatres, cinemas and music halls, reading became an increasingly popular leisure activity in parallel with the rising level of education.

Following the introduction of the Sunday as holiday, excursions – mainly to destinations in the vicinity of the capital – came to be a popular hobby for workers in Budapest.²⁹ By the 1930s, a few days' recreation and weekend leisure activities had also spread among the less well-off urban classes.

²⁵ CSATLÓS 2021: 106.

²⁶ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 4.

²⁷ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 4.

²⁸ BORSOS 2009: 23.

²⁹ CSATLÓS 2021: 106.



Figure 1: Crowds on the Danube Promenade (Dunakorzó) at Vigadó Square, 1940

Source: Fortepan. Image no. 151632. Donated by Gali

The development and dynamic growth of the entertainment industry also contributed to the changes in the use of leisure described above. Technological advances, the emergence of cinemas³⁰ and the radio, the expansion of opportunities for mass sports, and improving mobility opportunities, which play a fundamental role in tourism, brought about a radical lifestyle change, which comprised the elements of both modern metropolitan life (theatre, cinema, music halls) and rural life (saint's days, festivals).

In the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, the upper middle classes and the aristocracy, who made up a minority of society, had plenty of leisure time and pursued a wide variety of leisure activities. One of the favourite pastimes of the citizens of Pest was taking some afternoon coffee and snacks in a café in Budapest. Some of the cafés that were operating at the turn of the century are still in operation today. One of the most important forms of entertainment among the middle class was strolling the promenade (Korzó), which also provided an opportunity for socialising. Especially in bourgeois and aristocratic families, strolling the promenade was often followed by a form of evening entertainment (*Figure 1*). “Doctors, lawyers, soldiers, having a lot of free time, placed great emphasis on educating themselves in addition to entertainment.”³¹ Apart from giving big dinners at home, they often went to the opera. They were also the first to be attracted to the radio in the same way as they came to like reading books. At the turn of the century, one of the most popular activities for the middle and upper classes was horse racing.³²

³⁰ BORSOS 2009: 16–39.

³¹ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 5.

³² TULI 2004: 375.

In the summer, the bourgeoisie and aristocracy often travelled to the countryside, to spa resorts and to the seaside. Domestic tourism flourished after the Trianon peace treaty, which drastically reduced the country's territory, and by the 1930s, tourism had reached the magnitude of millions.³³ The most popular destinations for longer summer holidays and leisure activities were the coastal areas of Lake Balaton and the towns around the capital, Szentendre, Gödöllő, and Göd. In autumn and winter, they went hunting, while a popular pastime activity during the carnival season was attending balls.

At the beginning of the period, sport was practised by relatively few people but by the Horthy era, it had become a mass recreation, partly as a result of the incorporation of physical education into the education system. "The most popular sport was football, which could be played both on the unbuilt plots of land in the outskirts of the city and in the pastures at the edge of villages. It was then that the Vasas and Textiles sports clubs were founded."³⁴ In Hungary, scouting spread mainly among secondary school boys after the First World War.

Even though we cannot speak of a significant volume of tourism in this period, neither in terms of inbound nor domestic tourism, but the period from the Austro–Hungarian Compromise of 1867 (which established the Dual Monarchy of Austria–Hungary) to the end of the Second World War saw the development of the infrastructure (e.g. the Millennium Underground Railway) and the setting up of the institutions (e.g. tourism organisations and committees, IBUSZ travel agency) that laid the foundations for Budapest's present-day primacy.³⁵ After Trianon, Hungary became practically equal to Budapest on the map of inbound tourism. The expansion of domestic tourism was fundamentally hampered by traditional farming activities: peasant communities were confined to their place of living due to their 10–12 hour working days that lasted from early dawn until late at night, which was common at almost all times of the year. In these communities, modern leisure time – understood as one of the essential elements of tourism – did not exist, and the free time available on Sundays and public holidays was typically spent going to church, and less often going to balls, village fairs, markets, and weddings. Summer holiday and travelling were unknown concepts for them. Once in a while, when they took the train or bus, they travelled to a nearby town and "admired the moving and talking pictures projected on the wall",³⁶ which was a real event. The only event of the period that attracted large crowds from the countryside to the capital was the Millennium Celebrations of 1896.

Places of the period:

- primarily the city dwellers' good places as domestic visitors from the countryside also looked for places visited by the locals
- leisure opportunities within good places differed in time, space, and activity according to wealth and status

³³ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 5.

³⁴ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 6.

³⁵ RUBOVSKY et al. 2009: 206.

³⁶ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 6.

- the classic good places were popular, which were mostly established at this time, i.e.
 - the promenade, walking areas, cafés (the Danube Promenade, boulevards, Andrásy Avenue, Thököly Road)
 - the Opera House, theatres, music halls in the inner-city of Pest
 - the venues of the Millennium Celebrations of 1896
 - entertainment areas (Amusement Park, Mutatványos Square (Jugglers' Square), "Constantinople" (Konstantinápoly)
 - urban parks (City Park), Margaret Island, Városmajor
 - excursion sites in and around the city (Buda Hills, Palota Forest – a holiday resort for the well-off, a day trip for the masses from the city)
 - riverbanks, lakesides, baths/barge beaches, water sports and boathouses on the banks of the Danube at the Roman Beach (Római part), People's Island (Népsziget) and the district of Pesterzsébet

It was an important communal and social activity of urban life to visit the promenades and the walking areas. On Sunday, families would dress up in their Sunday best for the stroll. It was also the time when Budapest's café culture flourished. Cafés had elegant interiors and their large terraces faced the promenades and boulevards.³⁷

The theatres and music halls were also a major attraction for both residents and visitors. Visitors were primarily interested in the sights of Budapest built around that period (Andrásy Avenue with the Opera House, the elegant apartment blocks of the Grand Boulevard, the hotel rows on the Danube bank, etc.). The area around the railway stations played a distinguished role in opening up towards the national and international scene.³⁸ This idea was symbolically reinforced by the view of the magnificent main building of the Keleti railway station, which forms an arch of triumph at the end of the city promenade leading to the station (Rákóczi Road).

The total number of visitors to the Millennium Celebrations was 5.8 million, according to the *Révai lexicon*, which, even if it seems somewhat exaggerated, shows its importance for the capital. Built in 1896 as one of the largest entertainment districts in Europe at the time, "Constantinople" (Konstantinápoly) lasted only two seasons, it could accommodate 40,000 people at a time.³⁹

From the Hungarian reform era onwards, the urban way of life gradually developed the need for city dwellers to spend summers, or at least Sundays, as they could afford it, in the green, leafy areas. For the urban masses, workers and servants, leisure was a holiday, which was mainly limited to Sundays and public holidays. Because of the shorter duration, leisure time was mainly spent in the city parks, therefore, the destinations that were within walking distance such as the City Park, People's Park, Margaret Island, and Városmajor were extremely popular. The need for and the possibility of leaving one's

³⁷ NAGY–TRENCSÉNYI 2012: 100.

³⁸ BÁN 2011: 52.

³⁹ BERZA 1993: 700.

place of residence was linked to the amount of leisure time. Before the introduction of rail transport, long-distance travel was rare, and only the privileged aristocracy or those who had to travel for work travelled further from their place of birth. Hence spaces for spending leisure time were confined to the general area of residence for a long time. However, efficient and accessible public transport made travel possible, even if limited in time, to widen the range of opportunities of journeying away from home to explore the neighbourhood.

From the Ottoman period until the end of the 19th century, viticulture was common in most parts of the Buda hills, and it only diminished after the great phylloxera epidemic. However, in addition to agricultural production, a new function of the area appeared from the middle of the century. The hills and forests of Buda were initially accessible only to the upper classes, but with the growth of leisure and the development of urban transport, one-day trips in the neighbourhood of the city became a popular destination for the masses. This is supported by the fact that, although restaurants were concentrated mainly in the inner-city area and along the main roads leading to the city centre, a large number of them were opened in places such as the forests of Buda.⁴⁰

The destination that was the easiest to reach on foot was Városmajor, but the cogwheel railway built in 1874 opened the way to the forested Svábhegy, and from 1890 to Széchenyi Hill. Zugliget had become a popular place for outings by then. Buda's first horse-drawn railway line, the Chain Bridge – Zugliget line led here from 1868.⁴¹ The attraction of the area is indicated by the large number of 'summer restaurants' that opened here from the very beginning, especially near the stations. The end stations of the Buda tram lines, unlike those in Pest, were not located in residential areas, but ran to excursion sites in forests, which shows that the users were not the local residents but those who came for excursions.⁴²

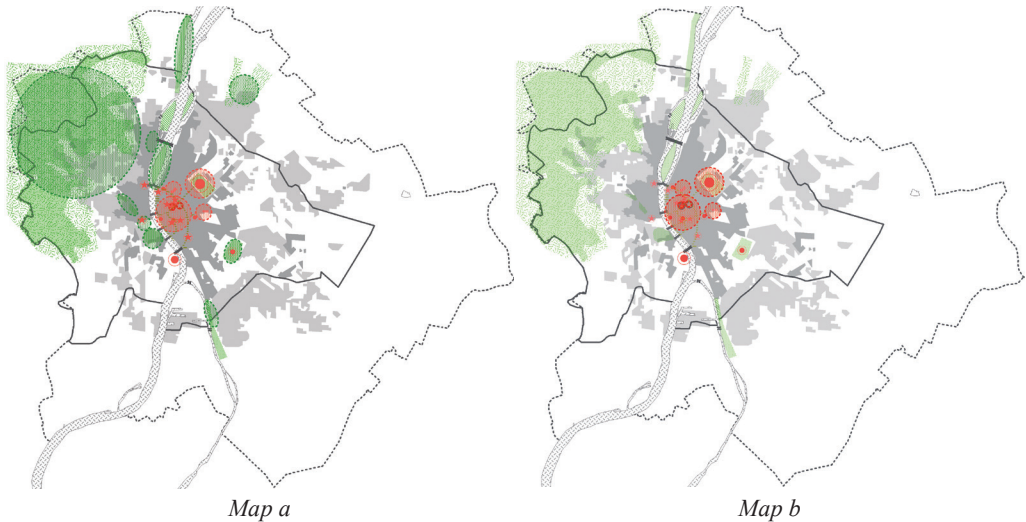
The Buda hills, on the other hand, attracted people not only as excursion places, but also as places for leisure and holidays. The Fácános Restaurant in Zugliget was a popular summer entertainment place and ballroom, and it also had a 30-room hotel, so it was suitable for staying for longer periods. In addition to their city apartments, wealthier people built summer houses in the area, and villas to rent for the whole summer were also popular. Mór Jókai bought the plot of his famous villa and garden from the fee he received for one of his novels in 1853. It can be visited today as a study trail.⁴³ The residential function of the buildings, originally built as summer houses, became more permanent over time, attracting more and more inhabitants to the increasingly expensive area, which has now become one of Buda's most attractive and prestigious residential areas.

⁴⁰ ILLYEFALVI 1933: 123.

⁴¹ BERZA 1993: 441.

⁴² ILLYEFALVI 1933: 147.

⁴³ BERZA 1993: 617.



Tourism was not yet dominant, so primarily the urban places that were popular with the city's inhabitants were found attractive by visitors, too.

In the period from the end of the 19th century to the Second World War, the most popular places were the classical good places – those associated with promenades, culture and outings.

Figure 2: Location of the good places of the period in Budapest

Source: compiled by the authors

Along the Pest–Vác railway line, excursion and holiday resorts appeared on the Pest side. The proximity of the railway station made the Palota Forest one of those popular places and a restaurant known today as Brunovsky was soon opened there. A residential area was built on either side of the railway, originally for seasonal use as holiday homes and summer houses, but later also for permanent residential use. The villas were built by wealthy lawyers, doctors, and artists, and included villas for Bishop Mihály Horváth, violinist Ede Reményi, and actress Lujza Blaha.⁴⁴

The waterfront became particularly popular in the 1920s because of rowing sports. In the 1930s, there were already 20 boathouses on the Roman Beach (Római part) from the railway bridge to the lower end of Szentendre Island, 6 on the opposite side of Újpest and 14 on the People's Island (Népsziget).⁴⁵

2.2. Good places to visit in the decades after the Second World War

The main features of the period were as follows:

- 1948–1956: new state order, scarce financial resources, dynamic growth in the number of college and university students, cultural re-education

⁴⁴ BUZA 1995: 49.

⁴⁵ KOVÁCS 1988: 10.

- 1956–1989: retaliation, opening up, rising living standards
- increasing amount of leisure time, collective and individual mobility (airplane, private car)
- not differentiated by status – equal access for all
- different offers for Hungarians and foreigners

After the Second World War, the establishment of the new state system – the introduction of Marxism–Leninism as the state ideology, the centralisation of the political field of force, the creation of a one-party system, the introduction of planned economy – radically transformed the lives of the inhabitants of the capital, thus also their use of leisure time. Education, culture (including theatre, cinema, radio, and books) and other areas of leisure (such as sports) became the main arena for the cultural re-education of society and the dissemination of communist ideology.

In the first decade of the period, cinema became a form of mass entertainment.⁴⁶ The prominent role played by cinema in reaching the masses is borne out by the fact that the number of cinemas quadrupled between 1948 and 1956. “Radio had a spectacular career similar to that of cinema. The government significantly increased the number of libraries and community centres. The number of people who read books more or less regularly increased, but the books published were heavily censored. The tools of political education included book reading evenings, ideologised educational programmes combined with propaganda in the culture centres, or the compulsory ‘Free People’s Half Hours’ at the workplace.”⁴⁷ The formerly popular coffee houses were closed down, while the typical hospitality establishments of the period, the ‘espresso cafés’, were very popular. The scarce financial resources characteristic of the period, especially among young people, led to the emergence of house parties.

The system promoted both mass and elite sport, so that “alongside the highly ideologised cultural selection, attending sporting events was a refreshing experience among the poor recreational opportunities”.⁴⁸

After the 1956 revolution, the Kádár regime applied severe repression, but gradually relaxed its economic and social policies, and stated that the main aim was to raise the living standards of the population. Under ‘goulash communism’, the working week was reduced from 48 to 42 hours, and every other Saturday became a day off, which led to a significant increase in people’s leisure time. The rising incomes were spent on consumption rather than savings.⁴⁹

The improving living conditions, increasing leisure and discretionary income also affected the area of cultural consumption. By the 1980s, virtually all the society had

⁴⁶ BORSOS 2009: 47–49.

⁴⁷ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 6.

⁴⁸ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 7.

⁴⁹ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 7.

become consumers of culture to some degree: cinema, theatre and books were cheap and easily accessible, providing a broad range of people with meaningful leisure activities. Since the 1970s, watching television has dominated the use of leisure time.

Cheap books by foreign writers – previously unknown or banned in Hungarian translation – were available to all, but besides buying books, going to the library was also popular. The role of radio was transformed, it gradually became a part of everyday life, and television took over its role of entertainment and recreation. “At first, people watched TV in culture houses, factory clubs, offices of agricultural cooperatives, in friends’ and neighbours’ flats, but by 1982, there were more than 100 sets per 100 households. As the number of sets increased, there was also a sharp rise in the transmission time. The spread of television significantly changed people’s entertainment habits. Social forms of leisure were pushed into the background by television.”⁵⁰ With the generalisation of television, interest in cinema declined, but in the 1980s, American adventure and action films gave cinema-going a new impetus. Substantial public subsidies for cinemas and theatres made it possible for everyone to buy tickets. Audiences were most interested in musical comedies, operettas, musicals, and cabarets.

Sport has lost its former privileged role, and new sports kept emerging alongside mass sports.

Tourism, both inbound and outbound as well as domestic underwent significant changes.⁵¹ Hungary established itself on the map of international tourism, and for the locals, travel – mainly to cheap company or trade union holiday resorts or to the plot of land to cultivate it at the weekends as a hobby – came to be an integral part of the way of life for the Hungarian population. Hungary, often referred to as ‘the happiest barracks’, and Budapest and Lake Balaton in particular, became the number one destination for foreigners visiting the socialist bloc. While other socialist countries severely restricted visits by foreigners, Hungary opened its doors to visitors coming from outside the socialist bloc after 1956, mainly to satisfy its foreign exchange needs.

The liberalisation of foreign travel was gradual, and Hungarians were initially allowed to travel only to the countries of the ‘Soviet camp’, and later to Yugoslavia, with significant restrictions. From the mid-1980s, shopping tourism to Austria flourished,⁵² with the primary aim of buying products (such as certain foodstuffs, household appliances, clothing, and cosmetics) that were not yet available in Hungary at the time.⁵³ In the second half of the period, thanks to the post-1956 measures and rise in living standards, going on holiday within Hungary became general, although Budapest was more of a departure than a receiving area with regard to domestic holidays. The most popular destinations for the inhabitants of Budapest were the outstanding resort areas of the Danube Bend, Lake Balaton, Lake Velence, the Mátra hill, etc. Spending holidays in company and trade union holiday resorts fulfilled an important role in domestic tourism. Urbanisation,

⁵⁰ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 7.

⁵¹ LENGYEL 2004: 51–53; RUBOVSKY et al. 2009: 222–237.

⁵² SÁRI 2019: 72–77.

⁵³ MICHÁLKÓ 2001: 256.

with the mushrooming of urban housing estates increased the popularity of building a holiday home of your own or buying or renting a small plot of land in the green area to do gardening. These became a new, active form of recreation for a wide range of people living in the capital.

Good places of the period:

- efforts to control leisure time and leisure activities
- formal “good places” (district and company culture centres, library network) created for the above purpose on a large scale and made accessible to all
- informal good places (sports facilities, liqueur shop bars, ‘espresso’ bars) emerged alongside formal places
- with the emergence of tourism, the perception of a good place became sharply divided between locals and tourists and it fundamentally differed
- main tourist sites (e.g., Heroes’ Square, Váci Street) were often avoided by locals
- “going to one’s plot of land for gardening” became a common form of active leisure in the outer suburbs of Budapest and in its agglomeration
- waterfronts were particularly popular, apart from the Roman Beach, the banks of the branching Danube in Soroksár and the sides of urban lakes were also found to be attractive

During this period, leisure spaces developed in two sharply different directions in parallel with each other. Recreational spaces can be divided into formal and informal spaces in terms of their use, and into spaces used by city dwellers or visitors to the city in terms of their users. In the post-war period, the aim was to re-educate society culturally, therefore, cultural institutions were characterised by wide and equal accessibility. Under socialism, alongside the strict control of working hours in the context of full employment, leisure time was controlled by the regime, as were all areas of life.⁵⁴ Formal leisure spaces were created, evenly distributed in space to offer easy access to everybody. These included the so-called ‘culture centres’, which were not only located in all districts but were also attached to larger factories and organisations. There were also libraries and cinemas, which hosted cinematographic works of great importance to the system, which also covered the capital evenly, district by district. With the creation of Greater Budapest (Nagy-Budapest) in 1950, the Szabó Ervin Library, for example, had to take on the task of serving the annexed towns and villages (23 branch libraries were set up in the outer districts within six years).⁵⁵

⁵⁴ FEKETE 2018: 43.

⁵⁵ BERZA 1993: 468.



Figure 3: The popular Hullám buffet on the bank of the Danube in Ráckeve (Soroksár), 1959

Source: Fortepan. Image no. 114104. Donated by Sándor Bauer

Traditionally, theatres in Budapest were built mainly in the city centre, however, decentralisation was also introduced in this sphere: district culture centres brought culture closer to the inhabitants of the outer districts by hosting performances of the permanent theatres. A good example of this process is that of the present-day József Attila Theatre, which was built as a culture centre in 1953, but from 1956 it became an independent theatre, targeting the residents of the workers' estates in Angyalföld.⁵⁶ In comparison to formal and controlled cultural spaces, however, informal spaces of leisure, such as sports facilities or liqueur shop bars, which also contributed to strengthening social relationships, played a much greater role in everyday life. A particular subculture of water sports was emerging. There were boathouses along the banks of the Danube at the Roman Beach and in Soroksár. They offered holiday accommodation in their cheaply rented rooms while the residents moved out for the summer (*Figure 3*).

After 1956, due to the rise in living standards, the amount of leisure time and the opportunities for spending it greatly changed. Increasing leisure time and relative prosperity also created the need and opportunity for a change of location. Due to restrictions on foreign travel, this need was mainly satisfied within Hungary: gardening at weekend plots and holiday-making emerged as leisure activities, the latter mainly in the form of company or trade union holidays.⁵⁷

Most of the companies in Budapest had their own holiday resorts, mainly on the banks of the Danube and in the Buda Hills. The Ministry of Metallurgy and Machinery had a holiday resort on the Roman Beach, which is now known colloquially as the "Sajtház"

⁵⁶ BERZA 1993: 619.

⁵⁷ NAGY-TRENCSENYI 2012: 101.

(the Cheese House), named after the cellular structure of the building. It had a fountain and a playground in the garden. A pioneer town was built for children in Csillebérc in the Buda Hills, but several districts also had their own pioneer camps, for example, the camp of the 13th district used to be held on the People's Island (Népsziget).

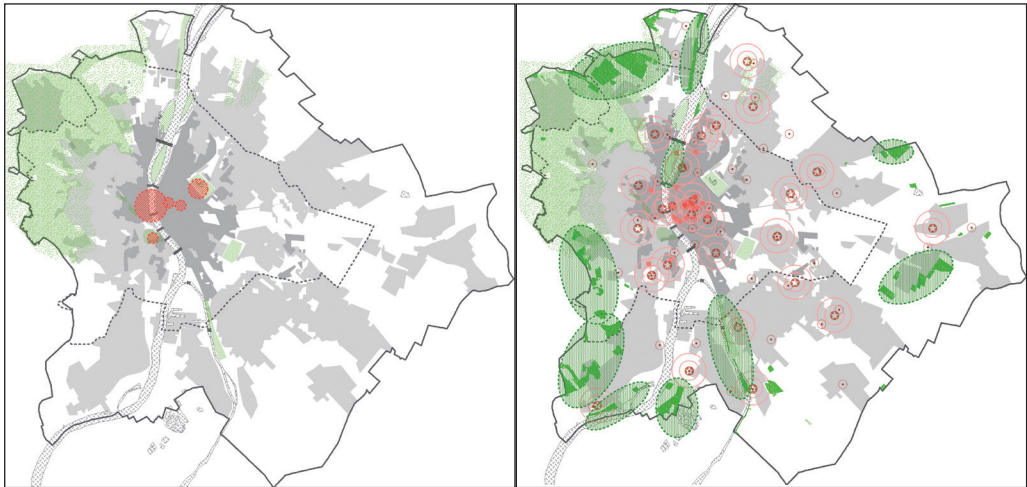
Originally, weekend plots were often so-called “enclosed gardens”, which were created from areas unsuitable for large-scale agricultural use, by parcelling them up into small plots under the 1968 decree of the Ministry of Construction and Urban Development (ÉVM).⁵⁸ The opportunity was particularly attractive for city dwellers who had rural roots and had moved to multi-storey housing estates without gardens, because gardening in the small plots of land offered them the chance to improve the household budget and enjoy active recreation. These areas were mainly located in the outer parts of Budapest, and those were particularly popular that were on the banks of the Danube (Horgásztelep, Soroksár, Molnársziget) and in the hills (Ezüsthegy, Aranyhegy, Ürömhegy, Csúcshegy), which were traditional recreational areas. The plots that were typically used as holiday homes rather than for agricultural purposes often became permanent residences later.⁵⁹

Until the regime change, international tourism that started after 1956 was mainly operated in organised group travels: visitors were shown the main sights of interest that were the regular components of the fixed programmes. The exposed ‘good places’, which were concentrated mainly in the city centre (Heroes’ Square, Buda Castle, Danube bank, Váci Street and its surroundings, museums) and in the main panoramic points (Citadel, Fisherman’s Bastion), were often avoided by locals in their everyday lives, so there was a sharp division between the places considered good by visitors and the city dwellers. Foreign groups were not only provided with a kind of showcase regarding the sights, but they were also given priority catering services, in a controlled manner, instead of an otherwise more limited range of goods.⁶⁰ There were also destinations that were equally attractive for both city dwellers and domestic tourists visiting the city mainly from the countryside, such as the Zoo, the Amusement Park and the Buda Castle.

⁵⁸ ÉVM-MÉM Joint Decree 18/1968 (of the Ministry of Construction and Urban Development and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food) on the sale or lease of certain state-owned land in unincorporated areas.

⁵⁹ CSORDÁS 2021: 89.

⁶⁰ “And the foreigner’s coupon. Capitalist visitors who came to see their relatives had to buy restaurant coupons, which could be used in a few selected elegant restaurants, mainly in Budapest”, writes Péter Esterházy on page 697 of his novel entitled *Celestial Harmonies* (*Harmonia caelestis*).



Map a

The 'good places' primarily concentrated in the city centre (Heroes' Square, Buda Castle, Danube bank, Váci Street and its surroundings, museums) and the main panoramic sites (Citadel, Fisherman's Bastion) were often avoided by locals in their daily lives.

Map b

Formal 'good places' (district and company culture centres, library network), established in a way to be accessible to all, were evenly spread across the city. Going to weekend plots of land became a widespread form of active leisure in the outer districts of Budapest and in its agglomeration.

Figure 4: Location of the good places of the period in Budapest

Source: compiled by the authors

2.3. From regime change to today: Whose good place is it, after all?

The key characteristic features of the era were the following:

- the change of regime brought fundamental socio-economic changes
- the boundaries between working time, other time spent on social commitments and leisure time became blurred
- the “city” came into fashion: blogs, street food, thematic routes, map design, ‘A Day in the City’, ‘Urbanista’
- tourism became one of the most important drivers of the economy
- between 1990–2000, rapid privatisation in tourism, the era of organised mass tourism
- from 2000 to the present, dynamic growth of individual tourism and the number of city sight-seeing tours of a couple of days, low-cost airlines, cheap flights, the boom in private accommodation (Airbnb), the spread of the use of internet and social media, review sites (such as Tripadvisor)
- micro-trends, the emergence of niche markets

The change of regime brought fundamental changes in the socio-economic structure: a market economy was established, incomes fell sharply, unemployment became visible, social and income inequalities manifested themselves and then became more pronounced. The struggle to make a living led to a radical decline in the demand for consumption, including leisure goods, especially cultural goods and travel.⁶¹ The proportion of young people in education increased, the overall share of the intelligentsia rose, while the number of people working in agriculture fell. Among employees, the number of managers increased, while among entrepreneurs, the separation of working time and leisure time was impaired.⁶² In addition to changes in the economic environment, demographic changes also had an impact on leisure consumption.⁶³

The reduction of the support provided to the cultural sector led to a massive increase in the price of books and the closure of theatres, cultural institutions, culture centres, libraries, and cinemas. The funding of sports clubs was restructured, and sponsorship was introduced. “Books, newspapers, theatre, and cinema were replaced by multichannel cable TV and video. Video rental stores proliferated, and video became the entertainment of choice for a significant proportion of families. The leisure activity of ‘playing on the computer’, using a game program, first appeared in urban families, and quickly became very popular, then it was followed by the rapid spread of the internet.”⁶⁴

In the three and half decades since the regime change, it can be observed that apart from a decline in the amount of time spent reading, there has been an increase in the amount of time spent in front of the television and screens.⁶⁵ Today, the screen gives the framework of young people’s lives, “their leisure time is pervaded by screentime activities, and being present on the internet is also a major field of self-representation”.⁶⁶ The time spent in social activities with family, friends, and acquaintances, as well as in cultural activities outside home (going to the theatre, cinema, visiting events), has decreased. The time spent in physical activity, walking, hiking, or other physical activities has been reduced to a minimum.⁶⁷

Since the turn of the millennium, new trends have evolved on the supply and demand side of the leisure industry. After a low point in 1996 for attendance at cultural institutions and events (cinema, theatre, museum, concerts, etc.), demand has now risen, forming a U-shaped curve.⁶⁸ In parallel, new cultural institutions, high quality concerts, international festivals, events, museum exhibitions, cinema complexes, escape rooms⁶⁹ have emerged on the supply side of the cultural scene.

Overall, as the amount of leisure time increases at the societal level, polarisation in the amount and use of leisure time is also becoming more pronounced. In this process,

⁶¹ FEKETE 2018: 93.

⁶² TIBORI 2002: 64.

⁶³ SZABÓ 2020: 65–68.

⁶⁴ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 8.

⁶⁵ KSH 2013: 5.

⁶⁶ BOCSI–KOVÁCS 2018: 68.

⁶⁷ KSH 2013: 6.

⁶⁸ Erzsébet Ifjúsági Alap [s. a.]: 8.

⁶⁹ PETYKÓ et al. 2020: 37–39.

the capital city acts as a kind of flagship, the key driving force of which are the city dwellers and the tourists visiting Hungary mainly from the affluent societies, the mature “experience societies”.⁷⁰

The Hungarian capital is also becoming increasingly attractive to foreign tourists. Budapest’s attractiveness was growing steadily from the 2000s until the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, thanks to improving transport links, the rise in popularity of less globally known and popular cities and owing to the good value for money by international standards. In some areas of the capital, this has devolved into “overtourism”, which deteriorates both the quality of life of locals in the area and the quality of the experience unacceptably.⁷¹ For domestic tourists, visits to Budapest take the form of day trips or trips of a few days as they often find accommodation at friends’ or relatives’ homes.⁷²

Good places of the era:

- different processes are occurring in parallel with each other, there is a simultaneous demand for places that are quick to consume, can be ticked off or put on a list, and for authentic, special experiences and places that are also considered good places by locals
- due to “overtourism”, the characteristic features are the overuse of public spaces in the inner city, and the critical deterioration of the quality of public spaces, particularly in the centre, in the party district and in the “Jewish Quarter”
- the Island Festival (Sziget Fesztivál) and the party district attract young foreign tourists most strongly
- due to the search for an authentic local experience, the places considered good by Spatial Dynamics of Good Places in the Urban Development of Budapest, the city’s residents and tourists alike tend to converge, e.g. both young people from the city and from abroad come to the party district for fun
- the Danube and urban waters are in a contradictory situation – the Danube is inaccessible in the city centre, while the natural, outer water banks and small watercourses are increasingly valued
- grassroots civic initiatives and communities shape the use of public space through finding new functions
- white-collar and creative workplaces seek proximity to good places, the boundaries between different activities, especially work and leisure, become blurred
- during and after the pandemic, outdoor entertainment and entertaining guests became more valued

Since the regime change, there has been a significant shift in what is perceived as good places by residents and visitors to the city. The renewal of public spaces and buildings of the inner-city area has more and more increased the value of the city centre, but instead

⁷⁰ KOVÁCS 2014: 47.

⁷¹ PINKE-SZIVA et al. 2019: 13.

⁷² HALASSY 2010: 26; MICHALKÓ et al. 2014: 6–7.

of its residential function, the renewed historic quarter has become more attractive for institutional, economic, cultural, and tourist purposes.

Since the 2000s, as a consequence of cheap flights and the spread of booking portals and booking applications (Booking.com, Airbnb), the organised group trips have been overwhelmingly replaced by individual tourists coming for a few days' sightseeing trip. A number of simultaneous trends can be observed with regard to tourists arriving in large numbers but as individuals. Partly, there is a rapid 'consumption' of attractions, which is enhanced by various 'Top 10' lists and consumer review sites (such as Tripadvisor). In addition, an increasing demand has emerged to discover unique, special, "hidden" places. Finally, as a combination of the two, some companies have found a niche market, and they are specialising in mass-produced, industrialised 'unique experiences' by offering escape rooms and beer bikes. These simultaneous and contradictory demands have played a major role in the transformation of the inner part of Erzsébetváros (Elizabeth Town) into a party district. It is well illustrated by how the originally truly authentic and unique ruin pubs have been turned into a real industry. However, the density of functions and the central location in the city centre continue to make the area attractive not only to foreigners but also to city dwellers, at least for entertainment purposes.

Such processes have been set in motion that are contradictory also from an urbanistic point of view: value increase and vacancy due to overuse simultaneously manifest themselves in the inner area. Inner city places, previously more popular with locals, have become a special authentic experience for tourists, but the more visitors arrive, the more overuse erodes the experience and causes conflict in the use of the inner districts. The large tourist traffic makes residential function impossible, and the resulting mass vacancy of apartments leads to short-term rentals, which is a further source of conflict, causing more people to move out of the neighbourhoods concerned.



Figure 5: The empty Szimpla Garden during the Covid pandemic, 2021

Source: photo by Gábor Michalkó

This process is directly observable in some of the changing places that become fashionable for a while. In the mid-1990s, Ráday Street, which was thematically renewed with cultural and catering functions, began to gentrify, and the price of residential property increased significantly. The street attracted not only locals but also a large number of foreign tourists, especially in the area closer to the city centre. However, the bustling street life caused considerable environmental pollution, which was not only extremely disturbing for the residents, but also significantly diminished the visitor experience, and the place lost its former popularity. It seems that over-popular places have a 'life cycle' and their warranty 'expires' after a while. The process then repeats itself in new places. City dwellers discover previously less popular places, which are then 'put on the map', and after a while they are also discovered by tourists, and the cycle restarts again. However, the process is likely to become more balanced, the further away the location is from the city centre.

Open spaces, particularly green spaces and waterfronts are outstandingly attractive for residents of densely built-up urban areas. The value of outdoor entertainment and catering particularly grew during and after the pandemic. Nevertheless, the perception and use of the Danube is still controversial. The Danube bank in the inner-city is inaccessible due to traffic on the lower embankment. Its direct use is blocked by a series of hotel and event boats occupying the waterfront view, so tourists visiting the World Heritage Site look for a connection to the riverbank in vain. As regards Budapest's inhabitants, the riverfront is almost completely absent from their mental map of the city.

In recent years, grassroots community initiatives have been launched to make temporary use of the Danube bank, and they have also changed the trend of seasonal catering, seeking out the outer spaces of the Roman Beach, the People's Island or the southern parts of the city, instead of the overcrowded, inaccessible inner-city Danube bank. Temporary use of public spaces is an important part of the cityscape both in its image-forming and community-oriented roles, expanding the public space use.⁷³ By supporting the economic prosperity of the adjacent areas, it also serves tourism purposes besides giving satisfaction to the city's residents.⁷⁴

In the 2018 Venice Biennale programme, Valyo's "Szabihíd" (nickname from the name of Liberty Bridge) project entered the international scene. The project was originally inspired by a spontaneous 'occupation' of the bridge by young foreign tourists during the closure of the Freedom Bridge (Szabadság híd) in 2016. Similar experimental projects included the temporary utilisation of the construction site on the Danube bank (Harbour), the free bathing opportunity in the Danube (Roman Beach) or the Árasztó-part recreational project on the side of the unused embankment of the Danube. These micro-scale, community developments next to the Danube are not only of local significance: an increasing proportion of city residents and visitors to the city are showing interest in unique attractions that are popular with locals and go beyond sightseeing. Therefore, the revitalisation of the outer areas is also an opportunity to ease the concentration of

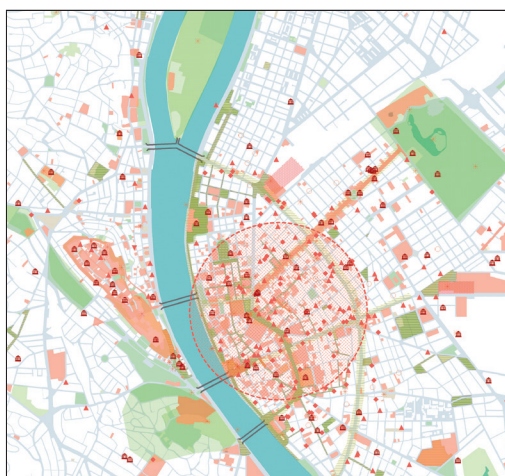
⁷³ FONYÓDI 2019: 34.

⁷⁴ MICHALKÓ 2010: 66.

tourism. It effectively shifts the demand for using the Danube in the inner city, which is difficult to achieve because of traffic, to the outer parts of the city.⁷⁵ Riverbanks, which are close to nature and revitalised sections of small watercourses are being discovered and enjoyed by city dwellers because of the direct access to the watercourse and due to the urban cycle routes. Thus, new areas are added to the green/blue selection alongside the banks of the Roman Beach and the Soroksár branch of the Danube. Temporary traffic closures in inner city areas are testing the demands of city dwellers, and at the same time, they are preparing the ground for a social debate on a more liveable city.

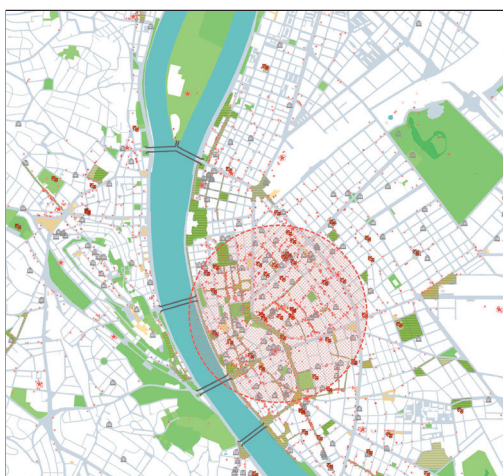
A good place is no longer a need merely related to leisure time. Companies with highly skilled, creative employees, such as Prezi and LogMeIn choose to work in the feature-rich city centre rather than in distant office parks, and the unique Danube-front environment also played a major role in the unparalleled success of Graphisoft Park. In addition, fusion places have emerged that offer café, exhibition space and community office functions at the same time, such as the Kastner Community in the Népszínháznegyed (People's Theater District), which won the Community Office of the Year Award in 2022.

All this is a good illustration of the trend of our time, as the boundaries between the time spent on work, commitments, and leisure become blurred, and the need for good places, previously enjoyed more on holidays and days off, is becoming increasingly important in our daily lives. This way the separation between a good place, workplace and place of residence is diminishing more and more.



Map a

Density of attractions and tourist services in the city centre: built heritage, museums, exhibitions, viewpoints, accommodation, and high quality catering.



Map b

The density of functions in the city centre and the central location make the area attractive to both foreigners and city dwellers for entertainment. The main entertainment venues for city dwellers are theatres, cinemas, nightclubs, bars, and pubs.

Figure 6: Location of the good places of the period in Budapest

Source: compiled by the authors

⁷⁵ FONYÓDI 2019: 34.

Summary

Bull and his colleagues identified four major trends that have a profound impact on the development of the leisure economy,⁷⁶ and these changes are also bound to affect Budapest's good places. In the coming years, the boundaries between working time, other social commitments and leisure will be blurred. The evolvement of leisure activities could take place along two scenarios: one of them, organic development is less likely, leisure activities are thought to undergo significant restructuring. The latter implies increasing lifestyle involvement and quality-of-life dimensions, a rise in the popularity of leisure time spent in the immediate environment and focusing on activities related to personal development (learning, sports, community work). Increased commercialisation will be reflected in the creation of new products and services, with new experiences. Lastly, the service provider side of the leisure services market will be expanding: the civil sector and local authorities will appear more markedly on the supply side of leisure services alongside the traditional business sector.

Besides these macrotrends, several further microtrends are shaping the future of leisure time.⁷⁷ The increase in the number of single-person households, new patterns of childbearing and cohabitation, the rise in retirement age, commuting (both daily and long-distance), working from home, increasing internet penetration, the expansion of the market for electronic goods, the rise in the popularity of dangerous hobbies, among others, will lead to the creation of new services, the expansion of leisure spaces, the emergence of new niche markets also in respect of the leisure spaces of Budapest.

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⁷⁶ BULL et al. 2003: 280–288.

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- Act XXXVI of 1872 on the establishment and regulation of the Buda-Pest metropolitan legislative authority [1872. évi XXXVI. törvénycikk Buda-Pest fővárosi törvényhatóság alakításáról és rendezéséről]