



The rehabilitation of modern city centres  
in Hungary and the Central and Eastern European Region  
in the light of the example of Veszprém

THE S I S B O O K

The rehabilitation of modern city centres  
in Hungary and the Central and Eastern European Region  
in the light of the example of Veszprém

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THESISBOOK - 2022

## ABSTRACT:

In my thesis, I examine the potential for the rehabilitation in major conurbations in the 1960s and 1970s.

I believe it is time to talk more about the development, renovation and rehabilitation of our modern city centres and to start a more intensive dialogue about them. Little has been written on the subject in relation to its importance. However, it is a highly relevant and crucial area, as many problems remain to be solved and many of the values associated with these centres are being lost or forgotten. Currently, the professional discussions on the architecture of this period are becoming increasingly dynamic, both internationally and locally, and this provides the opportunity to compare information and results and to shed light on the interrelationships. Rehabilitation of this kind began in the first half of the 2000s, thirty to forty years after the establishment of modern city centres. There are now a sufficient number of examples of such projects in both the Central and Eastern European region and in Hungary to draw conclusions and summarise their experience.

In most cases, the above-mentioned developments either failed to be achieved in a comprehensive way (public space, buildings, transport) or were not accompanied by high-quality architectural and urban design solutions. Through my research, I would like to help these centres to be regenerated to a high architectural standard by anticipating the rehabilitation process and many of the problems and challenges that are likely to arise. In my thesis, I present four examples from abroad and three examples from Hungary. All of them have solutions or achievements in rehabilitation that are worth mentioning. Among them, the modern city centre of Veszprém, which I am familiar with and in whose rehabilitation project I was involved, will be analysed in detail. The general problems identified in the rehabilitation examples will be examined and attempts made to solve them collected and recorded. The focus of my thesis is on the key aspects of town centre rejuvenation which, in my view, are essential for successful regeneration.

The aspects are:

- functional role change,
- maintaining continuity in the process of renewal,
- spatial and temporal interpretation of the context,
- sustainability,
- cohesion and order,
- prioritising the local community in regeneration.

Six sub-chapters are built around the six aspects, each concluding with a thesis. I hope that the aspects set out and the theses formulated will be of help to planners and investors working on similar regeneration projects in the future.

I will conclude by summarising what has been achieved so far, taking note of the way forward for modern city centre regeneration and outlining the issues for the future.



1. The east end of the Kossuth street in Veszprém

#### Thesis 1: Functional role changing

Over the last twenty-five years, our changing lifestyles and the rapid transformation of the economy, commerce and administration have {all} brought about a functional reorganisation of our city centres. The uses and roles of these contemporary municipalities built under socialism, have also been transformed and changed. In this context, it became inevitable to reorganise their way they operate to rethink the functionality of certain elements of the building stock and to adapt the public space system to new needs.



2. Site plan showing public space developments in the centre of Veszprém

## Thesis 2: Innovation by maintaining continuity

The need to rehabilitate and further develop modern centres of our cities, significantly those built in the 1960s and 1970s, has become an urgent task, due to the passing of time and missed opportunities. An important aspect of redevelopment is the conservation of layers of time and space that carry the history and culture of the city, and the promotion of continuity to maintain and preserve community identity. This can only be achieved if all that is intrinsic to the essence of earlier periods is preserved in some form, and only the less important details and unattractive spatial situations are removed or transformed.



3. *Pedestrian links to the city centre of Veszprém*

### Thesis 3: Interpreting context in space and time

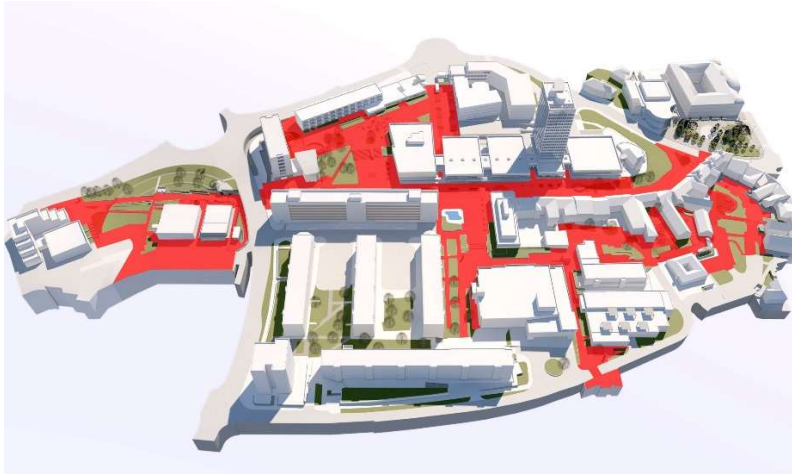
The importance of context in the modern city centres studied is manifested in two ways: First in the relationship between the city centre and the city, and second in the temporal layers. It is essential that the city centre fits harmoniously and naturally into the city as a whole. Improving pedestrian links and accessibility is an essential part of this. The coexistence of the different temporal layers becomes organic when the layers are taken into consideration and fit together. Both when creating spatial coherence and when subsequently sanding the temporal layers together, it is useful to fill in the missing elements, to refine the parts that create tension and to look for opportunities to connect.



4. The pergola built during phase I/B of the downtown rehabilitation.

#### Thesis 4: Sustainability in the rehabilitation of modern heritage

Responsibility for future generations requires us to leave as small an ecological footprint as possible. Today, many architects are seeking to make use of existing neighbourhoods, buildings and spaces (renovating or transforming them) rather than demolishing and building new. This approach is proving particularly important in the development of our modern city centres, where designers are considering and deciding on the future of groups of buildings and public spaces. From a sustainability point of view, an enhancing-complementary architectural attitude is a much more favourable strategy than starting from scratch by erasing the existing built environment, as is usually the case with projects of this kind. The first involves unlocking existing assets and exploiting their benefits.



5. A renewed public space in the modern city centre of Veszprém.

#### Thesis 5: Cohesion and order

In Hungary, since the change of regime, the rapid pace of transformation and expansion of our central cities has led to serious challenges. This has an impact on our city centres. Urban disintegration in the architectural and urban planning sense is becoming increasingly common, with centres falling apart. In order to ensure that the buildings and spaces of the socialist era are integrated with those of other eras and contribute to a framework for quality urban life, it is essential to strengthen cohesion and create order in the rehabilitation process. The experience of the examples studied shows that the regeneration of public space can be the main tool for achieving this - through its spatial location, horizontal extent and integrating capacity.





6. Szent Imre Square in Veszprém, with the new fountain in the background.

#### Thesis 6: Community-centred rehabilitation

The regeneration of modern city centres has an impact, directly or indirectly, on almost all the inhabitants of a city. For this reason, and because of the negative experiences of their construction in the past, it is particularly important that the planning of each project is accompanied by a listening process, that there is constant communication with the inhabitants and that the design and implementation of the project is carried out in a well-informed way.

## MASTERWORK:

Phase I/B of the Veszprém city centre rehabilitation (2014-2015, 2018)

Improvement of public spaces:

Architectural design by Zsolt György Kovács, Jana Beránková, Dávid Kovács

Architectural collaborator: Ágoston Barkács, Péter Páczelt

Landscape Architecture: Katalin Pernesz

Exterior renovation of the Vár Áruház department store:

Original designer: István Kovách, Katalin Kovách-Horváth

Architectural design by Zsolt György Kovács, Jana Beránková, Dávid Kovács

Architectural collaborator: Ágoston Barkács, Márta Székely

## A SHORT PRESENTATION OF THE MASTERPIECE:

Rehabilitation of the public space system:

The plans for the second (named I/B) phase of the Veszprém city centre rehabilitation were prepared in 2014 and the completed project was handed over in 2015. The project included the renovation of the park in front of the Hangvilla and the creation of an event space, the functional renovation of the courtyards adjacent to Kossuth Street, the redevelopment of the public spaces around the OTP bank, the improvement of the green areas, the creation of parking spaces and a sidewalk on the northern side of the long residential building at 21 Kossuth Street, and the development of the pedestrian axis parallel to the Municipal Market. A related project element was the renovation of the Castle Department Store, which is privately owned and became part of the project as a consortium partner.

The financial constraints during the phase I/B of the downtown rehabilitation were very tight. The fact that the project was nevertheless completed and that we were able to take steps towards improving the coherence and usability of the city centre made this work particularly important to me. For all these reasons, we had to be very careful and cautious in identifying the points of intervention where a significant transformation and addition was really necessary and indispensable. For large surfaces, the aim was to upgrade, to unlock existing assets and to bring out the best features. We have sought to unpack and emphasise existing spaces of advantage or interest. We looked for subtle, fitting

interventions and additions that were at the same time impactful in scale and capable of reorganising their surroundings.

Exterior renovation of the Vár Áruház in Veszprém:

The Veszprém Áruház was completed in the 1980s as the last element of the modern city centre. It quickly became popular, attracting crowds of shoppers. The period after the regime change, however, put the store to the test. Partly as a result, it was renovated and extended in 2000. During this intervention, a new restaurant was built on the upper floor with a view of the Veszprém Castle, a new staircase was constructed and the facades of the building were partially renovated.

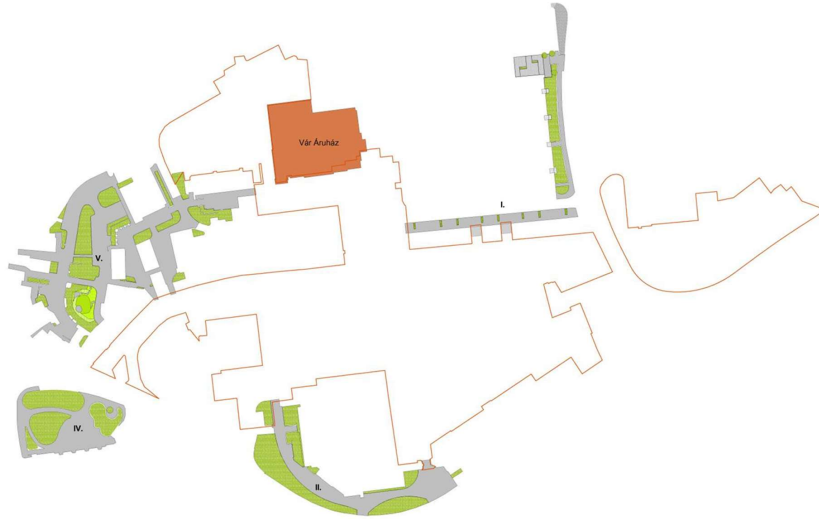
In the first half of the 2010s, the operating company wanted to make the building more economical to maintain, and planned to modernise the energy efficiency of the building. At the same time, they also had a problem with the appearance of the building; they wanted to create inviting and colourful facades.

Given the size of the building and its role in the city centre the facade transformation was also an urban design challenge. The south façade, which serves as the main façade, and a large part of the east façade were replaced by a painted glass façade with curtain walling, a substitute for the original white aluminium cassette façade cladding. The horizontal curtain wall ribs were intended to reinforce the stair stepping of the building's plan contours by providing a more prominent projection.

As with other modern town-centre buildings built in the 1960s and 1970s, or in the design of improvements to the public realm in the city centre, our aim in renovating the Castle Store was to reveal the existing values and assets of the original building and to show them off.



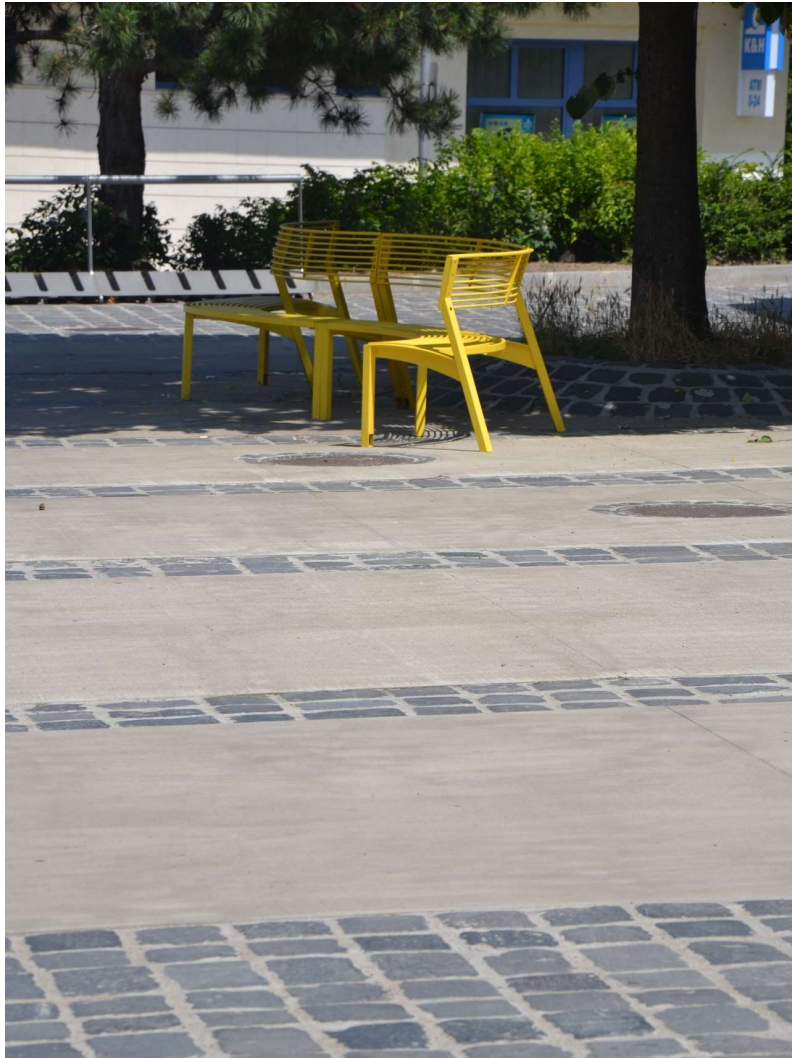
*The situation plan of the I. and I/B phase of the rehabilitation.*



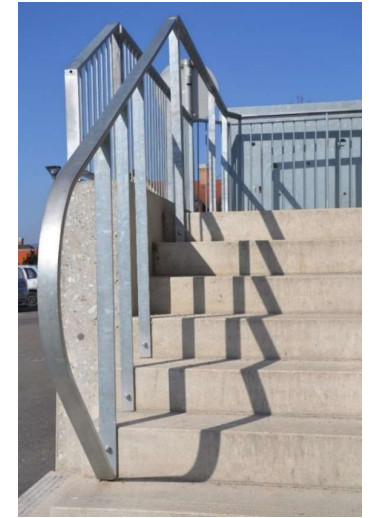
*The situation plan of the I/B phase of the rehabilitation.*



*The renewed park and community space before the Hangvilla Cultural Centre*



*The renewed Sarolta and Gizella court next to the Kossuth street*



*Some architectural elements in the renewed Sarolta and Gizella court*



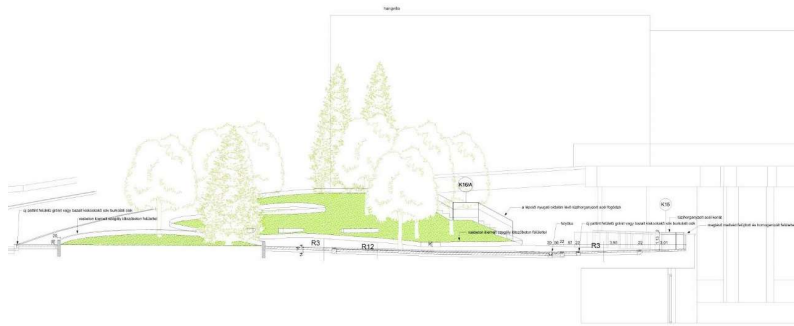
*The virtual modell of the renewed city centre*



*The renewed pedestrian surface around OTP Bank*



*Visualization of the renewed park and community square before the Hangvilla Cultural Centre*



The section of the renewed park and community square before the Hangvilla Cultural Centre



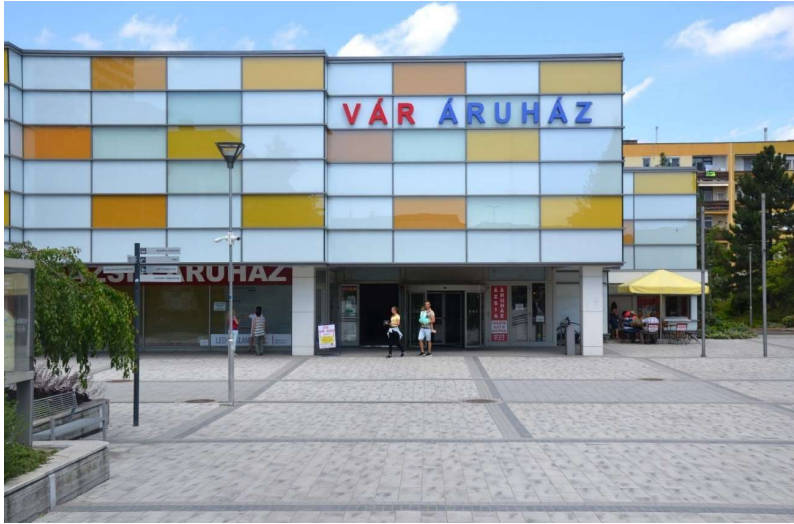
Vár Áruház department store before the reconstruction



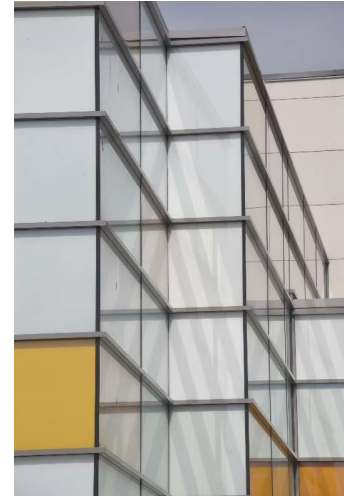
The situation plan of the I. and I/B phase of the rehabilitation



Vár Áruház department store after the reconstruction



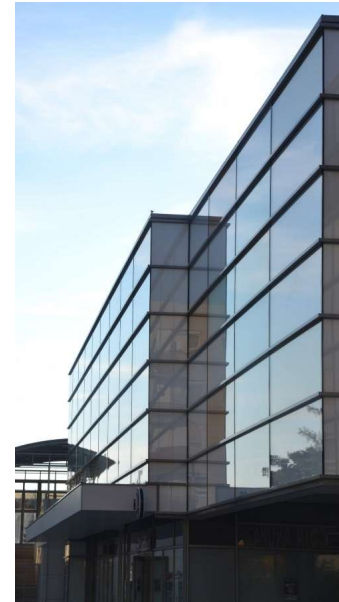
*The renewed facade of the department store from the square*



*A detail of the facade*



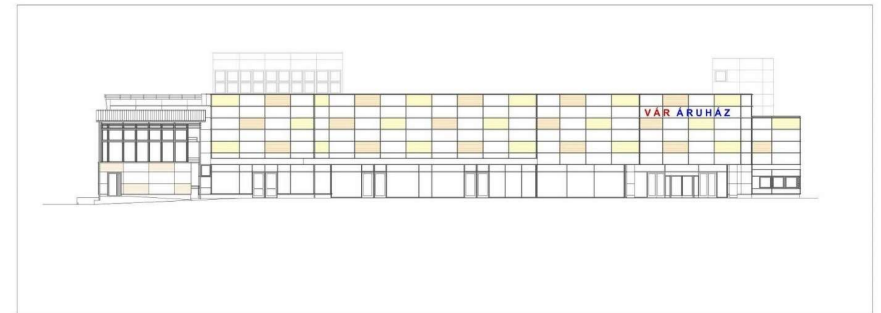
*The staircase of the renewed department store*



*A detail of the main facade*



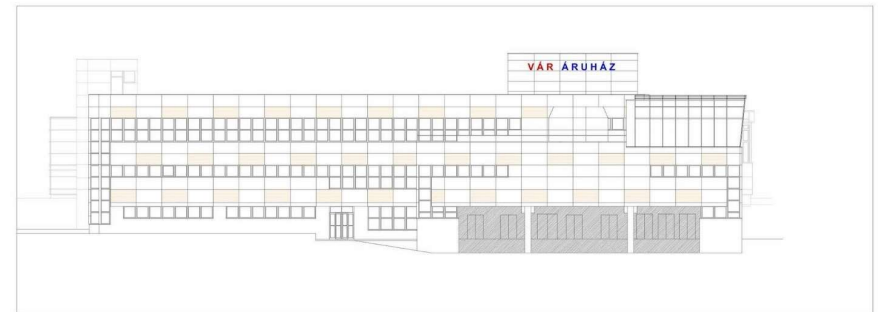
*The west facade of the department store*



*The plan of the south facade*

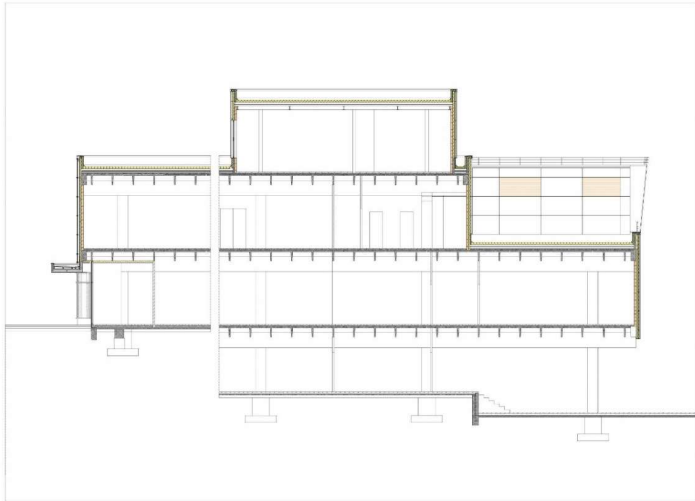


*Situation plan with the department store*

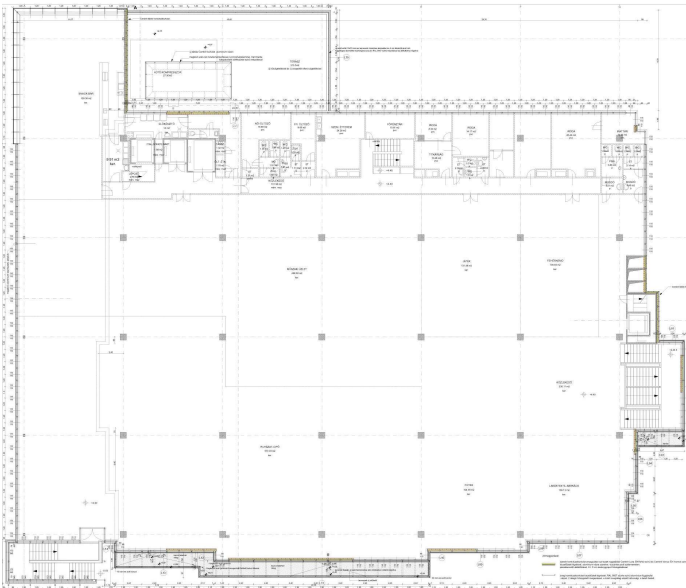


*The plan of the north facade*





*The crosssection of the department store*



*The plan of the first floor*

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