

Lóczy, Dénes; Tóth, József and Trócsányi, András (eds) Progress in Geography in the European Capital of Culture 2010. Zoltán Dövényi (series ed.) Geographia Pannonica Nova 3. Institute of Geography, University of Pécs. Imedias Publisher, 2008, 335 p.

Three occasions were listed in the preface of this volume of studies edited back to 2007. Firstly: it was dedicated to the oncoming 31st International Geographical Congress (Tunis), secondly: conceived to commemorate ten years of the foundation of the publishing Institute of Geography, and thirdly: to provide preliminary information about geographical aspects of Pécs: host city as the European Capital of Culture (ECC) in 2010. (Along with Istanbul, and Essen Pécs won the national and Brussels tenders and was entitled as one of the three capitals in 2005.) Since the establishment of the institute within the university (PTE) in 1998 nine departments have operated to comprise earth sciences in a broad sense: from physical geography and geology, environmental geography, cartography and geoinformatics, through human geography also including urban studies, tourism and political geography, to regional aspects of Hungary and of the wider surroundings, with a special reference to South East Europe. The doctoral school pursues fruitful activity as it has been witnessed by the volume as well. Altogether 28 contributions were selected written by nearly 80 authors and grouped in five chapters thus providing a complete cross-section of the discipline. The editors have chosen an unorthodox way of the aggregation of contents: theoretical foundations, methodical approaches and applied research reappear in each of the five topics: human geography, its regional application, tourism, geomorphology and environmental geography. The chapter on human geography abounds with conceptual writings (with reference to cultural geography, urbanisation), at the same time it contains overview of spatial aspects of economic sectors (viticulture) and social formations (microvillages, non-profit organisations) in change.

Applications include an analysis of the past fifty years of internal migration the two decades since the systemic change included also putting marks of question (e.g. on specific features of female migration). With the advent of EU enlargement (accession of two East Balkan states) the Western Balkans affairs (those related to the future of the successor states of Yugoslavia) came to the focus of interest of the workshop of political geographers at Pécs. Breakout points are numerous in the South Transdanubian Region (one of the seven NUTS2 entities in Hungary) with Pécs as its seat. Higher education and cross-border cooperation are some of them, but tourism also has chances on its own right. Beside the explanation of complex spatial categories the latter chapter raises concrete trends of the development: designation of thematic routes, raising ecotourism and infrastructure that need considerable intellectual and financial input. The chapter on geomorphology might be characterised as a traditional topic studied with modern methods of investigations (impact of agriculture, geomorphological hazards, loess and red clays as paleoclimate indicators, studies on karst and geomorphological surfaces). A modern volume of studies in geography in Hungary is inconceivable without essays on sustainability and local economies, renewable energy sources, hazardous waste disposal including the radioactive ones. A special flavour has been added by topics such as rainwater harvesting and atmospheric aerosol scavenging. GIS applications and modelling are reappearing features all along the volume.

Pécs is the fifth populous city in Hungary with population number just under 160 thousand. A regional centre for centuries in trade, institutional and cultural respects, it had developed into a big city in Hungarian scales taking advantage of the industrial revolution based on

the development of mining (coal and uranium ore) and manufacturing industries including diverse light and food industries. With the change of the political system (1990) and the ensuing socio-economic restructuring and deep crisis forced the city of Pécs to seek a way-out via post-modern transformation e.g. through the rehabilitation of industrial blights for cultural purposes. These trends have been reinforced by the nation-wide expansion of higher education. Thus cultural heritage, cultural industry and culture-based economy became the pillars the development strategies were based upon during the 1990s.

After an abortive attempt to bring the historic downtown under protection, Early Christian Necropolis of Pécs (Sopianae) was listed among UNESCO World Heritage sites in 2000. During the EU budgetary period 2007–2013 the Pécs Pole Developmental Strategy was formulated and approved with cultural, health and environmental industries as the main supporting pillars with the university strongly involved in all three fields. The status of World Heritage Site is promising in a sense that Pécs enjoys some advantage on the tourism market, and its brand can become more familiar.

By definition the title of the ECC is purposed to be catalyst for the cultural development and the transformation of the city in concern. When in the year 2005 Pécs applied for the ECC 2010 title the “Borderless City” was chosen as the slogan. Firstly it refers to the Balkan region towards which Pécs has traditionally represented an important gateway. It means that a long-term goal is to turn the city into a regional centre/hub in a cross-border sense. The other meaning is the efforts to remove the physical borders and barriers to interlink sections of the city (historical quarters and modern but worn down ones including industrial blight) through urban revival.

Physically ECC 2010 strategy is based upon five key projects (*Figure 1*):

1. The Zsolnay Cultural Quarter as a central element. This manufacture of ceramics with great traditions is a monument of industrial history and architecture and is going to sustain its initial function only partly. In line with the post-modern concept of urban planning there will be a park in the inner court with Art Nouveaux features, and incubator house, art camp and exhibition facilities for the Faculty of Arts of the PTE, a hotel and restaurants (*Photo 1*).

2. The Regional Knowledge Centre is to be created along the axis connecting this district with the downtown area and accommodate a common modern university, county and city library and a competence centre (*Photo 2*).

3. The Conference Centre and Music Hall complex will enable Pécs with higher reputation, to become involved in international circulation of conference tourism (*Photo 3*).

4. A facility in the historic downtown area called “Street of Museums” a chain of existing enriched with a newly built Grand Exhibition Hall.

5. Last but not least one element of the strategy is aimed at reconstruction and rehabilitation of the public squares and parks and the renewal of the downtown area, but also includes of highly degraded public spaces in the city district centres (*Photo 4*).

The total expenses planned in 2008 reached 50 billion HUF (ca 200 million EUR) shared between the EU, Hungarian state budget, Pécs Municipality (44 billion HUF) and private investors. 35 billion was to be devoted to the above described facilities and renewal and 9 billion to be spent for the organisation of cultural events. As it was written in one of the studies of the volume published in 2008 and reviewed here: «...unfortunately it seems that cultural “software” i.e. the actual programmes, events and the non-infrastructural elements of the portfolio, is becoming shaded out by planning the elements of “hardware”».

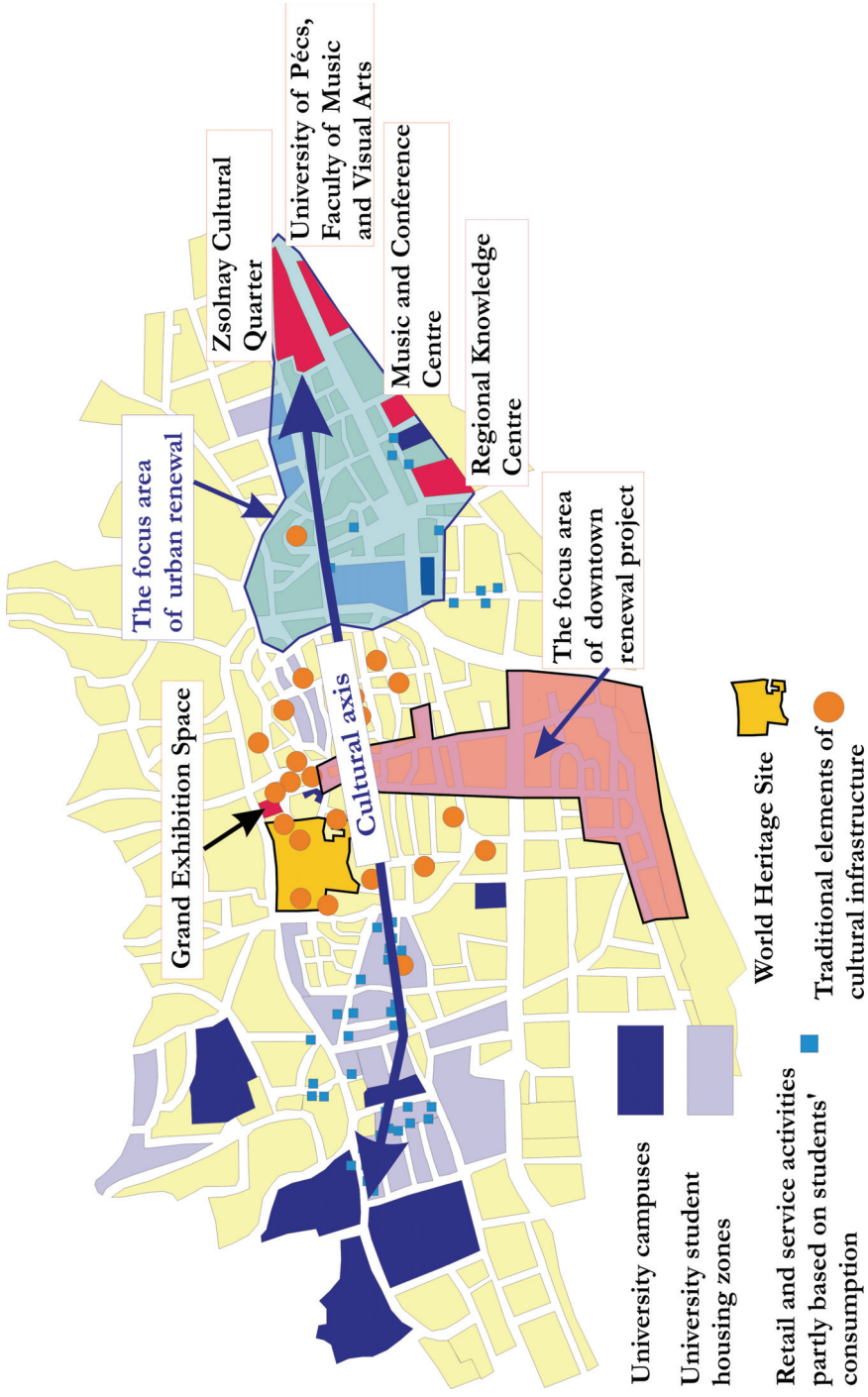


Fig. 1. Space-forming impacts of cultural economy in the city of Pécs. Venues of the key projects of ECoC. (Compiled by G. PIRISI and A. TRÓCSÁNYI)



Photo 1. Zsolnay Cultural Quarter emerging on the place of a renowned ceramics manufacture (Photo by A. TRÓCSÁNYI)



Photo 2. Regional Knowledge Centre of South Transdanubia (Photo by A. TRÓCSÁNYI)



Photo 3. Conference centre and concert hall complex under construction (Photo by A. TRÓCSÁNYI)



Photo 4. The hub of the city of Pécs: Széchenyi Square in mid-March 2010 (Photo by A. TRÓCSÁNYI)

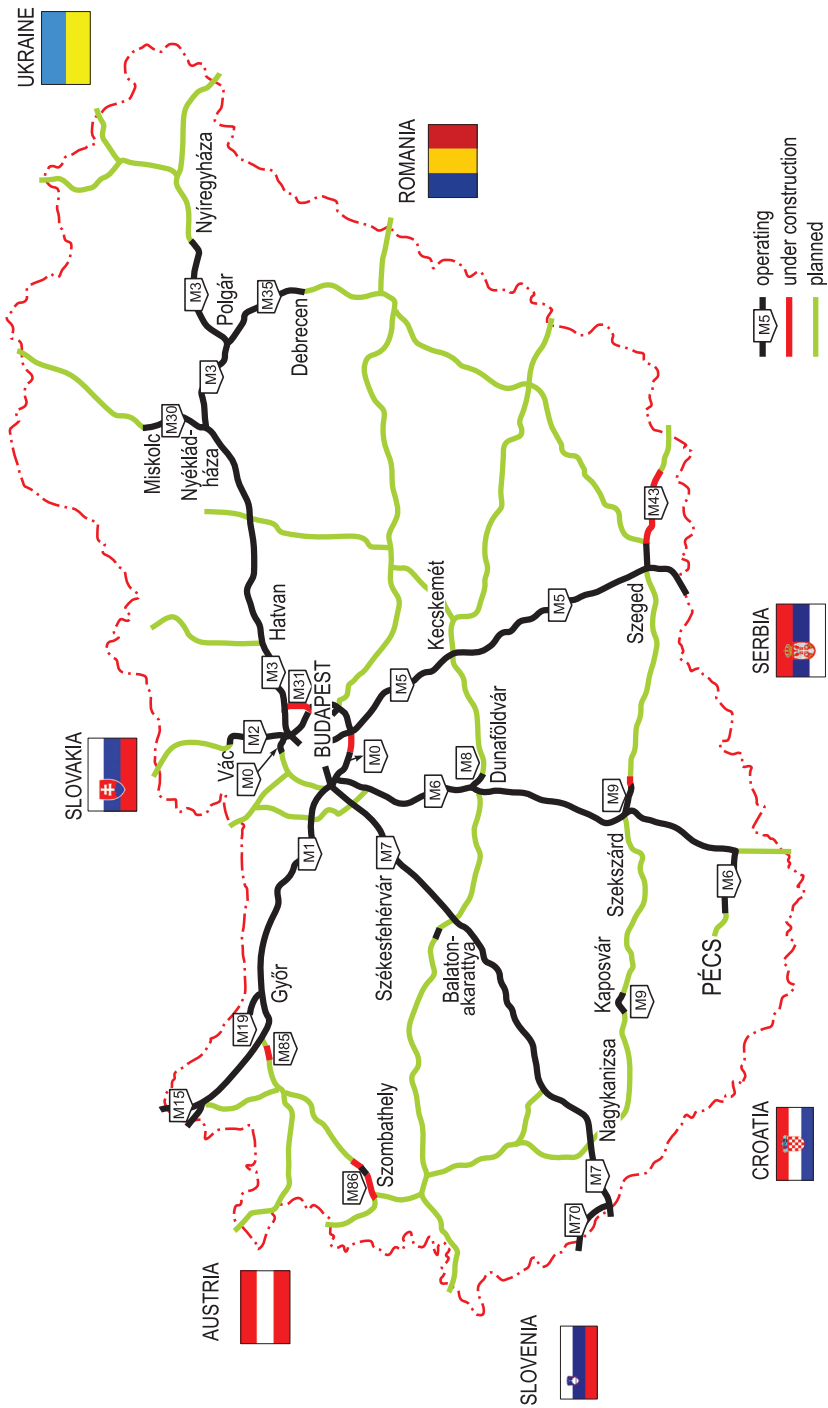


Fig. 2. Motorway network in Hungary (as of the state of March 31, 2010)

In a conspicuous way just the opposite happened: in mid-March 2010 the schedule was 350 cultural programmes for the whole year, 100 civil initiations and 80 regional events to be held. About one million visitors are expected; presumably 20–30 per cent of them will be foreigners. In contrast, the construction of the new centres is delayed heavily: reconstruction of the Museum Street (1.5 billion HUF, 85 per cent from EU sources) might be completed by the end of April, but without the exhibition hall; the regional library and knowledge centre inaugurated in June as the earliest; and the conference and concert hall opened by the end of August. The complex of the Zsolnay cultural quarter will not be completed in 2010, while most of the sites of the public spaces reconstruction pillar are in their new use and design at the moment – unfortunately excluding the emblematic city centre, the Széchenyi square.

At the end of March a 145 km long section of M6 motorway approaching Pécs closely was opened, which improved the accessibility of the city from Budapest by reducing travel time below two hours (*Figure 2*). With the addition of the new section the total length of motorways in Hungary exceeds one thousand kilometres.

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