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**The role of shopping centres in the use of leisure time of  
Youth of Budapest**

The main point of the Thesis (PhD)

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## AIM AND OUTLINING THE THEME

Emerging of shopping centres became one of the most noticeable trends in town development in Hungary last years, their spreading is considered to be the trenchant appearance of the Americanization by many people. The spreading of plazas<sup>1</sup> is accompanied by not only an alteration in lifestyle and change in shopping habits but it also raises a series of question in the field of economy, culture, society and in other fields. The shopping centre phenomenon mainly appears in town planning (GfK- MBSZ 1998; Lukovich 1997) and in environmental researches (Mehravian - Russel 1974; Turley - Milliman 2000; Wakefield - Baker 1998), however, investigations related to them include social scientific analysis as well. These mainly approach shopping centres from the angle of Anthropology (Auge 1995; Robinson 2000; Shields 1989; Udvarhelyi 2000; Wilson - White 2001) and Sociology (Bloch-Ridgway - Nelson 1991; Matthews - Taylor - Percy-Smith - Limb 2000; Taylor - Cosenza 2002) but there can be found such investigations that interpret this phenomenon as the manifestation of consumption architecture (Szentpéteri 1998).

*The dissertation focuses on shopping centres in the context of leisure culture of youth in Budapest. The most important aim of our research was to explore the subcultural group being organized in accordance with the leisure-consumption dimensions in the life and leisure culture of which shopping centres appear as not only consumption but also social community spaces.*

The dissertation is divided into two main parts structurally. In the first part I outline the theoretical approach of the research. In the first chapter I describe the international and national research related to the theme. My aim is to look through the research background, directions connecting to the research topic – indirectly or directly. In the second chapter I determine the concepts of shopping centre and youth and emphasizedly discuss the socialisation function of plazas. The next three parts are organized around the functions of shopping centres. In the chapter dealing with shopping centre as a built environment, we point out that how important the environment factors are that influence the staying of attendants in shopping centre, the formation of ‘I love and like this place’ feeling. The statement, theorem of the next chapter is that that a shopping centre function as a place for social relationship. I look through the theories connected with plazas in field of culture-philosophy and anthropology in this chapter. The last theoretical part builds on consumer functions of shopping centres. I describe what kind of factors influence the consumer culture of youth shopping actively in centres and outline the types of young consumers providing an overall picture of their lifestyle. I explore the groups of consumers, being outlined in accordance with different use of plazas, in the framework of a questionnaire survey in the second part. I try to describe a subcultural group, the being of which we assume, by means of interviews in the third part.

My research in an inter- and multidisciplinary way is associated with the researches for the environment of places for leisure activities – relating to built environment –, with youth-leisure-sociology studies concerning social-community demands, and with the analysis of lifestyle of youth when touching the theme of consumption.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the world plaza as the synonym of shopping centre in my dissertation. The original meaning of the world of plaza is market-place. In Hungary, this concept spread in the name of the commercial groups (Plaza Centres Group) that started to open their establishments at the beginning of 1990's.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Theoretical part of the dissertation provides the framework of empirical research involving the working up of bibliography connected with the theme. In the course of our research it became obvious that bibliography in Hungarian language is available only in limited number consequently, our work is mainly based on sources in English. I summarized the most important results of my theoretical research as follows:

The chapter associated with youth mainly approaches the world of plaza in the dimension of socialization. The **socialization function of shopping centre** - as places for leisure activities - is built on value-cores produced as a result of primary socialization playing a role in the socialization of youth as a secondary factor. In accordance with this correlation system, the “success” of primary socialization determines value, norm and model mediation of secondary socialization. The value world of plazas, being manipulative and cherishing illusion, is only risky for youth if a stable value basis is not developed in them in the course of the former socialization by means of which they can differentiate the reality from fictions and the true value from that which doesn't even exist. On the other hand, if the routes of former socialization “functioned” well, young people are “capable of creating reality in this dream-like world” and excellently enjoy themselves within it. Consequently, establishments contribute to the socialization of youth when using plazas “in this kind of way of rational character”. *These establishments have the most obvious socializational function in the process of becoming consumer.* Utilizing services of a centre youth will become conscious of that that consumption is a differentiated and conscious activity, its logic is not dictated by many kinds of consumer activities offered by plazas but the consumption being determined by ourselves, practical, with favourable rate of usefulness, and which is in accordance with material circumstances and demands. On the other hand, consumer activity becomes an *identification tool*, the lifestyle and forms of self-expression of youth show through it (Reich 2005: 48). In the case of youth shopping in groups, the need-centred consumption is motivated by social-recreational demands, consumption mainly with recreational purpose, based on joint experiences plays a significant role in formation of their group identity, which will strengthen more and more that these group members belong together. *Youth can be socialized by plazas for spending the leisure time intelligently and full, connecting with each other (“everything in one place” principle), which can be implemented in a safety, pleasant, cultural environment.* If the plaza-use is involved in the leisure culture of youth so consciously, its positive socializational impression will remain in adult age. On the other hand, centres have specified behaviour rules therefore they not only see the required social rules of community being together here but youth also practice it: they will be aware of the fact that spending leisure time is also one of the form of social activities, its formal framework is determined by social behaviour models. *Therefore the dimension of socialization appears on the level of social skills. Youth can acquire social behaviour forms (courting, making contacts, etc), try playing different roles* (Vidra 2006).

Summarizing main reflections of the chapter dealing with the **environmental factors** it can be sated that physical environment can strongly influence the staying of youth in shopping centres. Trendy world being created by environmental elements is close to the lifestyle of youth, on the other hand it provides an excellent venue for social being together. Experiences of „I like being here” and „I like this place” arising in them considerably depend on complex entirety of these factors. Main results of the research dealing with studying the environmental factors of shopping centres were that they proved: the emotional „excitement” of whom visiting to shopping centres influence positively the length of time spent there. The positive impression and global opinion-forming of environment on establishments heighten

the state of „excitement” of attendants; people spend more time in shopping malls when perceiving environment pleasantly, interestingly, excitingly (Wakefield-Baker 1998). It is also important for youth that space and place should be spectacular, exciting, colourful and mainly should be rich in information being possibly used easily and quickly. If sense of „I like this place” has form in them, they have a good and pleasant time there. One of the most important tasks of the managers of shopping centres is to initiate kinds of studies and surveys for environment focusing on the formation of environment elements and factors influencing staying. As youth spend quite a lot of time in centres sellers have to take their active attendance into account. When planning establishments, the demand of this age-group should be taken into consideration, and their design should be done to be pleasuring, exciting and attractive for youth (Taylor-Cosenza 2002).

We discuss the **social, community functions** of shopping centres in the next part. Bibliography worked up in this chapter unambiguously support the finding that shopping centres can be interpreted not only as the „citadels” of consumption but also as spaces and places available for spending leisure time and making social contacts (Bloch-Ridgway-Nelson 1991). One of the most important findings by Victor Gruen, „the parent of shopping centres”, is was the discovery that these kinds of establishments should fulfil commercial and social function at the same time, and there is no inborn antagonism between „money” and „people”. Centres should become the supplier of community, primary and of more level, to make profit (Brubaker 1975). Coming of social function of shopping centres into the front is proved by the fact that the more and more analyses in the field of social sciences has been completed – related to the theme – for the last years. Two anthropological „place-theories” are in the centre of the chapter studying the issue if shopping centres can be interpreted as a „place” or as „third place”. Auge (1995) stated that plazas – like motorways, airport terminals – don’t involve distinctive features of the place therefore they are defined as „non-places” creating social loneliness. In contrast to this, in addition to home (*first place*), school-workplace (*second-place*) Oldenburg (1989) describes the socializational and community functions of leisure places (*third place*). In accordance with Oldenburg’s interpretation shopping centres become third place because they are well-going in terms of attendants, open to everybody (*neutrality, equality*), helping in development of interactions (*social relationship*, mainly creating good atmosphere (*sites for amusing-leisure activities*) and accessible easily (*situated in the centre*) (Oldenburg 1989: 20-42).

The last theoretical part in the dissertation is organized around active **consumer activity** of youth. Youth become one of the most important of aimed strata of consumer and entertaining industry (Gábor 2000), the life stage of youth being prolonged and youth becoming independent, demand on entertainment appears with higher intensity; this generation can use services of shopping centres as an autonomous consumer. The independent consumer activity of youth forms affected by „internal” (family) and „external” (contemporary group, media) socializational models of consumption, which show and inform on the consumer itself. Products purchased in a plaza, values and norm systems acquired here indicate affiliation to a specific subculture. With attending and shopping in plazas, youth inform not only their narrower but also their wider environment on their affiliation, referring to their ideology and to their relation with people of the same age and older age-groups. We outlined two kinds of approaches that would assist us in describing consumer activities of youth attending to plazas. One of aspects formulates the features of shopping centres compared to an external measure (reality, real world), regarding consumption as an activity without thinking, in which consumer is fond of different products because of themselves using them to enhance her/his personal prestige (Baudrillard 1988; Douglas 1996). The other approach adjusts the interpretation of the phenomenon to an external measure, it expounds consumption as a process, which is creative, encased in culture, active, conscious and

differentiated (Udvarhelyi 2004).

The paper – based on empirical research – proves that this kind of extreme theories and approaches is untenable since its results highlight that plaza-use of youth is differentiated.

## METHODS AND PROCESS OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

I endeavour to prove empirically the reflections and findings of the theoretical part that are essential for me by means of two methods (questionnaires and interviews) in the second part of the dissertation:

We applied **questionnaires** in the **first phase** of the empirical research. The **aim** of the questionnaire survey was mainly to explore if there is the group in our sample in the life of which plaza appears as a leisure-recreational-social site, and if yes, how they can be described. Furthermore we wondered which factors of the background variables of the questionnaire (family, leisure, media, pocket-money, friendly, spatial, demographical) interpreted in a wider sense influence significantly the plaza-use assumed by us.

We take the Budapest secondary school students as the basic multitude for the sample. In the course of the procedure of sampling, we divided schools of the capital into four major parts – city centre of Buda, suburb of Buda, city centre of Pest, suburb of Pest – using the database of the Ministry of Education. In the next step, considering the division of the four territorial units according to school types, we selected – without premeditating – 11 secondary schools, of which one vocational secondary school can be found in Szolnok. The total sample consisted of 289 persons.

In the course of analysis by SPSS software, two groups were outlined in accordance with demands and activities related to plazas. One of the groups is the group of „*recreational consumers*” in the case of which plaza appears as the „third place”, and their consumer activities „belonging to plazas” are subordinated to their social-recreational demands. On the other hand these social recreational demands are totally disappeared in the case of the other group, the so called „*utilitant consumers*”, the plaza-use were influenced exclusively by purposive, utilitarian consumption.

Our investigations show that *the differentiated plaza-use of youth is obviously influenced by cultural capital of family, leisure-socializational models of parents*. Socializational models aimed at consuming the elite culture appears strongly in the environment of an advanced qualified family (higher education) of utilitant consumer mainly attending grammar school. In contrast to this, the leisure models of „recreational parents” holding skilled worker qualification are rather close to the recreation, which is more passive and entertainment-centred, and their children inherit this socio-culturally. *The different value-preferences of youth becoming independent influence their plaza-use as an additional factor*. Fashion, the identificational role of trends is more emphasized in the case of recreational consumers than in the case of utilitarians. The fashionable lifestyle of the recreational group show itself in television-watching and in „leisure consumption”: it is more important for them to follow the fashion and to attend plazas. *The relation with consumption also determines their habit of attending plazas*. In the case of recreational group shopping becomes the recreational way of leisure spending, a kind of activity in which consumer activity is realized in accordance with social-recreational demands. Therefore, consumption based on common group experiences, mainly aiming at entertaining themselves, has a considerable role in the formation of their group identity, which more strengthens the togetherness of the members of the group and separating from utilitarians. Compared to this, the customer identity can't be assumed in the case of the utilitant group, the hierarchical contact of demands is exactly

reversed at them. This group prefers more personal places functioning as sites for activities of conversation rather than plazas with milling crowds.

We conducted **interviews** in the **second phase** of the research. With interviews our aim was to describe and illustrate the subcultural group more precisely, assumed by us in our hypothesis as well, in the life of which plaza also function as a leisure-recreational-social space. Having had the questionnaires filled in, we asked students who attend plazas regularly<sup>2</sup> – in his/her leisure time – with his/her friends and is willing to be informally interviewed – in connection with the topic. We selected ten volunteers from the eleven secondary schools whom we accompanied when going to plaza in a time appointed in advance. After a two-hour observation there, we conducted the interviews. Then basing on experiences of the observation, we selected “leading personalities” from the company of interviewees who were also willing to be interviewed. According to this, we worked up nineteen almost two-hour interviews in the dissertation, and – reflecting the results of questionnaire survey - our *interviewees* were so called *recreational consumers*.

I applied the well-known “traditional” **method** in the analysis of content when doing my analysis: the treatment of the interviews according to themes follows the sequence of ideas of hypotheses, on the other hand – for good cause – it also build on dividing samples into subsamples and on emphasizing types.

*The correlations of the interviews responded to the final conclusion of ‘survey’ in many cases.* Our recreational consumers don’t belong to elite group of youth. They attend trade schools, living in suburban prefabricated houses, their families belong to the lower-middle class. The parents are low-qualified, mothers and fathers as skilled workers work in service industry – in changed shifts-. *Our interviewees interpreted plazas as a place of complex function (“everything in one place”-principle),* however, it also became clear from their telling that plaza is more than a consumer-commercial establishment, they talked about them as places for social companies, leisure programmes as well. Consequently, plaza is changed into a site for friendly companies in their life that is a kind of safety social place in which it is possible to cultivate friendship. Common experiences, memories gained in plazas also contribute to the formation and strengthening of group identity of our interviewees. *Our interviewees distanced themselves markedly from the “utilitants” of their age, not attending plazas to spend leisure time,* they thought about them that they are lonely, don’t like companies and don’t have friends either. In contrast to this, they visit plazas *with their friends* to be together. “It is possible to be well”, “just in some way”, without spatial activity, community being together are emphasized, the way and duration of spending time is subsidiary. *The interviewees like leisure activities with the purpose of consuming mass culture that “can be admitted” easily.* Their leisure spending outside of plazas is characterized by that they attend discos, most of them like electronical, disco and pop music types. “Alternative musical trend” suggesting intellectual self-irony and self-and world-reflection, spiced with spatial humour, is not close to plaza-attendants. Student island, which is very popular among elite youth from middle class, presumably “utilitants”, don’t attract our interviewees either, their spontaneous interest, intension of making contacts, community activity, cultural space is more superficial and passive than their contemporaries’ of “Student island”. *Youth mainly watch programmes on television, produced under mentality of American mass culture, and South-American soap operas reflecting romantic-idealistic taste.* Their favourite channels are RTL Klub and TV2. Our interviewees like surfing on the internet, however, considering the purpose of use, acquiring knowledge and demand on learning don’t characterize them. They mainly visit the world wide web to spend their time passively. *The interviewed youth are demanding for their appearance.* It is very important for one of the group of the interviewees to follow the fashion. They are those who want to meet the requirements of an external

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<sup>2</sup> Twice a week at least.

measure by all means, it is remarkably significant for them how their environment forms opinions of them. Of our interviewees they follow clothing models dictated by plazas mostly. *The leisure activities for consuming elite culture are not popular among the interviewees.* They don't attend theatre, art cinemas and don't read the book "representing" high culture either. The concentration is exhausting and tiring for them while reading, they are "lazy" to read, rather desiring passive belonging together in companies.

*Our interviews also pointed out some correlations that can't be explored by questionnaires.* Although most important demand of our interviewees "belonging to plazas" relate to the presence of friends, it is also important for them that these places "should have good appearance". Of environmental factors mentioned by Wakefield – Baker (1998), the *layout-interior architecture* and *decoration-design* excite the interest of youth mostly in the interviews. They like those large, spacious, well exposed plazas, spaces where they can orientate easily and comfortably enjoying their freedom. Most youth attend Westend. Certain people are attracted to spectacular and *youthfully exciting colours* (Mehrabian -Russell 1974), others to natural materials and atmosphere of the Far East. Global impression of the interviewees on plazas can be characterized by attributes, interesting and exciting on macro level, and spatial impression can be described rather using the attributes, pleasant and intimate on the micro level of regular haunts.

In the course of deep analysis of the interviews, it became clear that the group of seemingly homogeneous consumers is differentiated as well. *The claims of the interviewees laid to plazas are the same on the level of expectations ("being together") but the content and way of community being together that can be experienced in the case of boys are considerably different from girls'. Boys* rather "attend plazas" to use of active, entertainment-centred services, and compared to the girls, they like relaxing among friends interpreted in a considerably wider sense. Their social-leisure demands don't involve the recreational content of passive consumption, they are not characterized by recreational-costumer identity (Guiry - Lutz 2000) at all which is typical of girls. Contrary to this, girls like spending their time passively: staring, window-shop, trying dresses on, "shopping". Their activities of plazas are "more spontaneous" than boys', being in plaza - without other active acts - means relaxing in their case. *Despite the plaza-use that can be differentiated in accordance with gender, boys and girls were characterized by demands on making contacts with the other gender and new people.*

## MAIN FINDINGS

1. Of the environmental elements of shopping centres (Wakefield - Baker 1998) layout, interior architecture, decoration, design influence the spatial satisfaction of youth mainly. The visual appearance of shopping centres is very important for youth attending plazas, however, the presence of friends is much more important than the attractive, modern spatial impression made by environmental factors. The presence of youth in plazas is mainly determined by social, community demands; their environmental demands are subsidiary.
2. "Place-theories" in the field of anthropology, communicational theory, architecture connect places to human activities, interactions, meanings formed in the course of use, memories and identities. Although, plazas create an artificial world that often seems to be sterile they unambiguously become places if studying from the point of view of youth attending there. They play a role in the formation of identity and mediation of it, functioning as sites for social interactions that is they are determining in the community life of youth attending there.

3. Centres also become “third places” in the case of youth regularly spending their leisure time in plazas (Oldenburg 1989). Plazas as permanent and safety places for social being together of youth – providing active and passive recreational facilities – strengthen the identity of group and formation of social relationship. They provide excellent venue for the consumer leisure-spending socialization of youth, which is of social behaviour and skill level.
4. In the course of our empirical research, we explored in our sample the subcultural group being outlined in accordance with leisure consumption in the leisure time spending of which plazas function as “third places”. This group was called “*recreational consumers*”. The recreational consumers are those youth that mostly visit plazas to meet their social demands and to be with friends.
5. Recreational consumers don’t consume in a hedonist way but consciously, consideringly, their consumer demands are moderate adjusting their material circumstances. This group can be characterizes mainly by recreational consumption being derived from its name, which is determined by social demands in every case. Boys and girls using plazas can be described differentially on the basis of the content and way of recreational consumption. “Recreational boys” can be described in accordance with active entertainment-centred demands, they avoid passive time-spending considering it as unnecessary. Contrary to this, in the case of girls not the use of entertaining services becomes leisure time spending that has purpose and can be described as particular enjoyment but the being in plazas itself. Passive recreational consumption characterizes them, they are those who are just “being”, window-shopping, hanging around, trying dresses on without obligation of shopping. Shopping becomes the recreational way of leisure time spending in their case.
6. Recreational consumers like the more superficial “ways” of leisure time spending that can be more easily consumed. The consumption of leisure time of the group shows the model of mass culture. These youth considerably emphasize their appearance, trying to follow actual fashion trends according to their circumstances. They like attending discos and watch television programmes reflecting the taste of American mass culture. Their spontaneous interest, intention to make contacts, community activities can be considered as passive. They are not characterized by leisure programmes being aimed at consuming elite culture at all, they rather desire for spending their time in company.
7. Youth regularly relaxing in plazas are the children come from families that have lower social status. Youth mostly live in housing estates or in the attraction zone of Pest, studying in trade schools and their parents have the same qualification. These families are characterized by bad circumstances. Leisure socializational models of parents mediate the “value order” of mass culture therefore the cultural capital of families (Bourdieu 1980) determines the character of leisure culture of “recreational” youth in basis and its demand and depth.

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