

## DEVELOPMENTS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE SERVICE OF URBAN DESIGN IN THE NORTH GREAT PLAIN REGION (HUNGARY)

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**Abstract:** One of the most important elements of place marketing is the creation of an attractive urban landscape which require significant financial resources. For this reason local authorities of Central Europe use regional policy grants from European Union for this purpose. In the light of the above, the aim of this paper is to examine the role of European Union grants in the improvement of the built environment in North Great Plain Region (Hungary), one of the least developed regions of Hungary. In the course of the above, on the one hand, we intend to provide a general overview of the situation in Hajdú-Bihar County, also located in this region, and on the other hand, through the example of a specific settlement, we will also present the processes in detail.

**Key words:** urban design, North Great Plain Region, European Union development funds

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### INTRODUCTION

Significant changes occurred in the operation of local authorities in several areas, first in North America and Western Europe in the 1970/80s, and then also in former socialist countries after the political transformations (Leitner, H., 1990; Paddison, R., 1992). Realising that the struggle for economic actors, tourists and residents who would improve the situation of the settlement requires new tools, local authorities started to conduct a much more proactive urban policy than before, in the spirit of which they used increasingly often the various tools of place marketing (Kotler et al., 1993). In the framework of the above, according to researchers of this topic, leaders of the settlements, in addition to conducting the necessary theoretical studies and advertising the existing positive qualities, should place much emphasis also on the development of the given place as a product from various perspectives. In addition to the

modernizing of the infrastructure and organising different (e.g. cultural, commercial) events, this development also includes the formation of an attractive urban landscape, which is of outstanding importance from the point of view of all three abovementioned target groups.

At the same time, the developments concerned require significant financial resources, and since return on these investments can only be expected over the long turn, public funding plays an important role in the course of their financing. With a view to the unfavourable financial status of local authorities in Central Europe, it is hardly surprising that in this region, and thus also in Hungary, regional policy grants from the European Union are seen as a possible means of funding for these purposes.

In the light of the above, the aim of this paper is to examine the role of European Union grants in the improvement of the built environment in North Great Plain Region (Észak-Alföldi Régió), one of the least developed regions of Hungary. In the course of the above, on the one hand, we intend to provide a general overview of the situation in Hajdú-Bihar County, also located in this region, and on the other hand, through the example of a specific settlement, we will also present the processes in detail.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Several different methods were used in the preparation of the study. In the process of examining the international literature available on this topic, we paid special attention to presenting the role that the built environment plays in territorial and settlement marketing. We have examined the regional and settlement level development documents, and also relied on the information of regional development agencies pertaining to grants. In the course of the preparation of the case study, we examined the history of the given settlement, the plans drawn up in connection with the developments, and conducted interviews with the various participants of the project.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

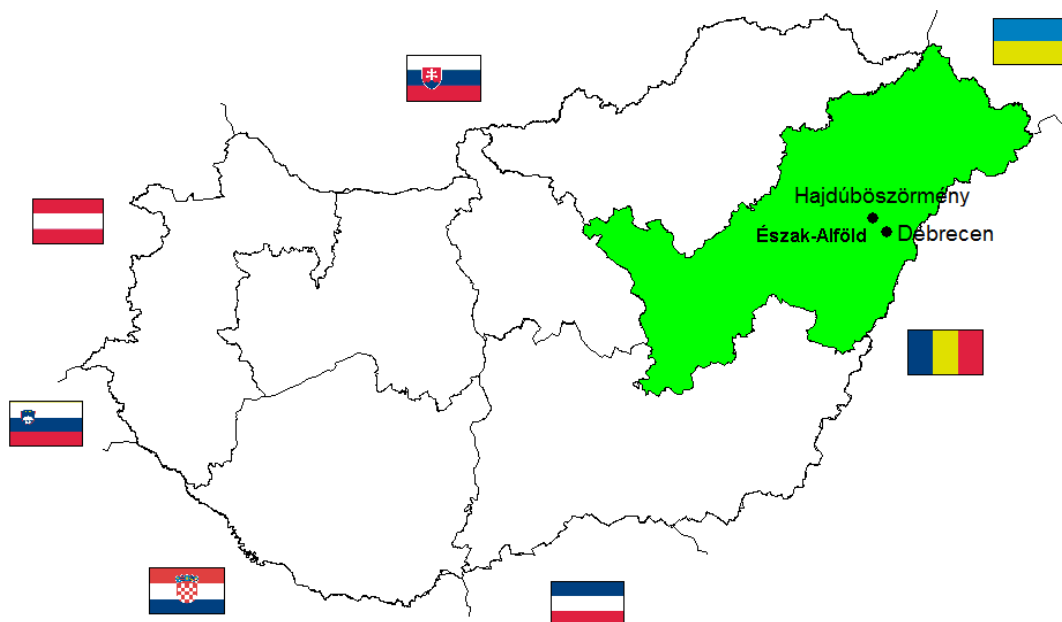
In the process of place marketing the formation of the built environment is of special importance, which is able to elevate places above their rivals. Basically, two methods are available for the local authorities to realise this (Ward, S.V., 1998). One of the possibilities for them is that they place novelty and modernity into the focus following the principles of the presently worldwide ground-gaining postmodernism and thus they ensure unexpectedness and effectiveness. This opportunity is mainly applied in Western Europe, especially in the regions which were formerly used for heavy industrial purposes and have unfavourable images so as to emphasise that breaking with the past exists in relation to architecture too (Hubbard, P., 1996). The investments to be implemented often become the new symbols of the cities and function as the central motif of the communication activity (Crilley, D., 1993; Michalkó, G., 1999).

For the settlements, the other option could be the proper exploitation of the relics of the architectural past, that is the so-called heritage planning (Ashworth, G.J., 1994). This new trend developed in Western Europe in the 1970s and 1980s and mainly characterises Europe with hardly any traces in the United States of America. This activity is basically situated at the intersection of three different dimensions of the cities (Ashworth, G.J., 1991; Tunbridge, J.E. &

Ashworth, G.J., 1996). Firstly, it relies on the existing forms and uses the elements of the built-in environment; secondly, it endeavours at the expedient utilisation of the given objects (i.e. the given building should have certain functions); and thirdly, the whole process is conducted within the framework of urban planning and the elaboration of the appropriate regional strategies.

### **NORTH GREAT PLAIN REGION**

The North Great Plain Region, consisting of three counties, is located along the eastern border of Hungary (figure 1). Its area is 17,729 km<sup>2</sup> (which makes it the second largest region of the country), while its population on 1 January 2016 was 1,474,383. In terms of its GDP/person indicator, the Észak-Alföld Region stood below two-thirds of the national average (64.0%) in 2005 – and only 40% of the average of the European Union of 28 Member States – making it the last among the regions of Hungary. During the time that has since elapsed, only minimal progress could be observed, as a result of which, by 2014, this indicator was 64.2% of the national average and 43% of the average of the European Union.



**Figure 1.** Location of North Great Plain Region  
(Source: Own work)

In the light of the above, it is hardly surprising that in the 2007–2013 programming period, North Great Plain Region was one of the convergence regions, and as such, it received significant development funds. On the one hand, it received support from the various sectoral operational programmes, and on the other hand, it also had its own operational programme (ÉAOP). In the framework of the latter, the total amount of EU funds available was EUR 975.1 million, which was supplemented by the Hungarian state by an additional EUR 172.1 million. The grant funding was used along five priority axes (regional economic development, tourism development, improving transport conditions,

development of human infrastructure, urban and regional development), which was supplemented by technical assistance.

The primary objective of the fifth priority was the creation of a regionally balanced, functionally rich urban network that is attractive socially and economically and has a significant strength of spatial organisation, as a result of which the economic attractiveness of the cities improves, the further lagging behind of deteriorated parts of the city is eliminated, and these are reintegrated into the life of the city. 25.8% of the available amount served the purposes of this priority, within which the measures of ÉAOP 5.1.1 related to urban renewal played an important role.

### **THE ÉAOP 5.1.1 CALLS FOR PROPOSALS TITLED “FUNCTION-EXTENDING INTEGRATED URBAN DEVELOPMENTS”**

There were several calls published within the ÉAOP 5.1.1 grant category the aim of which was to provide support for the renewal of the central and sub-central areas of cities through the application of complex urban rehabilitation tools and to facilitate the expansion and strengthening of their functions. Further, the funding sources supported the creation of new sub-central areas by way of the extension of functions, as well as the renewal of earlier central and sub-central areas as a result of function extension.

The development sources could be used in connection with the following scopes of activities:

- Activities aimed at strengthening the economic function – the essence of these is for the local authority to develop cooperation with the economic operators.
- Activities serving community functions – the aim of these is the development of spaces enhancing local identity and forming communities.
- Activities strengthening the urban functions, the development of public spaces – aimed at the creation of the central area of a city or a part thereof, the development of urban design and the enhancement of the quality of the built environment.
- Developments for the strengthening of the functions of the public sector – aimed at improving of the client-friendly functions of the public sector.
- Activities strengthening residential functions (only found in the call for proposals concerning cities with county rank) – aimed at the provision of a high-quality living environment in socially disadvantaged residential areas and the upgrading of residential buildings in terms of enhancing their energy efficiency.

In addition to the abovementioned principal activities, applicants also had to add supplementary activities that could not be independently applied for (e.g. community-purpose developments related to institutions of public education, measures aimed at improving the accessibility of the facilities created by way of the development, upgrading of the public utility networks, measures for the improvement of public safety, as well as the creation of other physical assets, such as cinemas, event and conference venues, markets, museums, etc.), so that the developments realized would indeed achieve a complex function-extending effect in multiple areas.

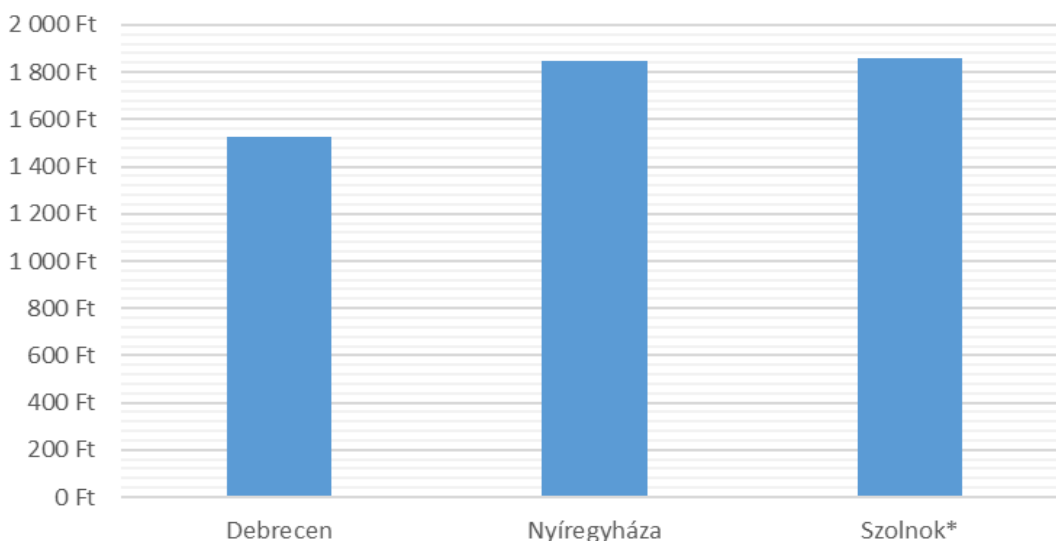
Support from the function-extending developments were received by the applicants in the framework of the following 6 calls for proposals:

- 5.1.1/B Function-extending integrated urban developments in cities of county rank
- 5.1.1/D-09-2f Function-extending integrated urban developments
- 5.1.1/D-12 Function-extending integrated urban developments
- 5.1.1/D-2f Function-extending integrated urban developments
- 5.1.1/G-09 Function-extending integrated urban developments in least developed micro-regions (LDMR)
- 5.1.1/D-13 Function-extending integrated urban developments

In response to these calls for proposals, 95 successful projects were created on 40 settlements of the Észak-Alföld Region, with a total amount of HUF 26,298,213,815 in development aid awarded.

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS OF THE ÉAOP 5.1.1 APPLICATIONS

On the basis of the applications submitted, in a breakdown according to the individual calls for proposals, grants were allocated among the settlements examined in the following distribution. On the basis of the call for proposals specifically announced for cities of county rank and titled “5.1.1/B Function-extending integrated urban developments in cities of county rank”, Debrecen, as the county seat with the highest population received the smallest amount of funds (figure 2). In connection with the data pertaining to the largest city of the region, the figures reveal even more if we examine the amounts relative to the population size. Taking this factor also into consideration, the amount per capita awarded was HUF 7,480 in Debrecen, HUF 15,636 in Nyíregyháza, and HUF 25,420 in Szolnok.

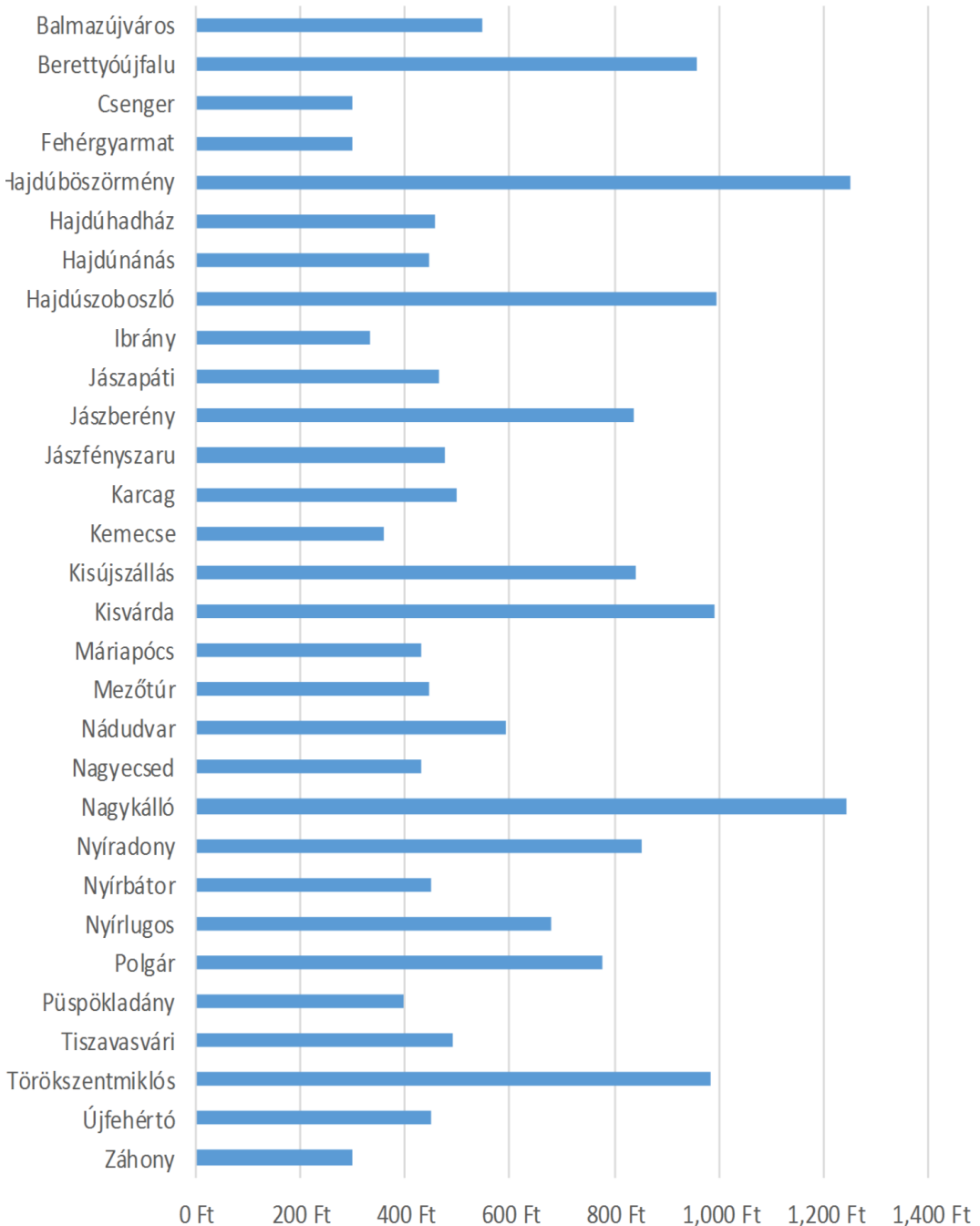


**Figure 2.** The winners of the call for proposals in the ÉAOP 5.1.1/B “Function-extending integrated urban developments in cities of county rank” (million HUF)

(Source: Own work relying on the web-site palyazat.gov.hu)

The largest number of winners in the region were in the “Function-extending integrated urban developments” (ÉAOP 5.1.1/D-09-2f, ÉAOP 5.1.1/D-12, ÉAOP 5.1.1/D-2f, ÉAOP 5.1.1/I-13) category. In terms of the distribution of the absolute amounts of the grants awarded (figure 3), there were significant

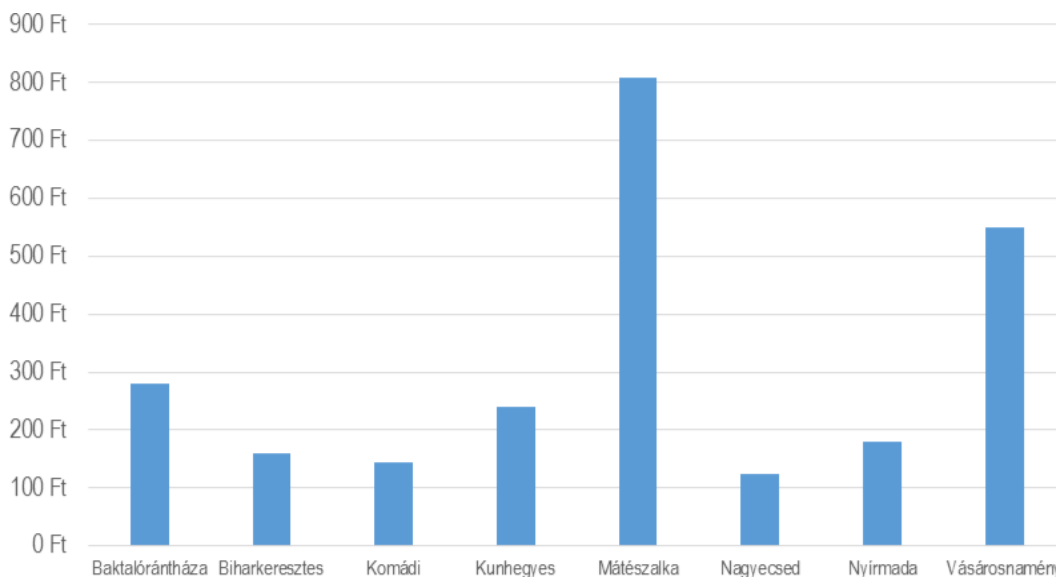
differences: the highest amounts awarded exceeded HUF 1.2 billion (Hajdúböszörmény and Nagykálló), while in case of three settlements, the relevant amount was less than HUF 300 million.



**Figure 3.** The amounts of the grant awarded in the framework of “Function-extending integrated urban developments” (million HUF)

(Source: Own work relying on the web-site [palyazat.gov.hu](http://palyazat.gov.hu))

There was a separate call for proposals aimed at settlements in the least developed microregions (ÉAOP 5.1.1/G-09 Function-extending integrated urban developments in least developed micro-regions), in the case of which lower grant amounts were a general feature, with the exception of two settlements (figure 4).



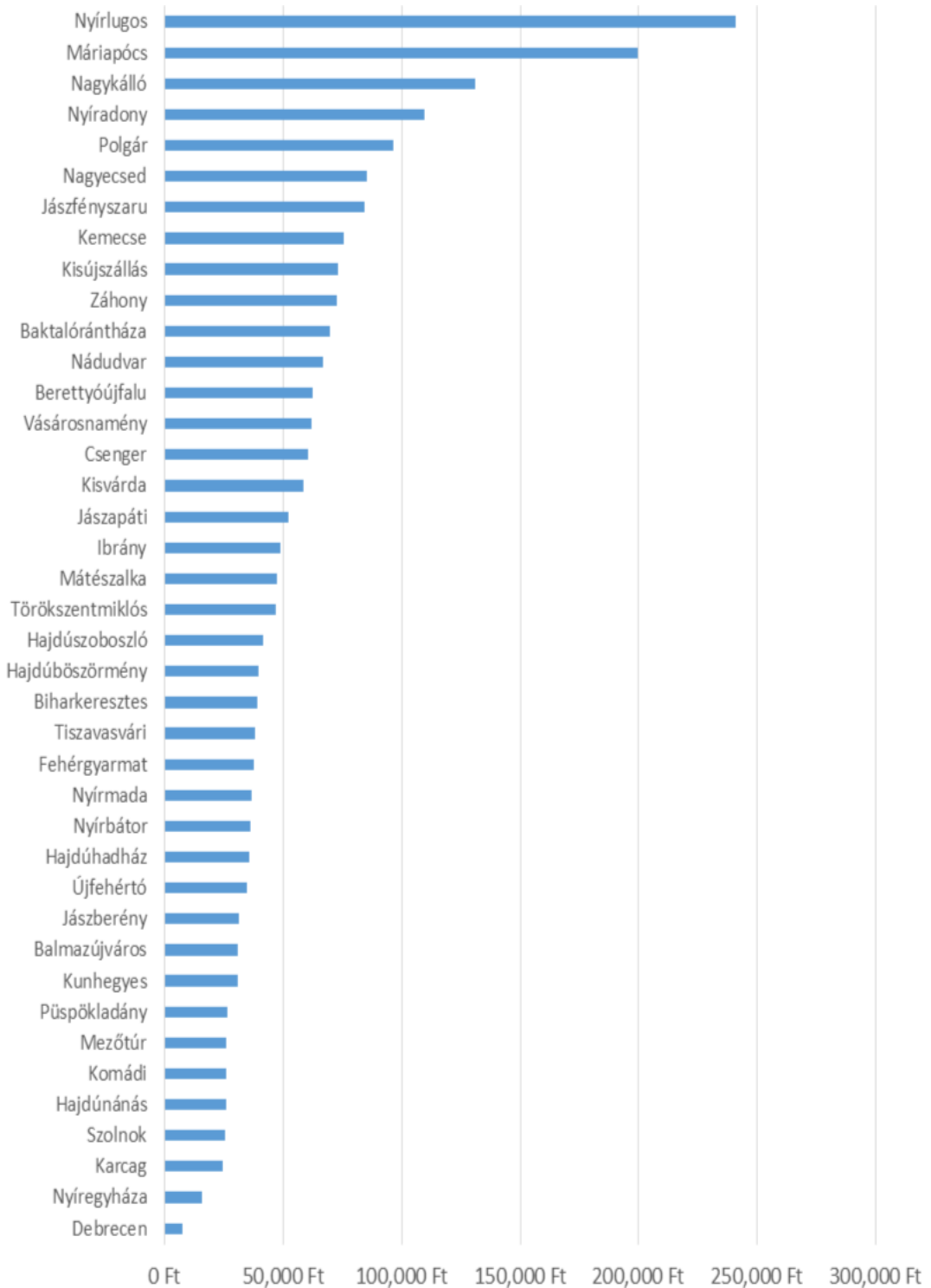
**Figure 4.** The amounts of the grant awarded in the framework of “Function-extending integrated urban developments in least developed micro-regions” (million HUF)  
(Source: Own work relying on the web-site palyazat.gov.hu)

The size of the grants awarded to individual settlements are much better reflected by the relative (e.g. per capita) figures. An examination of the data from this point of view shows very significant differences (figure 5): the lowest per capita amount can be found in the case of Debrecen (HUF 7,480), while the highest amount in the case of Nyírlugos (HUF 240,762).

From among the factors determining the relative figures, the most important role is played by the population size (table 1): in case of smaller settlements, the per capita amount of the grant was much higher than in case of larger settlements. There are several reasons in the background of this fact. On the one hand, certain activities constitute a mandatory part of all projects, and therefore, these represent a permanent cost; on the other hand, the size of the areas involved in the development (and thereby the amount applied for) and the population size of the settlements were not proportionate with each other.

**Table 1.** The per capita amounts of the grant awarded in settlements of various sizes in case of the ÉAOP 5.1.1 call for proposals  
(Data source: own calculation relying on web-site palyazat.gov.hu)

Size of settlements (number of inhabitants)	Relative amount (HUF/person)
- 4,999	84,570
5,000 – 9,999	70,771
10,000 – 19,999	40,686
20,000 – 49,999	36,832
50,000 –	13,234



**Figure 5.** The relative (per capita) amount of the grants awarded to the various settlements in the framework of the ÉAOP 5.1.1 call for proposals

(Source: Own work relying on the web-site [palyazat.gov.hu](http://palyazat.gov.hu))



### CASE STUDY: HAJDÚBÖSZÖRMÉNY

One of the most expressive examples for the use of European Union grants in urban design in the Észak Alföld region is offered by the town of Hajdúböszörmény (figure 1). This settlement of approximately 30,000 residents having significant historical traditions is situated north-west of Debrecen (Nyakas, M., 2000). One of the town's most defining elements of the urban landscape is Bocskai Square (Tóth, A., 1996), formed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (figure 6 – the subsequent numbers refer to this figure), where the most important buildings are the Town Hall (1), the Reformed Church (2), István Bocskai Grammar School (3), István Bocskai Primary School (4), Hajdúság Museum (5), and Gábor Sillye Cultural and Community Centre (6). Over the course of the past decades, however, the square has lost much of its former appeal: the buildings' general state of repair has significantly deteriorated, due to the busy roads nearby there was significant motor vehicle traffic, and the quality of the green areas also left much to be desired (photo 1).



**Figure 6.** The most important buildings of Bocskai Square and the site of the developments implemented  
(Source: Own work)



**Photo 1.** The condition of Bocskai Square before the renovation  
(photograph from the eastern side)  
(Source: www.hbapro.hu)

The solution of the emerging problems started to gain momentum in the new millennium. In the framework of the PHARE Regional Development 2002–2003 programme, between 2004 and 2006, a project with a total budget of EUR 4.2 million (of which the amount of the aid was EUR 3.8 million) was implemented for the renovation of the municipally owned public buildings (e.g. schools, town hall), the archaeological exploration of the square was carried out, and the plans for the developments in the next stage were prepared. At the same time, the necessity of continuing further was also clearly indicated in the town's Urban Development Strategy, approved in the second half of the first decade, and the action areas covered in the period between 2007 and 2013 also included the town centre. The objectives specified in that document included the renewal of the urban landscape, the improvement of the quality of the infrastructure, increasing the town's attractiveness in the field of tourism, as well as enhancing the standard of the existing services and adding new functions to them.

The implementation of the plans was made possible by the North Great Plain Operational Programme, and in call for proposals no. ÉAOP-5.1.1/D-09, announced in the framework of that operational programme, the project titled "Function-extending integrated urban development of the town centre of Hajdúböszörmény" was awarded funding. The project included the following elements:

- the pedestrianization and reconstruction of Bocskai Square into a forum;
- the development of Petőfi Street into a shopping street;
- the construction of the New Municipal Market and Shopping Centre at 10 Ady Endre Square (photo 2, figure 6 – 7);
- the renovation of the store at 4 Bocskai Square, the construction of an events hall and training room;
- the renovation of the bathroom block of the restaurant at 4 Bocskai Square, making it wheelchair-accessible, and adding an internet café;
- the creation of the Economic Services Centre;
- the external renovation of the Orthodox Catholic Church of Hajdúböszörmény (figure 6 – 8);
- making the Community Centre wheelchair-accessible, in the interest of providing access to the László Kertész Municipal Library and the new functions added in the framework of the project; the energy-efficiency renovation of the adult library section, the creation of a Childcare and Civil Information Centre;
- the renovation of the exterior and the energy systems of the Municipal Police Station of Hajdúböszörmény at 2 Kossuth Street (figure 6 – 9).

The project, which was implemented between 2012 and 2015 with a total budget of HUF 1,386,654,150 (of which HUF 1,007,125,025 was the grant) fundamentally delivered on the hopes that were associated with it. The reconstruction on the pedestrianised Bocskai Square (only one lane was left for vehicular traffic) and its vicinity was carried out in harmony with the Neoclassic style of the buildings around the square (photo 3), yet it brought significant novelty and freshness to the urban landscape. Several new functions were added to the town centre (cafés, spaces suitable for outdoor events, fountains and benches creating intimate corners, etc.), strengthening its unified, Neoclassic style, and communicating a positive impression both to the local citizens, those coming to the district centre from neighbouring settlements, as well as tourists visiting the town.



**Photo 2.** The building of New Municipal Market and Shopping Centre  
(Source: [www.hbholding.hu](http://www.hbholding.hu))



**Photo 3.** The condition of Bocskai Square after the renovation  
(photograph from the eastern side)  
(Source: [www.viragosmagyarorszag.itthon.hu](http://www.viragosmagyarorszag.itthon.hu))

As a continuation of the project, in the framework of the project titled “The extension of the district centre functions of Hajdúböszörmény” with a budget of HUF 243,079,5433, the creation of a Government Office, the district centre role of the town was further strengthened, thereby providing the citizens of the entire district access to more efficient administrative services. The District Centre building was created by way of extending the existing office building and adding a new entrance from Petőfi Street. In the designing of the new wing, the Neoclassic style of the neighbouring streets was taken into consideration, and



the resulting building is well aligned with the existing appearance of the town centre (photo 4).



**Photo 4** The Petöfi Street wing of the Hajdúböszörmény District Office (investment has been already finished)  
(Source: news.hajduboszormeny.hu)

## SUMMARY

On the basis of our study it can be concluded that the grants available under the “ÉAOP 5.1.1/D-2f Function-extending integrated urban developments” calls for proposals provided opportunities for the decision-makers of settlements to implement developments that may improve the identification of the settlements and strengthen their unique features. Despite the opportunities, however, only a small proportion of the applicants took advantage of the image-developing potential inherent in these projects, since they mainly focused on the realisation of the functions in the requirements of the grant application, and the conservation of the existing urban landscape, as a result of the renovation of the buildings.

If we also take the attractiveness of urban design into consideration when examining the successfulness of the projects concerned, we can calculate with double results; however, due to the novelty of the projects there are still no usable data. It is worth taking into consideration that even though the extended services and functions may operate properly; however, if the attractiveness of the town did not increase as a result of the project, then we cannot talk about an effective development from a settlement marketing point of view. On the other hand, if the development cannot fulfil its potential function, but it does provide the attractiveness and novelty that helps win the sympathy of both the local residents and tourists, then it is a development that can be considered successful from a settlement marketing point of view. It may be worth, therefore, studying the developments also from this perspective in the future, and for such research, the project of Hajdúböszörmény discussed in the case study may be an excellent example.

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