

Social context group (Klára Balázs, Zsófia Bene, Szabolcs Molnár, László Ruszty)

Our research was based on the diverse and various social context in terms of Skála Metro. We tried to analyse this complex topic from the side of costumers, demography changing and the usage of the building.

We found out that there has been a strong connection between Nyugati Railway Station and Skála Metro from the beginning of the '80s. Nyugati has always been a chaotic place, where people met each other, arriving by train from the country, looking for job opportunities, making businesses, changing for the metro, bus or the tram etc.

When Skála Metro was built in 1984, it intended to stop the slumming process in the surroundings and gave an opportunity for shopping opposite to Nyugati.

There were different types of products which were affordable for the wide range of society: from the expensive electric devices to cheaper sport clothes and everyday grocery. In the '80s there was a restaurant as well, which was quite buisy, due to the employees of the shops (900 members), MÁV (800 members) and the costumers (30.000 costumers per day) who used to have lunch in Skála Metro. However there were not only regular costumers, but also famous people for whom it was prestigious to go to Skála Metro. Politicians (János Kádár), actors and actresses (from popular hungarian and international series) were often represented during shopping.

The down turn started from the time when the system changed. Due to privatization, new laws and regulations the 'underworld' appeared in the city center, in the neighborhood of Nyugati as well. Criminalism, prostitution and homelessness became an important issue. Because of these processes, house and flat owners tried to sell their properties and moved from this area. The poor part of society stayed, and the slumming process started again. It had a huge affect on Skála Metro as well. It was no longer prestigious to go there shopping, so many costumers left and chose the new form of skala: the mall. First was built in 1996 in Budapest, after in 1999 West End shopping center was opened, which is just opposite to Skála Metro. From this point there was no reason to go to Skála Metro. West End had much more products and various entertainment availabilities, with that Skála Metro couldn't keep up.

Skála Metro was empty for years until an investor bought the skala chain in Budapest. It is interesting to look at the changes and the usage of the building nowadays. The 4 layers of the building have strong connection with the layers of society. Underground and on the ground floor the 'underworld' represents itself. From the 1st, till the 3rd floor we can find chinese cloths everywhere, where usually a few under middle class costumers go shopping. Mini City which can be found on the 3rd floor is a commercialized 'playground' for children and their parents. On the top of the building- which is totally seperated from the other levels- officies take place, where the employees work in cultural businesses (fidelio.hu, port.hu etc).

It is also important to highlight the role of West Balkán, which was also a cultural related business, (space for parties, cultural events) opened for the wide public. West Balkán has changed it's location 3 times. Every time it moved to a certain area, which was in the beginning of a big and complex changing. West Balkán probably noticed that there are huge possibilities in the surroundings of Nyugati.

The social diversity around the railway station hasn't changed, but the demography of the flat owners and rentals did. Nowadays the rental fee is almost as high as in the prestigious 5th district, and it started to be very popular among foreign and erasmus students. West Balkán was the only connection between local or foreign younger generation and Skála Metro. West Balkán could have had one of the main roles in the revitalization of this area, but due to tragedy which happened almost 2 years ago they had to close the space.

There are many future possibilities for Skála Metro. It seems that the owner started to fill the building with cultural initiatives (this tendency looks similar to Corvin Áruház, where a huge independent cultural organisation - Műszi and a party space -Corvin tető take place, thanks to the same owner). Hopefully there will be a need for change from the political level, from the city council soon. The surroundings must be viewed as a complex issue. For the revitalization is not enough to build some green areas, but the traffic, the buildings, the built environment and the problematic social issues should have a complex and responsible plan.