

New Environments for the Creative Economy in Central Europe

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In no place in Europe is it more important to create places for the creative economy than in the new European Union accession countries and their neighbors to the East. It is a special challenge given the nature of Soviet era development during the 1960's, 70's and 80's.

Unfortunately development during a new capitalist era has yet to foster a new generation of urban environments or a creative economy, to the extent necessary that these transition economies not only catch up to, but begin to surpass in certain areas neighbors to the West.

This presentation will focus on large projects currently under planning or development in: Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Ukraine. Each of these projects, in its own way, created new synergies with programmatic uses and integrated urban design to complement the metropolitan area as a whole and to attract and retain the global talent that will sustain a creative economy.

1. Growing the Creative Economy in Central Europe

The large-scale development and rezoning of land underway in much of central Europe is the potential foundation for a new sustainable creative capitalist economy. There is a unique opportunity in central Europe to build a new generation of urban environments that do not simply replicate late 20th century urban patterns but that rethink the needs of these new democracies and rapidly evolving economies.

1.1 The European Legacy of Sustainable and Creative Cities:

Europeans have long been leaders in shaping cities for the long term. The cities, treasured by their residents and admired by people worldwide as integrated places to live, work, learn, and play, use their resources relatively efficiently and already have proven their longevity. I believe that Western European cities also are better suited for the future, as their residents are surrounded by diverse environments, that are not only more stimulating environments in which to live but are less energy intensive and high emissions generating late-20th-century living patterns.

To achieve their ongoing resilience and livability, European cities have depended heavily on public sector initiatives. Today, however, the private sector is assuming an increasingly important role, especially in the rapidly emerging economies of central Europe, where the public sector has neither the economic means nor the market-based experience to carry out the most important projects. It is critical though that the private sector investors in central Europe do not perceive themselves as being "behind" their western European countries.

The international financing process and equity markets often lean towards supporting big projects rather than a number of smaller ones, each requiring substantial analysis. However, large projects in central Europe entail burdensome land ownership and zoning policies that remain from the communist years. Such anachronistic policies complicate development and the sustainability of emerging capitalist economies. However, projects in Warsaw, Prague, Budapest and Kiev are proving that central Europe can succeed in the post-Soviet era and

create pioneering developments that look not to simply copy western successes, but to attempt to surpass them.

Over the last few decades, mega projects such as London's Canary Wharf, Paris's La Défense, and Berlin's redevelopment of Potsdamer Platz have reshaped major cities. These efforts have helped make cities more sustainable by redeveloping their underused assets, thus preparing them for the 21st century. Other European cities also are looking to transform themselves. Frankfurt, Birmingham, Marseille, and Lyon have followed the lead of their countries' capitals. Most ambitions of these western European cities are commensurate with their means; however, central European cities, without the accumulated wealth of decades, face different challenges.

1.2 An Obsolete American Dream

It is no surprise that, during the past ten years, after almost half a century of living under communist rule, central Europeans have been pursuing "the good life", the urban expression of which seems to be a caricature of America 20 years ago: hypermarkets (called "big box" retailers in the United States), shopping malls, office towers, and single-use suburban residential enclaves spread indiscriminately across the landscape. These projects often mimic the form of their American models. However, even projects that are only crude replicas open with great initial success, since they provide a stark contrast to existing real estate products in places starved for anything "western". A hypermarket opened several years ago outside of Łódź, Poland, had unprecedented success for its chain. Today, that same facility is one of many struggling for market share.

Such facilities have little sustainability because they assume that 20-year-old concepts – now obsolete in western European markets – can work in the developing markets of central Europe. Planning codes in central European countries during the 1990s did little to restrict such developments, provided that sufficiently large land parcels – usually on a city's edge – could be assembled. The public sector, happy that any investment was being made in their city did not consider the long term impact of such developments. Wrocław, Poland, has had more than 100,000 square meters of retail space built to the south of the city, just beyond the municipality's jurisdiction and not connected by public transportation, while certain key sites in the city centre remain undeveloped.

Such practices have created traffic problems rendering the traditional city centre less livable and the city as a whole less sustainable. As points of attraction move toward the periphery of a city, younger residents abandon public transportation, opting for their own automobiles. Roads departments adopt policies that lessen traffic through broadening roads and creating overpasses, regardless of the context. Today, many central European governments are growing dependent on petrol tax revenues, which fuel low density development patterns that are unsustainable in emerging markets. Such patterns rely on costly infrastructure and imported energy and accelerate environmental degradation, and projects accommodating these patterns are increasingly difficult to legitimize, even in the wealthiest western European countries.

1.3 A redefined American Dream?

One of the key changes has been a shift in attitude about density in the US, a country that has spread its cities relentlessly over the last 100 years, and has for the last several decades served as the world's lifestyle model. Significantly, an emerging body of research suggests that higher-density development is an important component of economic development initiatives and helps attract new employers. This includes the "information economy": growing industries based on the economies of the Internet, information goods, and intellectual property. Workers in this field are known as 'knowledge workers' and many

believe they are the future of the American economy. These workers are comfortable with the latest technology and, because their skills are transferable, choose their jobs based on the attributes of the town or city where they are located. They seek out vibrant, diverse urban centers that offer access to technology, other knowledge workers, and lifestyle.

The economic development game has fundamentally changed. Employers now follow the workers rather than the other way round. Therefore, communities, that focus on providing a high quality of life with the energy and vitality created by urban centers will be much more likely to attract these highly prized, talented, and productive workers than communities of faceless sprawl. Companies that understand the appeal of these communities are making relocation decisions with these workers in mind. Studies have shown that increasing urban density increases labor productivity, generally by reducing commuting times.

A growing number of Americans are redefining their American Dream. They are seeking a more convenient and vibrant lifestyle, whether that be in the city or the suburbs. A national survey of homebuyers' community preferences found that nearly three-quarters of all buyers prefer to live in a community where they can walk or bike to some destinations. The 2001 American Housing Survey further reveals that respondents cited proximity to work more often than unit type as the leading factor in housing choice. These surveys confirm that many people prefer the suburbs but want the amenities traditionally associated with cities, including living close to work.

2. Building Sustainable Creative Solutions

Some of the most interesting and pivotal development environments in Europe today are in central Europe. Several recently completed projects and others still in planning suggest a maturation of the central European market that may set a standard for development well beyond that of the countries in which they are located. Some of these projects are built in central city locations, while others create their own environments. Each project, having overcome land ownership challenges, has undergone or is undergoing a strategic development process meant to be environmentally sustainable and to foster a next generation creative economy.

2.1 Budapest: Corvin Promenade, the 21st century street



The Corvin Promenade site comprises a 16 hectare area 1 kilometer to the southeast of the center of Budapest. It is statistically the poorest neighborhood in the city, with a difficult history that includes a largely transient population. 19th Century constructions have

degenerated and lack basic services. As neighboring areas have been upgraded and the traffic situation in Budapest makes commutes from outside the city more difficult, this area is a natural location for infill re-development. The site is near a Metro station and adjacent to one of the worlds busiest tramway lines. The area is also adjacent to the main artery from the center to the airport. Adjacent to the site are the medical faculty and a new technical university. The holocaust museum is several hundred meters to the west.

The overall program for the site is to be well over 300,000m² of built surface. The program at its outset include a mix of residential, office, retail, leisure and cultural components. Since this type and scale of infill redevelopment was unique and the location untested, the usual brokers and consultants had trouble coming to grips with the market. To incorporate the market ambiguity, many of the buildings were designed to be flexible loft style units that could function as residential space, office or both. Generally this was set atop a one or two level plinth of retail. Although a digital cinema/conference hall found its way to the third level.

Automobiles could cross the site but only perpendicular to the new promenade. Parking is in large part shared and is dealt with under public streets and plazas. Private and reserved parking sits under the private lots.

The project is expected to develop over the next 8 to 10 years. Beginning adjacent to the existing successful Corvin theatre, expanding the retail and leisure offer. Office, hotel and serviced apartment components are also part of the first phase. The following phase would be predominantly residential set around a central park/promenade. Finally the development would culminating with a substantial cultural anchor as well as a tower related to medical services and research in compliment to the adjacent medical faculty.

2.2. Prague: Rendering sustainable the River's edge



Novy-Karlin (or Rohansky-Ostrov, as it is currently known by locals) is a brown-field former river port site located 1.5 kilometers (1 mile) east of the traditional city center of Prague. It is a 70-hectare, 2 kilometer (1.2 mile) strip of land of varying width along the Vltava river. Road, Subway and tram lines connect this site to the center as well as eastern suburbs. During the summer of 2002 all surrounding areas flooded. This included the three subway stations along the southern edge of the site. This site benefited from the earth deposited from the extension of Prague's subway system, it did not flood.

The primary concern of the residents of Prague after last years "500 year flood" was that such an event be able to be controlled and negative consequences limited. The second concern was that the riverfront development not only protect the residents of Karlin from that river, but that the neighborhood be more effectively connected to it and through park-spaces and a bio-corridor.

The urban design of the area connects with the existing urban tissue through scale of the building, as well as at certain key points with a variety of public amenities to enhance the livability of the neighborhood. The key organizational elements include those essential to the well-being of the entire district of Karlin, as well as the mix of uses that make the overall project economically feasible. The mix of uses will make it a very lively, human scale walking district, with calm residential enclaves. Automobiles will be accommodated but not to the point of compromising the livability of the district.

The town center is intended to bring together public and semi-public functions that serve the daily necessities of living in the neighborhood while creating a location special enough to be the site of celebrations. This includes retail facilities that range from a hypermarket built below ground level to a farmers market in the main square. A gallery of shops connects the two. A multiplex will be used to screen films during the evenings and week-ends and serve as a conference center during week-days. Outdoor screenings in the plaza during the summer months will be replaced by a skating rink during the winter. The plaza is conceived as an outdoor living room for the people of Karlin.

Prague is currently lacking a major primary office district. The Novy Karlin district will help to create an efficient business center that will allow Prague to compete more effectively with other European capitals. This will include an area that will serve as an incubator for new businesses. Adjacent to that site will be an information technology market. The first office buildings at the western edge of this district are already under construction.

Over half of the site is reserved for public space and landscaping. This space is programmed for all kinds of outdoor activities. A series of smaller neighborhood squares compliment the central town square, each with their own character. A contemporary art museum with an outdoor theatre overlooks the river toward the old town and castle. The flood retention and detention areas will serve as one of Prague's largest city parks. It will incorporate meadows and lakes with beaches for casual use, as well as fields and courts for more formalized sporting activities.

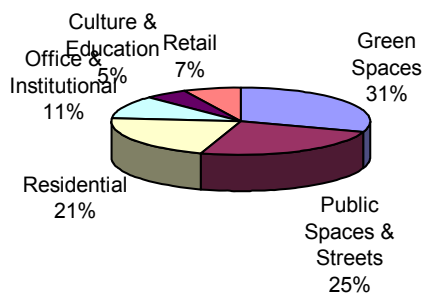
Residential areas will compliment the existing neighborhood by creating a more up-market product that will increase the value of the district as a whole. Private gardens adjacent to the park lands will provide playgrounds, pools and tennis courts for the individual building residences. The architecture, more contemporary and light in character than the older Prague housing stock, will compliment that cities over-all offer. Many units will seem as if the park is passing beneath them as they overlook the river and bio-corridor. Some units will have access to generous roof gardens, while all will have terraces designed to incorporate vegetation.

2.3. Warsaw: Wilanow: Building the new Suburbs

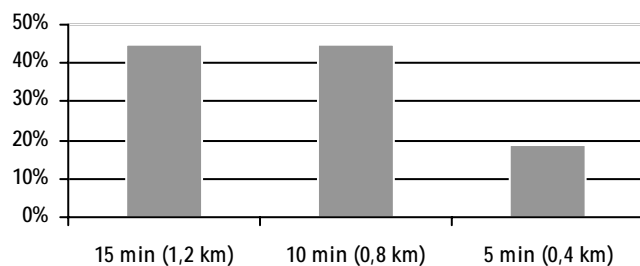


Miasteczko Wilanow, situated eight kilometers from the centre of Warsaw, is a mixed-use, ecologically sensitive development that is the 169-hectare keystone of a 480-hectare planned development district that has just undergone rezoning. The site, long preserved as part of an agricultural college, retains its natural character. During the 1950s, it was slated to become a privileged communist enclave, but the necessary zoning changes were not authorized. The site, across from the 17th- and 18th-century Wilanow Palace and Gardens, is especially sensitive to the Polish people. At the public unveiling of the project in October 2000, hundreds of Warsaw residents were surveyed. Visitors` comments regarding specific program elements and architectural character have and will be integrated into planning, urban design, and architectural guidelines for the site.

Program distribution



Reasonable walking distance



From the outset, the master plan for the area integrated a variety of activities that would be the foundation for a balanced, sustainable community. The project, along with the international investors involved, have redefined the market during the course of the development. Their collaboration helps ensure the success of the development, which will have a total build-out exceeding 1.7 million square-meters. The key elements of this multifaceted project include a retail and entertainment-oriented town centre, institutional buildings, offices, and a wide range of residential units.



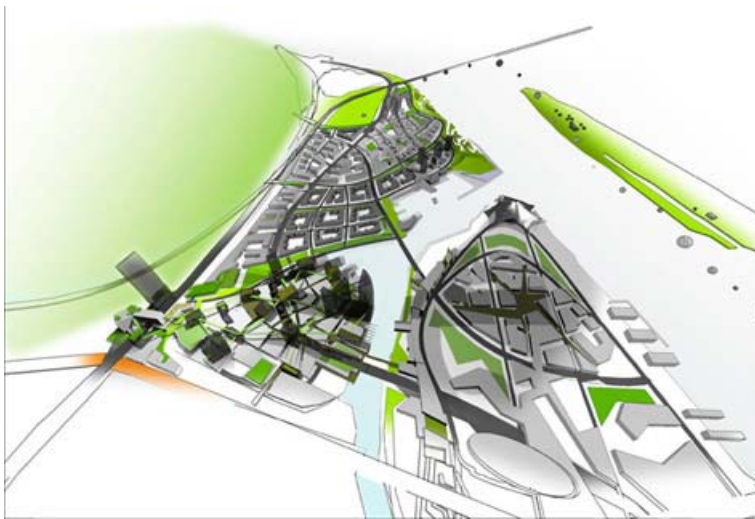
The design of the centre, places shops and activities to define a streetscape that will be covered during the winter months while opening during the summer months. A cinema complex located within the project will be used as a conference / educational auditorium facility during off-peak cinema hours. While the details of the town center will evolve, the overall framework – including a circular public plaza, a water plaza that becomes a skating rink during the winter months, and a farmer’s market – corresponded to expectations for the project as determined by the October and subsequent surveys.

In addition to the town centre offices, ecologically sensitive campus-style offices will be built around a television station and technology incubator (i.e., a group of information-and communications-based industries) with a common satellite uplink. A fiber-optic network throughout the site will provide global communications access for offices and residents. Sites throughout the 169-hectare project, available at less than half the market price, have been reserved for schools, which will give substance to the community. A German school and a French “maternelle” are locating within the community. It is hoped that a pricing formula will be able to attract additional Polish Schools.

Quality streetscapes, canals, park squares with playgrounds in each neighborhood, open meadows, and nature reserves will help unify the district. Equestrian trails will traverse the new community. (Fiber Optic trunk lines are being placed below the trails). New legal standards for all of Poland are being created in order to accommodate the horses crossing the streets in Miasteczko Wilanow. It is a a community that will be attractive not only to families but also to the elderly and young adults. Unlike many suburbs of recent decades, the project attempts to target a number of generations concurrently, as the family unit remains strong in Polish life.

A variety of developers are undertaking the construction of the residential areas. The products offered will range from 40 square meter lofts at 900 Euro/M2 near the town center to 500 square meter villas at 1,800 Euro/M2 along the western nature reserve. The land owner, Prokom, through an alliance with several Polish banks, including Warsaw-based Big Bank, will provide mortgage financing-increasingly common in central Europe – to help the community to a wider range of potential owner/residents. Homeownership is a vital step in initiating and supporting an emerging economy and establishing pride of place..

2.4. Kiev: Telychka: Complimenting Kiev's strengths



The nearly 200 hectare Telychka site, an underutilized industrial zone, is one of the city's most strategic future development areas. It is clearly a potential showcase for a 21st century economy and urban pattern to replace older industries and an old regime. No site is more visible in Kiev. Along the Dnipro river and adjacent to the city's botanical garden it is bordered by two of Ukraine's busiest thoroughfares including the country's busiest bridge. Arriving from the airport one glimpses Kyiv's most important monuments over the site. The site is also convenient to the city's wealthy suburb, Koncha Zaspas, whose residents find the commute to the center of the city increasingly difficult. Across the wide expanse of the river are vast developments of the last ten years which are a reminder of what can result from the marriage of primitive real estate capitalism and Soviet style planning policies.

One of the main attributes of this kind of student exercise is that it is a way of better understanding what future generations expect from their cities. It is often said today that a city's viability is largely dependent on its ability to attract and keep the world's best talent. It is also said that the more diverse the city, the more vibrant its cultural life. In the 21st century this is also the formula for a dynamic and competitive economy.

The students approached the site from many different perspectives representing their diverse cultures and interests. As is common in Harvard, the students in our studio class came from all parts of the globe, including one from Ukraine. As could be expected from such a diverse group they pursued different programming strategies at the outset of the class. While the exercise began with the development of a spectrum of single use complexes it evolved during the semester into a mixed use district which incorporated what the students considered to be appropriate proportions of each distinct yet complimentary activity. While the students outlined specific programmatic guidelines, the resultant master plan has a fluidity that acknowledged the dynamic nature of market forces. This is fundamental in order to allow this part of Kyiv to be planned yet opportunistic in its development.

The class created a city within a city. A place celebrating and approaching the Dnipro and the adjacent green escarpments. Creating office, research, hospital and educational facilities currently lacking in Kiev. Providing a range of residential opportunities from affordable housing to houses for a young workforce to luxurious apartments overlooking the river for top executives. International four star, designer boutique and quality three star business hotels help to fill niches in the Kiev hotel market. A major retail component creates a river-walk environment and seamlessly integrates the retail boxes that typically blight the 20th century

urban environment. A conference center, multiplex, aquarium and marina add cultural and leisure dimensions to complement Kiev. Sports clubs, public and private beaches are part of an ecological filtration system for the river. Without banishing the automobile, all of these complimentary components are within walking distance.

The students established an overall building gradient. One that includes Kiev's tallest structure and an adjacent high-rise office district near the highway interchange and metro/railway stations on the western edge of the site. While recommending a lower rise, though dense residential and campus areas to the east, near the river. This gradient keeps clear the majestic views of Kiev from the bridge while the towers serve to mark the entry to the city from south to east. The river and strong landscape features flow through the site, echoing the cityscape of Kiev as a whole. The students endorsed a contemporary architectural expression, and avoided nostalgic forms, but stressed the importance of maintaining a human scale throughout the project. In addition a floating sculptural intervention at the scale of the river sought to brand Kiev's identity into the mind of visitors to the city.

The students sought to compliment the a city which they admired with elements that would make Kiev competitive on the global stage. Their message was clear: build upon the programmatic and social diversity, richness and complexity of the city center which they enjoyed so much. Avoid simplistically importing building typologies from Moscow or the west but be inspired to draw upon a variety of ideas from the world to create something that is original, that is distinct. The students chose not to elaborate architectural details, mostly creating elegant ghostlike images – perhaps waiting interpretation by local talent.

3. Conclusion and future considerations

The post-communist economies of Europe can ill afford to create environments that are not sustainable. In some ways, they are in a privileged position to adopt new concepts, whether in planning practice or technology, without threatening a previous generation of investment real estate products. The inherent value of real estate assets in post-communist countries dwarfs all foreign investment made in them since 1945. Macroeconomic stabilization programs carried out by the governments there can perform only a fraction of the work required to create a democratic market economy.

By spurring large-scale rezoning that makes investments in central Europe attractive to institutional investors, the projects included in this article assist in the development of a capitalist market economy. By creating wired, dense, mixed-use, economically and socially integrated communities we are building the platform of the new economy. The many local architectural practices engaged in the design of these district give them a local face, an authentic culture and a human scaled urban texture. Each of these project engages smart growth policies that may help sustain these budding economies well into the future.

Perhaps these new developments are simply updating the qualities of the most dynamic European cities – I hope so. The challenge arises from implementing such places within the current economic and political context of central Europe. Perhaps it will be decades before they may be considered a success and weather they contribute to dealing with the global agenda of transition economies – economies that represent 80% of the world's population.

Ultimately, the economic and environmental well-being of places well beyond these emerging capitalist markets in central Europe depend on the sustainability of the developments undertaken with-in them. After all, transitional economies collectively account for 80 percent of the world's population.