

The role of the Modern Cities Program in the renewal of the cultural and creative sector

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Abstract: The Modern Cities Program is the largest-scale urban development effort in the history of the country, with which the Government of Hungary aims to promote the simultaneous development of municipalities at the same hierarchical level. Its projects focus on the preservation of intangible and tangible cultural heritage, the transformation of urban public spaces and green areas into community spaces, the creation of institutions for sports and recreational activities, research and development, digitalization, projects for innovative and creative professionals, and public educational and cultural institutions. The study aims to analyze the funding granted for developing the cultural and creative sector of cities with county rights through the Modern Cities Program in the period 2016–2025, by comparing the size of their population, their strategic importance in regional economic policy and the relationship between the value of the cultural heritage with the amount of funding received. The paper unveils the distribution of grants over time and space, the modalities and proportion of grants, and the way the cities that has received grants align with the national strategy. This will also reveal a shift in the regional importance of the cities and their relationship. Until February 2024, the Government of Hungary has contributed more than HUF 322.6 billion (809.5 million EUR) to the implementation of 98 cultural and creative projects in 22 cities with county rights through its urban development support program that has been established for the development and regeneration of cities with county rights and to counter the dominance of the capital.

Keywords: cultural and creative sector; Modern Cities Program; urban development

1. Introduction

Many Hungarian towns and cities boast a significant cultural heritage, complemented by local intellectual capital, but due to their limited financial resources, they are unable to move forward, develop and become competitive on their own. The cultural expenditure of cities is financed by the municipalities, and in most of the cities with county status the municipalities are the maintainers of public cultural collections (museums, libraries, archives). Since 2007–2008, urban development strategies, mainly involving EU funds, have focused on the creation of quality urban spaces and the development of infrastructure and cultural and higher education institutions, in which cities have been prominent through their role in the fields of culture, education and other public services. They have also become competitive through their R&D and related cultural and creative industrial performance, in which the education function has also been a key element.

The Government of Hungary has established the Modern Cities Program, for which it has allocated HUF 3400 billion (8.5 billion EUR), to promote the development and regeneration of cities with county status and to counter the

dominance of the capital. In addition, it provided the opportunity for additional funding from the Operational Programs for Regional and Urban Development and Competitive Central Hungary (Government Decision 1562/2016 (X.13.)). Following a review of the projects, Government Decision 1474/2023 (2.11.2023) closed the program, entailing their completion, further funding, postponement or cancellation.

The urban development approach of the Modern Cities Program, a cooperation between central and local government can be originated from the principles of the “urban regime”, dating back to the 1980s. It has led to new forms of governance, new collaborations and coalitions in cities, through the combination of US municipalities and the private sector, and the division of power and labor between the public and private sectors. At the end of the 20th century, city municipalities were characterized by their collaboration with significant local businesses and NGOs, while nowadays government actors also participate in these collaborations (Faragó, 2019). Clinton’s urban policy has ensured that inner-city communities share in the investments made through the Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities initiatives (Black, 2021). Examples of Science Parks and ‘Technopoles’ include the science city of Tsukuba, the Cambridge Science Park, the Techno city Sup in Turin, the Route 128 in Boston, and Silicon Valley, an inevitable reference for the technopole concept (Eberlein, 1996). In the 1980s, a joint public-private enterprise development company was established in Hamburg, Germany, to support the media industry. Also relying on private investors, the urban strategy of Bilbao, Spain, aimed to reuse abandoned industrial sites and develop the service sector. In the UK, the City Challenge partnership approach was based on the involvement of private investors, and the directly managed Development Corporation model was replaced by more flexible forms of central public intervention. The role of the London Pride Partnership has been to adopt a public-private agenda. In Birmingham, the Heartlands project focused on the commercial image of the city center, while City Pride focused on community, training and education, through which central government also supported the internationalization of the city center. The Hungarian Modern Cities Program is most comparable to the French ‘regime’ of development. The Modern Cities Program can rightly be regarded as the largest-scale urban development effort in the country’s history, with which the government sought to promote the simultaneous development of municipalities at the same hierarchical level. The method reminded many of the central directives for local economic development in the 1960s, as well as the centralized, planning contract-driven, French ethereal-dirigiste approach. Others, however, argued that it left too much decision making to local authorities, using a bottom-up approach, leaving room for local actors and not identifying the developments to be supported. (Fekete, 2017, 2018; Lux, 2019). The creation of Paris’ status as a world city, the prestige development of Plaine Saint-Denis, and the development of a new European communication network in Lille characterize the specific French approach to urban development: the interconnection of levels of government, the strong role of the public sector, the use of quasi-autonomous agencies, political and technical authority, and legitimacy based on a democratic process. The prominent role of the public sector is demonstrated by the image-building of cities, new image and investment in cultural activities, which in Montpellier has reached the level of economic investment. In France, science parks and technopoles, initiated or

created by local authorities as part of local economic development strategies, have entailed a redefinition and redistribution of the roles and powers of the state and local authorities (Eberlein, 1996).

1.1. Participants in the Modern Cities Program: Cities with county status

The first Local Government Act (Lex. No. LXV of 1990) has declared towns with more than 50,000 inhabitants, the county towns Debrecen, Győr, Kecskemét, Nyíregyháza, Miskolc, Pécs, Szeged, Székesfehérvár and the county capitals Békéscsaba, Eger, Kaposvár, Salgótarján, Szolnok, Szombathely, Tatabánya, Veszprém, Zalaegerszeg and the secondary centers Dunaújváros, Hódmezővásárhely, Nagykanizsa, Sopron as cities with county status. Its amendment in 1994 abolished the population limit, which led to the accession of Szekszárd (Rechnitzer, 2019). On 1 May 2022, the right has been also granted to Baja and Esztergom (Mötv, 2011). The total population of the 25 county-level cities was close to two million on 1 January 2023 (KSH, 2024). Seven of them are classified as metropolitan cities with a population of over 100,000 and eighteen as cities with a population of over 50,000. They can be characterised as regional centres (Debrecen, Győr, Pécs, Miskolc, Szeged), large cities (Kecskemét, Nyíregyháza, Székesfehérvár), development poles of the 2005–2007 period (Debrecen, Győr, Miskolc, Pécs, Szeged), co-poles (Székesfehérvár and Veszprém) or as quality-of-life centers (Pécs), which aim to develop the cultural industry. The plans formulated in the Integrated Urban Development Strategies of the cities of county status are the basis for the application concepts of the Modern Cities Program (Rechnitzer, 2019).

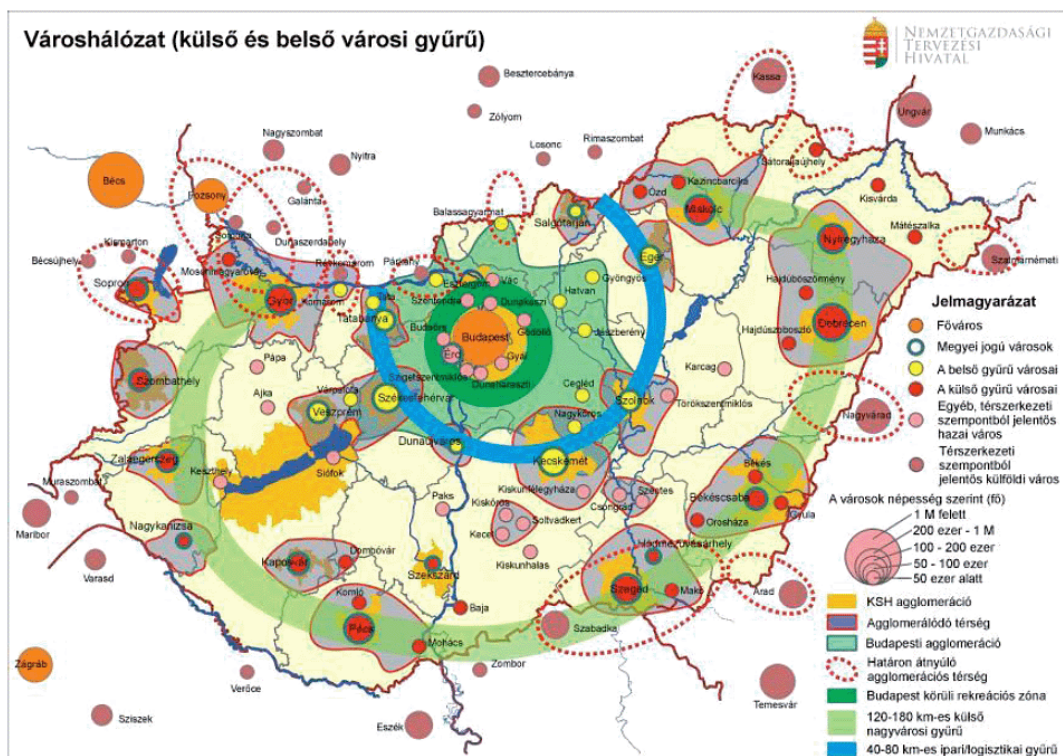


Figure 1. Cities of the regional outer and inner ring. source: parliament resolution No. 1/2014. (I.3.) OGY national development 2030 national development and territorial development concept (6, p. 151).

The National Development 2030 focuses on rural cities as counterpoints to the capital, located in the urban rings surrounding it. The plan identifies the cities of Debrecen, Győr, Miskolc, Pécs and Szeged as the perspective focal points of the outer metropolitan ring. The outer ring also includes Békéscsaba, Kaposvár, Nyíregyháza, Sopron, Szekszárd, Szombathely and Zalaegerszeg. The cities of the inner ring, which includes Dunaújváros, Eger, Esztergom, Kecskemét, Salgótarján, Székesfehérvár, Szolnok, Veszprém and Tatabánya, also have an important role to play. In the case of the cities of the inner ring, the national urban development is focus on innovation-based economic development, research and development, education, including the promotion of international cooperation and training forms of education and research in university centers. In case of the outer ring, emphasis is placed on the increased development and creation of R&D and educational institutions that are in line with the economic profile of the cities, as well as on improving the quality of the urban environment (Hungarian Parliament 6, No 1/2014 (3 I); **Figure 1**).

1.2. Definition of the cultural and creative sector

The selection of projects for this study is based on the definition of the cultural and creative sector. Taking the EU definition of culture (Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013, 2013) as a starting point, this includes activities based on cultural values and artistic and other creative expressions, architecture, public collections archives, libraries and museums and tangible and intangible cultural heritage beyond these, as well as educational activities related to artistic or other creative activities. In addition, the Monitor on Cultural and Creative Cities (CCCM, 2022) has a continuous flow of research on urban infrastructure, the impact of innovation on the creative economy, the attraction of talent, and the tangible and intangible assets that make for a liveable environment.

The definition of cultural and creative activities in the Hungarian context was based on the one hand, on the Local Government Act, which defines the tasks and competences of municipalities as cultural services and emphasizes the provision of public libraries, support for cinemas and performing arts organizations, support for local cultural activities, and protection of the local tangible and intangible cultural heritage. On the other hand, it was based on the Cultural Statistics Data Collection System (KultStat, 2022), which collects information on public culture, zoos, libraries, museums, archives, theatres and dance companies, concerts and contemporary exhibitions. The main categories of the market-based grouping established by Kézai and Rechnitzer (2022) include scientific research and development and artistic activities, including, as activities according to the TEÁOR code, architectural activities, operation of arts facilities, scientific research and development and artistic activities (fashion, design, photography, cultural education, performing arts, creative arts). Taking into account the definitions of cultural statistical data collection as formulated by ESSnet Culture (2012), KEA (2015), the Platform for Creative Industries (2010) and KSH (2008), we can count 80 different activities, grouped into six categories, summarizing the definitions used so far (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Summary chart of cultural and creative activities (2024, own working).

Cultural, Arts, Creative Goods and Services and related activities	
Creative and performing arts, cultural activities	Visual arts (fine arts, painting, sculpture, photography), music, concerts, theatre, opera, cinema, dance, folk ensembles, festivals, circus, amusement park, cultural park, public/community education, literature;
Functional and creative activities	interior design, graphics, games, clothing, furniture, jewellery, crafts, design, fashion design, design, photography;
Activities related to the preservation of cultural heritage, cultural activities	library, museum, image and sound archive, archives, gallery, historical monument, building, other attraction, cultural heritage (artistic and monumental), natural heritage, botanical and zoological garden;
Audiovisual, media, publishing, distribution, marketing, commercial activities	sound recording; music publishing and distribution; publishing of books, newspapers and periodicals; mass communication, advertising; production and distribution of films, video, television and radio programs; media advertising, publicity, advertising agency, digital content industry, software, video games, multimedia, animation; computer engineering, computer games, digital services, information technology, high-tech industries; antiques trade; architectural activities; operation of arts facilities;
Scientific research, development	natural sciences, biotechnology, mathematics, engineering, social sciences;
Related, auxiliary, entertainment and recreation activities	education, training, management, copyright, nightclubs, amusement parks, gambling, sports betting, sports and recreation activities.

2. Materials and methods analysis of the cultural and creative sector in the Modern Cities Program

The aim of the research is to examine the forms of cultural and creative expression, their distribution in time and space, and the way and extent of support for the projects of the Modern Cities Program. It draws conclusions about the relationship between the population of the cities, the strategic socio-economic and regional importance of the city or area, the strategic economic policy, the intrinsic value of the cultural heritage and the size of the grant. Among the projects under the program for 2016–2025, those concerning the cultural and creative sector will focus on the intangible and tangible cultural heritage, particularly the conservation of the architectural heritage, the transformation of urban public spaces and green areas into community spaces, the promotion of the 21st century and the promotion of the cultural and creative industries. The projects under consideration are public cultural institutions (art and vocational training schools, libraries, archives, zoos), vocational training, higher education and research and development projects for innovative creative professionals, the 21st-century application of digitalization, and the development of sport, recreation and leisure. The study does not include investments in transport development or investments not closely linked to the research field. The research is based on government decrees and decisions (NJT, 2024) and the concluded support documents (MVP, 2024) of the Modern Cities Program, supplemented by information available on the relevant official online platforms.

3. Results

3.1. Culture and creativity in the Modern Cities Program

Cultural support is almost exclusively in the form of building renovation or development. 61% of the Modern Cities Program components involve development, renovation or both. 29% are for the construction of new buildings and 9% are still at

the planning stage. The exceptions to this are the additional operating subsidies for cultural institutions in Pécs (Zsolnay Cultural Quarter, Kodály Centre and Pannon Philharmonic Orchestra) included in the government decision. Thirty-four projects for the preservation of cultural heritage and the renewal of cultural institutions are included in the applications. These are included in the historic town center of Sopron, the Gothard Castle and County Hall in Szombathely and the renovation of the town hall in Kecskemét. Other functional improvements include the development of the Kállay Mansion in Nyíregyháza, the renewal of the church and its surroundings in the main parish of Salgótarján, the reconstruction of the former archives building in Kaposvár, the Mindszenty Pilgrimage Site in Zalaegerszeg and the construction of the conference center for the Lővérek Program in Sopron. As well as the Zichy-liget project, which is still in the planning phase, to improve the liveability of the city center of Székesfehérvár. Among the cultural heritage buildings with an institutional function, the development of the Szolnok Artists' Colony will support the creative arts, while six theatres - the renovation of the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen, the Csiky Gergely Theatre in Kaposvár, the Hevesi Sándor Theatre in Zalaegerszeg, the creation of the Rózsakert Municipal Open-Air Stage in Nyíregyháza, and the complex development of the Petőfi Theatre in Veszprém and the National Theatre in Győr - will support the performing arts. As part of the renewal of six public cultural heritage collections, the renovation of the Szombathely Gallery will provide a fitting home for Imre Schrammel's oeuvre. In addition to the conservation, renovation and development of the Munkácsy quarter in Békéscsaba, the castle and fortress system of Eger, the Diósgyőr castle and the Göcseji Museum in Zalaegerszeg, the plans include the preparation of the conservation of the Nyíregyháza-Sóstó Museum Village. The new interactive library and archives in Szekszárd and the József Attila County and City Library in Tatabánya will create the need for a new type of cultural service alongside the old. The plan for the joint renewal of János Pál II Square and the theatre in Győr shows a complex vision of cultural urban regeneration. The development and expansion of the Xantus János Zoo in Győr, the Nyíregyháza Zoo, the Kittenberger Kálmán Botanical and Wildlife Park in Veszprém and the preparation of the study of the development possibilities of the Novohrad-Nógrád Geopark in Salgótarján will help to protect the natural heritage.

Infrastructural developments include, in addition to the many cultural developments, the promotion of 'mini-C', creativity in the learning process, and 'Pro-C', the development of creativity through effort and professional expertise (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009). The importance of arts education is illustrated by the renovation of the Music Secondary School and the Elementary Art School in Veszprém, the renovation of the Antal Csermák Music School and the infrastructure development of the Kodály Zoltán Music Pedagogical Institute in Kecskemét. Vocational education and training is considered to be of strategic importance in six cities: the Knowledge and Training Centre for the Printing Industry in Békéscsaba, the vocational training institution system in Érd, the complex educational development in Székesfehérvár, the Szekszárd Vocational Training Centre and the related real estate acquisition, and the introduction and expansion of dual training in Tatabánya. The education and innovation workshop planned for industrial investment in Kaposvár is also directly linked to the development of the creative industries. The investment in the Veszprém

Industrial Park, in line with the vision of the Aranyosvölgy Knowledge Park and Science Centre, will also contribute to the pursuit of quality, skills-driven activities. Infrastructural and intangible investments supporting research and development will promote the presence of the highest level of creativity, the “Pro-C”, at six universities: the ELI Science Park and Incubator House at the University of Szeged, the new Science and Technology Park at the Faculty of Management of the Budapest University of Economics in Zalaegerszeg, the Innovation Centre at the University of Debrecen’s Industrial Park, the complex development of higher education in Békéscsaba and the capacity development of the University of Pécs. The Digital Development Centre at Széchenyi István University in Győr will support higher education, while the SMART GRID system in Békéscsaba will support public utility services. In Miskolc, the smart city model will be among the grants to promote digital modernization.

A total of 39 applications for sport, leisure and recreation have been submitted, of which 24 are likely to be implemented. The 11 new multifunctional sports halls for cultural purposes, the six aquatic sports and recreation facilities and the six outdoor community and recreational venues will provide a more liveable environment, more entertainment and a better quality of life. The Szent Márton Equestrian Sports, Heritage and Events Centre in Szombathely is unique in the city and is currently focusing on preparatory works. Among the sports facilities, stadiums are being built in Nyíregyháza, Kaposvár, Szeged and Veszprém specifically for athletics, while sports centres are being linked to swimming pools in Nagykanizsa, Szekszárd, Szolnok and Pécs. Baths, swimming pools and water parks are being built in Dunaújváros, Győr, Szolnok-Tiszaliget, Veszprém and Zalaegerszeg. A beach, a port and an eco-centre are also planned on Lake Fertő. Recreation will be supported by the Weckheim hiking and cycling trail in Békéscsaba, the Nagyerdő Program in Debrecen, the recreational development of Szalki Island in Dunaújváros, the recreational use of the Érdligeti Zápórt Reservoir, the renewal of the Spartacus boathouse in Győr and the development of the Késmárk Street Tennis Centre in Szombathely.

In addition to events, the hotel and event centre in Dunaújváros, the further development of the CsabaPark Gastronomic and Experience Park in Békéscsaba, the cultural, tourist and gastronomic visitor centre, conference and event centre “Kanizsa” in Nagykanizsa will also serve a tourist function (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Projects supported by the Modern Cities Program (2024 02. own working).

No.	Docu-ments	Further implement-ation	Project title	Type	Type of implemen-tation	P ⁷	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)
I.	Békéscsaba					7	14,990,506,859	37,476,267
1	CS ¹	providing additional resources	Development of the Munkácsy quarter in Békéscsaba	cultural heritage, cultural inst. ⁴	development		3,998,738,765	9,996,847
2	CS		Békéscsaba Printing Industry Knowledge and Training Centre	vocational training	construction		1,899,785,000	4,749,463

Table 2. (Continued).

No.	Docu-ments	Further implemen-tation	Project title	Type	Type of implemen-tation	P ⁷	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)
3	CS	realization	Complex development of higher education in Békéscsaba	R&D ³	development		230,050,250	575,126
4	CS		Further development of CsabaPark Gastronomic and Adventure Park	recreation	development		1,136,026,101	2,840,065
5	CS	subsequent implemen-tation	Design of a new multifunctional sports hall in the Békéscsaba Sports Center (competition pool)	Sport, recreation	planning		355,442,000	888 605
6	CS		Weckheim Hiking and Cycling Trail (Békéscsaba)	recreation	construction		3,707,659,343	9,269,148
7	CS		SMART GRID system in Békéscsaba I. phase	Digitalization	construction		3,662,805,400	9,157,014
II.	Debrecen					3	21,143,389,206	52,858,473
8	CS		Completion of the Debrecen Great Forest program: Aquqticum beach complex	recreation	development		7,100,000,000	17,750,000
9	CS		Debrecen,Csokonai Theatre	cultural inst.-th. ⁵	renovation		10,160,000,000	25,400,000
10	GD ²		University of Debrecen Innovation Center	R&D	construction		3,883,389,206	9,708,473
III.	Dunaújváros					5	6,032,941,958	15,082,355
11	CS		Recreation development of Szalki Island in Dunaújváros	recreation	development		1,159,551,963	2,898,880
12	CS		Renovation of the Aquantis adventure bath and development of the Spa Park Dunaújváros	recreation	renovation and development		2,879,616,995	7,199,042
13	CS		Establishment of a hotel and event centre Dunaújváros	events	construction		1,993,773,000	4,984,433
14	GD		Investments aimed at the development and change of function of Dunaújváros, amusement park and park area	recreation	renovation and development			0
15	GD		Dunaújváros, sports complex development	sport	renovation and development			0

Table 2. (Continued).

No.	Docu-ments	Further implemen-tation	Project title	Type	Type of implemen-tation	P ⁷	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)
IV.	Eger					3	4,809,000,000	12,022,500
16	CofS	realized	Development and preservation of the castle and fortification system of Eger (former city wall)	cultural heritage, inst.	renovation and development		4,500,000,000	11,250,000
17	GD		Preservation of the Zákány bastion in Eger	cultural heritage, inst.	renovation		309,000,000	772,500
18	GD		Eger, National Water Polo and Swimming Center	sport	construction			0
V.	Érd					2	37,442,011,577	93,605,029
19	CS		Recreational use of the Érdliget rain reservoir	recreation	development		1,900,000,000	4,750,000
20	CS		Development of the vocational training institutional system of Érd	vocational training	development		35,542,011,577	88,855,029
VI.	Győr					8	28,572,668,941	71,431,672
21	CS		Comprehensive development of the János Xantus Zoo in Győr	zoo	development		2,920,000,000	7,300,000
22	CS	subsequent implemen-tation	Rehabilitation of the National Theatre of Győr, John Paul II Square	cultural inst.-th	planning		1,450,000,000	3,625,000
23	CS	subsequent implemen-tation	Restoration of the Spartacus boathouse in Győr and development of its environment	sport, recreation	renovation and development		260,000,000	650,000
24	CS		The Water Park of Győr	recreation	construction		21,367,487,941	53,418,720
25	GD	realization	The Digital Development Centre in Győr	digitalisation	construction		80,000,000	200,000
26	GD		Széchenyi István University in Győr real estate purchase	R&D	development		2,495,181,000	6,237,953
27	GD		Cycle path between Győr and Pannonhalma World Heritage	recreation	construction			0
28	GD		A new sports hotel on the territory of the Olympic Sports Park in Győr	recreation	construction			0

Table 2. (Continued).

No.	Docu-ments	Further implemen-tation	Project title	Type	Type of implemen-tation	P ⁷	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)
VII.	Kaposvár					6	10,307,855,000	25,769,638
29	CS		Education and innovation workshop designed for industrial investments to be established in Kaposvár	vocational training	construction		500,000,000	1,250,000
30	GD		Renovation of the Csiky Gergely Theatre in Kaposvár	cultural inst.-th	renovation		9,507,855,000	23,769,638
31	GD	providing additional resources	Reconstruction of the building of the former Kaposvár archives and development of a new function	cultural heritage	renovation and development			0
32	GD		Kaposvár Arena	sport	development		300,000,000	750,000
33	GD		Deseda Camping Development Program	recreation	renovation and development			0
34	GD		Kaposvár City Swimming Pool	sport, recreation	renovation and development			0
VIII.	Kecskemét					3	13,183,812,470	32,959,531
35	GD	completing	Development of the infrastructure of the Kodály Music Education Institute in Kecskemét	art education	development		6,517,135,399	16,292,838
36	GD		Kecskemét Town Hall renovation	cultural heritage	renovation		6,666,677,071	16,666,693
37	GD		Kecskemét: Kada Elek Secondary School of Technology and Economics dual vocational training	vocational training	renovation and development			0
IX.	Miskolc					2	17,402,385,148	43,505,963
38	CS	examination and recommendation of completion	Complex development of the Castle of Diósgyőr	cultural heritage, inst.	development		15,641,785,148	39,104,463
39	GD	examination and recommendation of completion	Smart City – Smart Miskolc	digitalization	construction		1,760,600,000	4,401,500

Table 2. (Continued).

No.	Docu-ments	Further implemen-tation	Project title	Type	Type of implemen-tation	P ⁷	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)
X.	Nagykanizsa					4	18,945,707,260	47,364,268
40	GD	realization	Nagykanizsa Sports and Event Center; swimming pool development	sport, recreation	development		14,794,222,000	36,985,555
41	GD	realization	Nagykanizsa Conference and Event Center	events	construction		0	0
42	GD	subsequent implemen-tation	“Kanizsa” cultural, touristic and gastronomic visitor center in the former Franciscan friary	cultural heritage, events	construction		4,151,485,260	10,378,713
43	GD		Mura program, complex economic and tourism development	recreation	construction			0
XI.	Nyíregyháza					7	14,003,447,291	35,008,618
44	GD		Development of the Kállay Mansion in Nyíregyháza Phase 1	cultural heritage	development		994,500,000	2,486,250
45	CS		Development of the Kállay Mansion in Nyíregyháza, phase 2	cultural heritage	development		400,000,000	1,000,000
46	CS	realization (government)	Development of the Nyíregyháza Animal Park	zoo	development		8,354,208,240	20,885,521
47	CS		Nyíregyháza Athletic Center	sport	construction		4,149,222,651	10,373,057
48	GD	realization	Preparation for the development of the Museum Village of Nyíregyháza-Sósto	cultural heritage, inst.	planning		105,516,400	263,791
49	GD		To be built along the entire length of the cycle path between Nyíregyháza and Tokaj,	sport, recreation	sport, recreation			0
50	GD	realized	Nyíregyháza Rose Garden City Open Air Stage	cultural inst.-th	construction			0
XII.	Pécs					3	29,353,044,010	73,382,610
51	CS		Construction of a multifunctional sports hall, swimming pool and aquapark in Pécs	sport, recreation	construction		500,000,000	1,250,000
52	GD		Development of the capacity of the University of Pécs and its R+D potential	R&D	development		27,683,044,010	69,207,610
53	GD		Additional support for the operation of cultural institutions in Pécs	cultural inst., events	operating aids		1,170,000,000	2,925,000

Table 2. (Continued).

No.	Docu-ments	Further implemen-tation	Project title	Type	Type of implemen-tation	P ⁷	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)
XIII.	Salgótarján					2	917,160,726	2,292,902
54	CS		Preparation of the examination of the development possibilities of the Novohrad-Nógrád Geopark in Salgótarján	natural heritage	planning		250,000,000	625,000
55	GD		Renewal of the Main Parish Church of Salgótarján and its surroundings	cultural heritage	development		667,160,726	1,667,902
XIV	Sopron					4	25,596,386,994	63,990,967
56	GD		Historic downtown of Sopron, monumental renovation and presentation Phase I	cultural heritage	renovation		1,980,000,000	4,950,000
57	CS		Historic downtown of Sopron, monumental renovation and presentation Phase II	cultural heritage	renovation		7,025,000,000	17,562,500
58	CS	realization	The Sopron Lővérek Program (Conference Center)	cultural heritage, events	development		16,591,386,994	41,478,467
59	GD	opening	Development of Lake Neusiedl and its surroundings: beach, marina, ecocentre (Sopron)	natural heritage	development			0
XV.	Szeged					3	2,499,489,375	6,248,723
60	GD		„ELI” Science Park Szeged spatial planning works and incubator house	R&D	construction		2,499,489,375	6,248,723
61	GD	realization	Szeged Athletic Center	sport	construction			0
62	GD		Sports investments in Szeged: indoor swimming pool, new handball hall	sport	construction			0
XVI.	Székesfehérvár					4	12,484,000,000	31,210,000
63	CS		Design of the Zichy Park project to improve the livability of downtown Székesfehérvár	cultural heritage	planning		400,000,000	1,000,000
64	CS		Complete design of a multifunctional event and sports hall Székesfehérvár	sport, events	planning		509,000,000	1,272,500
65	CS		Complex educational development in Székesfehérvár	vocational training, R&D	development		11,575,000,000	28,937,500
66	GD		Rehabilitation to ensure more efficient touristic use of Lake Velence and its surroundings	recreation	development			0

Table 2. (Continued).

No.	Docu-ments	Further implemen-tation	Project title	Type	Type of implemen-tation	P ⁷	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)
XVII.	Szekszárd					4	7,561,735,654	18,904,339
67	CS		For the development of the Szekszárd Vocational Training Center, purchase	vocational training	development		151,800,000	379,500
68	CS	realization	Development of the Szekszárd Vocational Training Centre	vocational training	development		25,000,000	62,500
69	CS	providing additional resources	Development of a new interactive library and archives in Szekszárd	cultural inst.-pc. ⁶	development		4,104,713,025	10,261,783
70	CS	realization	Sports developments in Szekszárd (swimming pool investment, recreation centre, event and sports hall)	sport, events	construction		3,280,222,629	8,200,557
XVIII.	Szolnok					4	13,998,499,519	34,996,249
71	CS	providing additional resources	Development of the Szolnok Art Colony	cultural inst.	development		1,961,700,000	4,904,250
72	CS	realization	Szolnok-Tiszaiget bath development project	recreation	development		10,517,480,624	26,293,702
73	CS		Development of the sports complex and the beach bath on Szolnok-Véső Road	sport, recreation	development		1,519,318,895	3,798,297
74	GD		Szolnok Athletic Center	sport	construction			0
XIX.	Szombathely					6	3,542,630,500	8,856,576
75	CS		Szombathely- Saint Martin Plan and Program Series	events	planning		500,000,000	1,250,000
76	CS		Preparation of the development of Szombathely- Saint Martin Equestrian Sport, Traditionalist and Event Center	sport, events	planning		195,010,500	487,526
77	CS	realization	Preservation of Gothard Castle in Szombathely	cultural heritage	renovation		76,530,000	191,325
78	CS		Development of the tennis centre in Késmárk Street in Szombathely	sport	development		267,970,000	669,925
79	GD	realization	Renovation of the County Hall of Szombathely	cultural heritage	renovation		2,230,120,000	5,575,300
80	GD		Worthy placement of Imre Schrammel's oeuvre (renovation of the Szombathely Gallery)	cultural heritage, inst.	renovation		273,000,000	682,500

Table 2. (Continued).

No.	Docu-ments	Further implemen-tation	Project title	Type	Type of implemen-tation	P ⁷	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)
XX.	Tatabánya					4	4,016,728,300	10,041,821
81	CS		Introduction and extension of dual training in Tatabánya	vocational training	construction		2,316,228,300	5,790,571
82	CS		Development of the József Attila County and City Library of Tatabánya City of County Rights	cultural inst- pc.	development		1,700,500,000	4,251,250
83	GD		Tatabánya: new city multifunctional sports hall	sport, events	construction			0
84	GD		with the historical reconstruction of the casino building of the mining officer (Tulip House),	cultural heritage	construction			0
XXI.	Veszprém					7	32,943,704,453	82,359,261
85	CS		Renovation of the Csermák Antal Music School in Veszprém	art education	renovation		2,555,849,884	6,389,625
86	CS		Veszprém Industrial Park	creative industry	construction		8,822,998,400	22,057,496
87	CS	realization	Complex development of the Petőfi Theatre in Veszprém	Cultural Inst- th.	development		13,780,000,000	34,450,000
88	CS		Development and expansion of the Kittenberger Kálmán Plant and Wildlife Park in Veszprém	zoo	development		6,402,559,995	16,006,400
89	CS	from EU support	Construction of new gymnastics training camps to be implemented as phase I of the complex renewal of the Athletics Stadium in Veszprém	sport	renovation and development		957,296,174	2,393,240
90	GD		The new indoor city swimming pool in Veszprém	sport	construction		425,000,000	1,062,500
91	GD		Veszprém-Balaton cycle path developments	sport, recreation	construction			0
XXII.	Zalaegerszeg					7	2,869,879,684	7,174,699
92	CS	realization	Preparation of the renovation and modernization of the Hevesi Sándor Theatre in Zalaegerszeg	Cultural Inst- th.	planning		255,358,000	638,395
93	GD	realization	Development of the Göcseji Museum Zalaegerszeg	cultural heritage, inst.	development		549,677,684	1,374,194
94	GD	realization	Multifunkciós sport és rendezvényközpont Zalaegerszegen (volt Tiszti klub felújítása)	sport, events	development		2,064,844,000	5,162,110

Table 2. (Continued).

No.	Docu-ments	Further implemen-tation	Project title	Type	Type of implemen-tation	P ⁷	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)
95	GD	realized	Zalaegerszeg_Mindszenty zarándokközpont_Botfai renovation of the Erdődy- Cool Castle and the Quartet House	cultural heritage, inst.	renovation and development			0
96	GD	realized	Zalaegerszeg swimming pool development new city swimming pool 2019	sport	renovation and development			0
97	GD	realized	New science and technology park in Zalaegerszeg	R&D	development			0
98	GD		Zalaegerszeg_Alsóerdőn planned development of a sports and recreation center	sport, recreation	construction			0
Total						98	322,616,984,92 5	806,542,46 3

1 CS = Certificate of Support; 2 GD = Government Decision; 3 R&D = Resourche and Development; 4 inst.= institution; 5 inst th = institution-theatre; 6 inst.-pc. = institution-public center; 7 p = number of projects, units.

3.2. Temporal and spatial distribution, modalities and scale of aid

The funding periods are between 2016–2019, and then 2020–2023, but due to the specificities of the funding, the duration of some projects will extend beyond the application period, with a deadline of 2025 in the cultural field. At the start of 2016, grants were awarded for the cultural and educational development of Debrecen, Eger, Kaposvár, Nyíregyháza, Szolnok, Szombathely and Székesfehérvár, and for the preservation of their architectural heritage. For some projects in Miskolc-Diósgyőr, Érd, Sopron, Székesfehérvár and Szombathely, the start of the previous year was also taken into account. 25 projects were approved in 2017 and nine in 2018, bringing the total number of cultural and creative projects to 98 by spring 2024. In almost all cases, the closing date has been changed in several cases and for 16 of them, no information is available. The current latest project closure date is 31 August 2025, the deadline for the complex renewal of the Petőfi Theatre in Veszprém. The review of the projects will allow the implementation of 26 programs in 13 cities. The government has also confirmed its support for the completion of several projects in Békéscsaba, Kaposvár, Nyíregyháza, Sopron, Miskolc, Szekszárd, Szolnok, Szombathely, Veszprém and Zalaegerszeg. It decided to complete one development each in Eger.

Győr and Kecskemét, and to complete works in Kecskemét and Miskolc. It will examine the feasibility of certain projects in Békéscsaba, Győr, Nagykanizsa, Nyíregyháza, Fertő-tav, Szeged, Szekszárd and Szombathely (Government Decision 1474/2023 (2. XI.)).

At the beginning of 2024, letters of support have been issued for 51% of the projects, around 50 projects while the endorsement of 48 projects have been confirmed by Government Decisions. Furthermore, no letters of support have been signed for any of the projects in Kecskemét, Nagykanizsa and Szeged.

The spatial distribution of the number of projects funded is not even, and the number of grants is not evenly distributed between the cities (**Figure 2**). Kaposvár and Szombathely received 6-6, Dunaújváros 5, Nagykanizsa, Sopron, Szekszárd, Székesfehérvár, Szolnok and Tatabánya 4-4, Debrecen, Eger, Kecskemét, Pécs and Szeged 3-3, Érde, Miskolc and Salgótarján 2-2. Out of the cities with county status, only Hódmezővásárhely did not apply with a project directly involving the cultural and creative sector, and the two new cities of Baja and Esztergom were not among the applicants.

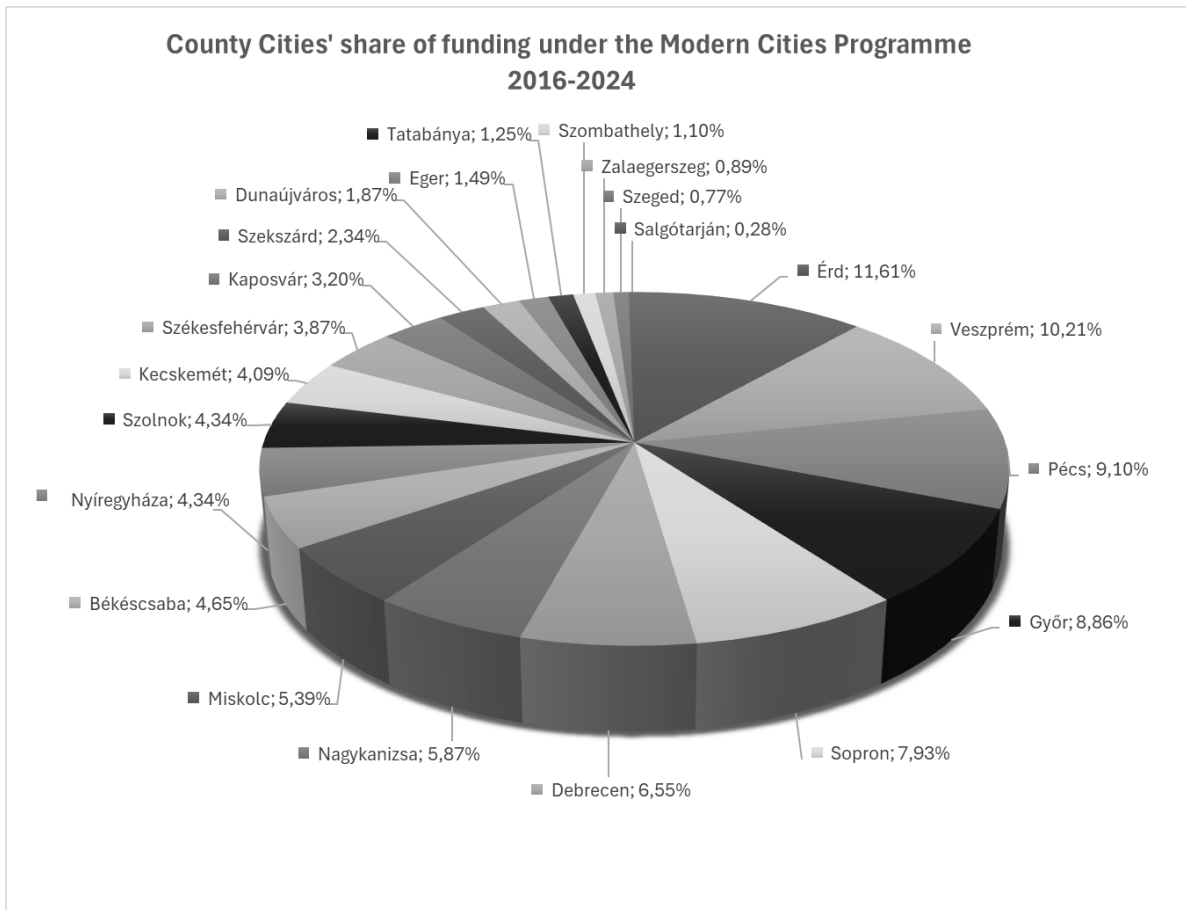


Figure 2. Share of the Modern Cities Program 2016–2025 funding for cities with county status (2024, own working).

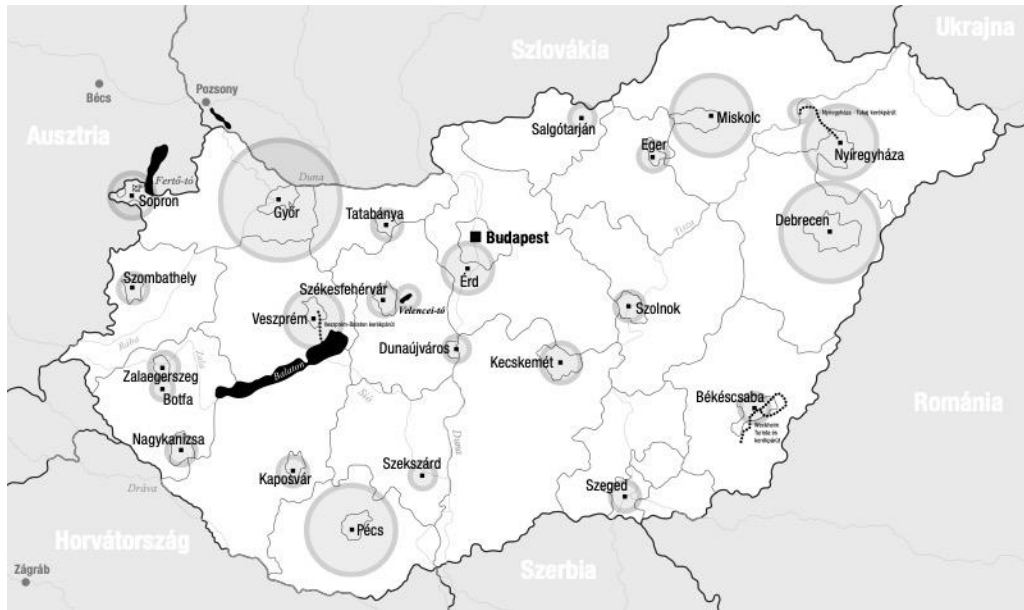


Figure 3. Spatial distribution of completed projects of the Modern Cities Program in the cultural and creative sectors (2024, own working).

A total of HUF 322 616 984 925 (809.5 million EUR) has been awarded for cultural and creative projects under the extended Modern Cities Program for the period 2016–2025, until March 2024 (Tables 2 and 3). The distribution of funding is not evenly distributed between cities. The highest amount, 11.6% of the total, more than HUF 37.4 billion (93.6 million EUR), was allocated to Érd, to a lesser extent for the recreational use of the Érdligeti Zápórt Reservoir and to a greater extent for the development of the city’s public education, vocational training, social and health care institutions. The two cultural capitals, Veszprém and Pécs, followed with HUF 32.9 (82.4 million EUR) and 29.6 billion (73.4 million EUR), with aid rates of 10.21% and 9.1% respectively. As a regional center, Debrecen is in sixth place with 21.1 billion HUF (52.9 million EUR) at 6.55%, Miskolc in eighth place with 17.4 billion HUF (43.5 million EUR) at 5.39% and Szeged in second last place with 2.5 billion HUF (6.2 million EUR) at 0.77%. The smallest amount, HUF 917 million (2.3 million EUR), was allocated by the government to the city of Salgótarján for the renewal of the church and its surroundings and for the preparation of the study of the development potential of the Novohrad-Nógrád Geopark (4. Zalaegerszeg 4, Dunaújváros, Győr, Kaposvár, Nyíregyháza and Tatabánya 2-2, Eger, Kecskemét, Nagykanizsa, Szeged, Székesfehérvár, Szolnok and Veszprém 1-1 projects without funding are listed in the documents available (NJT, 2024).

Table 3. Comparative table of cultural and creative sector projects in the Modern Cities Program of cities with county status, based on population, number of projects and amount of funding (February 2024, own working); (*p = number of projects, units).

	Population	Capita	Projects number	p*	Support	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)	Rate	Overall	
1	Debrecen	201 582	Győr	8	Érd	37 442 011 577	93 605 029	11,61%	Győr	1
2	Szeged	158 829	Békéscsaba	7	Veszprém	32 943 704 453	82 359 261	10,21%	Debrecen	2

Table 3. (Continued).

	Population	Capita	Projects number	p*	Support	Amount (HUF)	Amount (EUR)	Rate	Overall	
3	Miskolc	145 248	<i>Nyíregyháza</i>	7	Pécs	29 353 044 010	73 382 610	9,10%	Pécs	3
4	Pécs	141 031	<i>Veszprém</i>	7	Győr	28 572 668 941	71 431 672	8,86%	Miskolc	4
5	Győr	130 020	Zala-egerszeg	7	Sopron	25 596 386 994	63 990 967	7,93%	<i>Nyíregyháza</i>	5
6	<i>Nyíregyháza</i>	115 711	Kaposvár	6	Debrecen	21 143 389 206	52 858 473	6,55%	Érd	6
7	<i>Kecskemét</i>	109 731	Szombathely	6	Nagykanizsa	18 945 707 260	47 364 268	5,87%	<i>Veszprém</i>	7
8	<i>Székesfehérvár</i>	95 915	Dunaújváros	5	Miskolc	17 402 385 148	43 505 963	5,39%	Sopron	8
9	Szombathely	78 446	Nagykanizsa	4	Békéscsaba	14 990 506 859	37 476 267	4,65%	<i>Kecskemét</i>	9
10	Érd	70 800	Sopron	4	<i>Nyíregyháza</i>	14 003 447 291	35 008 618	4,34%	<i>Székesfehérvár</i>	10
11	Szolnok	67 126	<i>Székesfehérvár</i>	4	Szolnok	13 998 499 519	34 996 249	4,34%	Szolnok	11
12	Tatabánya	65 874	Szekszárd	4	<i>Kecskemét</i>	13 183 812 470	32 959 531	4,09%	Békéscsaba	12
13	Sopron	61 784	Szolnok	4	<i>Székesfehérvár</i>	12 484 000 000	31 210 000	3,87%	Szeged	13
14	Kaposvár	59 270	Tatabánya	4	Kaposvár	10 307 855 000	25 769 638	3,20%	Szombathely	14
15	<i>Veszprém</i>	56 777	Debrecen	3	Szekszárd	7 561 735 654	18 904 339	2,34%	Kaposvár	15
16	Zala-egerszeg	55 433	Eger	3	Dunaújváros	6 032 941 958	15 082 355	1,87%	Nagykanizsa	16
17	Békéscsaba	55 091	<i>Kecskemét</i>	3	Eger	4 809 000 000	12 022 500	1,49%	Tatabánya	17
18	Eger	50 018	Pécs	3	Tatabánya	4 016 728 300	10 041 821	1,25%	Zala-egerszeg	18
19	Nagykanizsa	43 188	Szeged	3	Szombathely	3 542 630 500	8 856 576	1,10%	Eger	19
20	Dunaújváros	41 873	Érd	2	Zala-egerszeg	2 869 879 684	7 174 699	0,89%	Dunaújváros	20
21	Salgótarján	31 223	Miskolc	2	Szeged	2 499 489 375	6 248 723	0,77%	Szekszárd	21
22	Szekszárd	30 057	Salgótarján	2	Salgótarján	917 160 726	2 292 902	0,28%	Salgótarján	22
	Totl	1 865 027		98		322 616 984 925	806 542 462	100%		

3.3. Completed projects

Information on the implementation of the projects of the Modern Cities Program can be found in the official online portal of the Government of Hungary and other media. According to self-reporting by the municipalities, 26 projects in the cultural and creative sector, 49% of the activities had been completed by the end of 2023 (szabadeuropa.hu, 2023). According to the news published on the official media sites of the Government and the municipalities concerned, 25 out of 98 projects in the cultural and creative sector have been finalized, several of which were not exclusively implemented under the Modern Cities Program. In Békéscsaba, the development of the Printing Industry Knowledge and Training Centre, Csabapark and Munkácsy Quarter, as well as the preparation of the complex higher education project, have been completed (behir.hu, 2023; kormány.hu, 2024). The Debrecen International School

has been established (kormany.hu, 2020b), the Aquaticum beach complex in Nagyerde has been inaugurated (kormany.hu, 2020a). The renovation of the Csokonai National Theatre and the innovation development project of the University of Debrecen have been successfully completed (civishir.hu, 2023). The Szalki Island in Dunaújváros has been renewed, also with a recreational function (duol.hu, 2022), and the former city wall of the Eger Castle has been restored as part of the conservation program (kormany.hu, 2020c). The Kaposvár Arena (kormany.hu, 2019d) and the new municipal swimming pool opened their doors. The Csiky Gergely Theatre in Kaposvár (kormany.hu, 2020c) and the Kállay House in Nyíregyháza (kormany.hu, 2020) were renovated, the City Open-Air Stage in Nyíregyháza was inaugurated (kormany.hu, 2020b) and the cycle path between Nyíregyháza and Tokaj was built (kormany.hu, 2017). The halls of the Faculty of Engineering and Informatics of the University of Pécs were inaugurated (kormany.hu, 2019b), as well as the buildings of the International Education and Foreign Language Centre (kormany.hu, 2019d). In Szekszárd, an interactive library and archives were created (kormany.hu, 2020c), and in Szombathely, the Picture Gallery was modernised to house the Schrammel legacy (kormany.hu, 2020c). In Veszprém, a new municipal swimming pool was inaugurated (magyarnemzet.hu, 2022). In Zalaegerszeg, the Göcseji Museum was renewed and its new wing, the Mindszentyneum, was inaugurated (zalaegerszeg.hu, 2022). The Innovation and Knowledge Centre in Zalaegerszeg was inaugurated (kormany.hu, 2019a), and the rehabilitation of the Erdődy-Hüvös Castle and the Kvártélyház in Botfa was completed (kormany.hu, 2020b).

4. Discussion

The program has been criticized in many quarters for not involving local communities sufficiently in planning, and for being characterized by strong government control, centralization and a lack of autonomy (Gajzágó, 2019). As projects have progressed, the focus has been on delaying the pace of implementation and increasing costs (Fekete, 2017, 2018; Lux, 2019) However, it is undeniable that significant developments have been initiated in Hungarian cities through re-industrialization, strengthening knowledge bases and creating a liveable metropolitan environment. The amount allocated to the program, which is essentially focused on transport, industry and economic development, represents an average of HUF 150 billion (37 million EUR) in development aid for cities, which is inextricably linked to the HUF 400 billion (1 billion EUR) in funding from the Operational Program for the Development of Settlements and the debt consolidation of municipalities to a similar extent (Fekete, 2019). Further economic analysis shows that municipalities have clearly benefited from the funding of the program. On the one hand, the subsidies proved to be sufficient for the municipalities and they were not forced to borrow, and on the other hand, they contributed to increasing the municipalities' tax capacity and, to a lesser extent, their revenues from the renting of sports facilities (Hegedűs Novoszáth Molnár, 2018). Municipalities with more modest financial resources, however, run the risk of sustainability (Fekete, 2018).

In December 2022, the amount allocated to the cultural and creative sector exceeded HUF 263 billion (658 million EUR), rising by 23% to HUF 322.6 billion

(809.5 million EUR) by the end of 2023. The 22 cities were awarded 14.6 billion forints each, but the distribution of resources has not proved to be equal. Érd and Veszprém, the most supported cities, received 21.8% of the payments, while eleven cities Dunaújváros, Eger, Kecskemét, Kaposvár, Salgótarján, Székesfehérvár, Szekszárd, Szeged, Szombathely, Tatabánya and Zalaegerszeg received similar amounts. A further analysis of the distribution of resources reveals that it is not territorially based, the amount, number and proportion of aid is not uniform and is not linked to either the population or the socio-economic embeddedness of the municipality. 20% of the projects, 20 of them, receive 40% of the budget, 128.3 billion HUF (3.2 billion EUR), of which four cities Érd, Veszprém, Pécs and Győr receive the highest support.

The clear winner of the Modern Cities Program is Érd, a medium-sized city with a population of around 71,000 located in the metropolitan agglomeration of the capital, which has not been included in the category of regional metropolitan development in the literature but is the recipient of the highest amount of cultural funding, HUF 37.4 billion (93.6 million EUR). In seventh place among the cities in terms of funding is Nagykanizsa with 43,000 inhabitants, which has three projects and is not yet of regional strategic importance. The largest regional centers, with 130–200 thousand inhabitants, also considered as development poles, receive 40% of the funding, some HUF 99 billion (247.5 million EUR), for 19% of the projects. The distribution of funding is not even: Pécs (9.1%), Győr (8.9%), Debrecen (6.6%) and Miskolc (5.4%) are in the top third, while Szeged (0.8%) is still in second last place among the cities. The Modern Cities Program and the Operational Programs have also provided additional funding: the city of Szombathely received an additional HUF 1.42 billion (3.55 million EUR) in EU funding for the renewal of the Szombathely Picture Gallery (kormany.hu, 2020c).

In terms of population size, the smaller cities (96–115 thousand inhabitants) are in the middle of the field: Nyíregyháza with seven projects, Kecskemét with three and Székesfehérvár with four projects deemed suitable for funding. The co-pole of the regional poles is Veszprém, in 15th place in terms of population, with almost 57,000 inhabitants, which has the second highest support as the outgoing Capital of Culture. Békéscsaba, with 55,000 inhabitants and the highest projected number of inhabitants, is the second most supported, with a lower average support. Szekszárd, which has three projects, has higher support for its lowest population (35,000). Szombathely, with a medium-sized population of 78,000, and Tatabánya, with 66,000 inhabitants, are among the cities with the lowest funding levels, with 6 and 4 projects respectively, and only EUR 3.5 and 4 billion in funding (**Table 3**).

In order of number of projects funded, amount of funding and population, the top third of the list shows a tendency to distribute the funding according to these criteria, with Győr, Debrecen, Pécs and Miskolc having the highest gains. The cities benefiting most from the project (with the exception of Szeged) are the large regional centers and development points located in the regional outer ring. They are followed by Nyíregyháza as a large city located on the outer ring, then Érd, which has not been listed as a regional strategic point in the literature until now, and Veszprém as a co-development point of the inner ring. In the middle are three large cities: Kecskemét on the inner ring, Székesfehérvár as a co-development point, which together with Sopron

is a city of strategic importance on the outer ring, and Szeged, a regional center and development point on the outer ring (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Regional position of participating cities with county status applying for MCP cultural and creative developments.

Ran-king	City with county rights	RPP/LT	DP/CDP	CC	IR/OR
1	Győr	RPP	DP		OR
2	Debrecen	RPP	DP		OR
3	Pécs	RPP	DP	CC	OR
4	Érd				
5	Miskolc	RPP	DP		OR
6	Nyíregyháza	LC			OR
7	Veszprém		CDP	CC	IR
8	Sopron				OR
9	Kecskemét	LC			IR
10	Székesfehérvár	LC	CDP		IR
11	Szolnok				IR
12	Békéscsaba				OR
13	Szeged	RPP	DP		OR
14	Kaposvár				OR
15	Nagykanizsa				
16	Szombathely				OR
17	Tatabánya				IR
18	Zalaegerszeg				OR
19	Dunaújváros				IR
20	Eger				IR
21	Szekszárd				OR
22	Salgótarján				IR

Notation: Regional Public Point (RPP), Large City (LC), Development (DP) or Co-Development Point (CDP), Capital of Culture (CC), On the Regional Inner (IR) Or Outer Ring (OR).

Source: Parliament Resolution No. 1/2014. (I. 3.) OGY National Development 2030 National Development and Territorial Development Concept, (own working).

The implementation of 50 projects has been confirmed with a letter of support. Government Decision 1474/2023 (2/11/2016) decided on the completion of 14, the funding of 3 and the subsequent implementation of 4 projects out of the developments included in the Government Decisions issued in 2016. There are 17 projects in the cultural and creative sectors that were neither decided in the 2023 review nor were granted funding. According to a statement on the government’s official website, four projects - the renovation of the Erdődy-Hűvös Castle in Botfai and the Quartet House linked to the Mindszenty Pilgrimage Centre in Zalaegerszeg, the new municipal swimming pool, the Science and Technology Park and the Rózsakert Municipal Open-Air Stage in Nyíregyháza were reportedly implemented thanks to the Modern Cities Program (kormany.hu, 2019a, 2020b, 2020c), although it is not listed in the database of supporting documents (kormany.hu 2020b; MVP, 2024), and the cycle path

between Nyíregyháza and Tokaj (kormany.hu, 2017) are included in government decisions without allocated funds (NJT, 2024; **Table 2**).

The implementation of individual projects in press releases does not always correlate with the implementation of projects in the supporting documents and government decrees, with some projects being identified as Modern Cities, even in the absence of public disclosure of the documents. In some cases, different amounts appear in the announcements: the Kaposvár Arena is mentioned as a HUF 6 billion (15 million EUR) investment (kormany.hu, 2019c), while the government decision only mentions HUF 300 million (0.75 million EUR); the Nyíregyháza open-air stage is reported to have received HUF 1.2 billion (3 million EUR), while the Eger Castle received another HUF 1.81 billion (4.5 million EUR) (kormany.hu, 2020c). The order of the cities is determined by the fact that the research only takes into account the amounts included in official government decisions and funding documents but is also significantly influenced by the fact that 21 projects are listed in the documents found without any funding amounts. The missing data will presumably lead to a reordering of the cities.

5. Conclusion

The Modern Cities Program was established by the Government of Hungary to promote the development and renewal of cities with county rights and to counteract the dominance of the capital. On the basis of the supporting documents and the relevant government decisions, the government will contribute more than HUF 322.6 billion (809.5 million EUR) to the development of the cultural and creative sector through 98 programs in 22 cities with county status by February 2024. Following a review of the funding, some projects will extend beyond the application and implementation period from 2016 to 2023 with a deadline of 2025.

The projects aim at preserving intangible and tangible cultural heritage values, transforming buildings, neighborhoods, urban public spaces and green areas into community spaces, and developing public institutions for training creative professionals. On the other hand, it will also help to implement innovative research and development programs linked to universities, preparing for the acquisition of creative professions and activities. In addition, a large number of new indoor and outdoor sports, leisure and community venues, swimming pools, spas and water parks will be created to promote sport, recreation, leisure, the preservation of the natural heritage and the creation of a liveable environment. Thirty-four cultural facilities have been awarded: six theatres, the libraries of Szekszárd and Tatabánya, the castles of Eger and Diósgyőr (Miskolc), the art center of Szolnok, two open-air museums, three zoos, the town hall of Szombathely and Kecskemét, and the rehabilitation of a church building of a parish church will be completed over the years. Six cultural heritage sites will be renovated, as well as the historic city centres of Békéscsaba, Sopron, Székesfehérvár and Szombathely. Pécs has been the European Capital of Culture for a decade, thanks to UNESCO, and its cultural institutions will also receive support. Veszprém was awarded this status in 2023, and the Modern Cities Program has supported seven projects to achieve it. The former aims to strengthen its scientific achievements by developing the university, while the latter is working to renew its

cultural and artistic educational institutions (theatre, music school, zoo) and to pass on traditional crafts.

There is currently no evidence of the implementation of the strategic objectives set out in the National Development 2030 (Hungarian Parliament Decision 1/2014 (I. 3.)), including projects for innovation-based economic development, research and development or international university education development in the cities of the inner ring. Instead, primary and secondary education, the rehabilitation of art education institutions in Kecskemét and Veszprém, the development of vocational training in Székesfehérvár and Tatabánya, and the investment in the Veszprém Industrial Park are more broadly related to this area. The cities of the outer ring are already more effectively linked to the ideas of the national strategy, including science and everyday life. Research and development and related institutional developments in line with the economic profile of the cities have been carried out at the universities of Szeged, Debrecen, Pécs and Győr, and higher education development programs in Zalaegerszeg and Békéscsaba. Work in higher education is complemented by vocational training and innovation workshops in Békéscsaba, Szekszárd and Kaposvár. The rehabilitation and functional renewal of historic buildings in Sopron, Szombathely, Kaposvár and Zalaegerszeg, the cultural urban regeneration of the theatre area in Győr, the Lake Fertő Ecocentre, the Békéscsaba tourist and cycle path and the Debrecen Nagyerdő Program are all designed to improve the quality of the urban environment (**Table 4**).

In terms of number, the largest number of projects, with 39, are sports, leisure, recreation and experience-oriented projects, followed by 34 cultural development projects, 20 projects in the fields of creative industries, vocational training, research and development and digitalization, and six projects for the conservation of natural heritage. The highest grants were awarded to vocational training projects in Érd and research and development projects in Pécs. The water sports and leisure development projects in Győr, Nagykanizsa and Szolnok-Tiszalet accounted for a third of the top 10, while the cultural heritage conservation projects in Sopron, Lővérek, Diósgyőr Castle, Veszprém, Debrecen and Kaposvár theatres building rehabilitation projects accounted for half of the top 10 (**Figure 3**).

Taking into account spatial policy, management and communication aspects, the Modern Cities Program projects partly meet the criteria of Enyedi's successful city, and their development is therefore likely (Gajzágó, 2019), as the developments materialise. The reform of the program, the spatially concentrated decentralisation of spatial development, the creation of coherence and unity, the joint development of cities with their region and their surroundings, and the inclusion of non-county cities with similar population size would be the solution to achieve success at the regional level (Fragó, 2019). The lack of a unified, comprehensive regional development system means that the solution of domestic territorial problems is still to be found, but it provides a good basis for the development of local development capacities and professional apparatus, and the emergence of a local urban regime (Lux, 2019). The Program mainly develops municipalities' skills in the creation of long-term urban strategies, entrepreneurial and management approaches, partnership and strategic cooperation (Pupp, 2020).

In the Modern Cities Program, the least objective criterion in the analysis is the assessment of the intrinsic value of the cultural heritage, creative industrial, educational or scientific development, leisure facilities or leisure facilities that have been preserved, accepted and supported by society and put into use, and their relation to the size of the sum received. In the eyes of the researchers, both the rehabilitation of cultural buildings and the development of institutions serve to preserve and make functional use of the tangible and intangible past and cultural heritage, while sports, recreation and leisure facilities make the present more liveable and meaningful, and creative industrial, vocational training, R&D and digitalization developments prepare the future. The social impact of the Modern Cities Program will be assessed in a few years, or even decades after the program has been completed and the improvements have been implemented.

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