

# District Sub Centres as Foundational Elements in the Implementation of the 15 Minute City Model: Case Study of Albertfalva

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## 1 ABSTRACT

The 15-minute city model aims to enable residents to reach the facilities necessary for everyday life within 15 minutes on foot or by bicycle. This study uses the example of Budapest's Albertfalva (sub)district (neighbourhood) to examine how district sub-centres could contribute to the implementation of this model. It was found that, while certain urban functions are present, community and service spaces do not form a real centre. Developing the area surrounding the former market building could fulfil this role. The results emphasise that designating central spaces is not an end in itself, but can be a vital step towards urban decentralisation and sustainability.

Keywords: 15-minute city, neighbourhood centres, urban decentralisation, mixed-use development, Albertfalva

## 2 INTRODUCTION

The 15-minute city model is predicated on the promotion of a polycentric urban structure, with an emphasis on the organisation of quotidian life around sub-centres and the concentration of essential functions in a decentralised manner.

The relevance of this city model is particularly evident in the context of contemporary issues, particularly those pertaining to sustainability. It presents a "greener" alternative to the reduction of car traffic, traffic jams, and the resultant pollution, which is an overarching objective. This commitment is further underscored by the European Union's allocation of 30% of its planned budget for the 2021-2027 period to the fight against climate change (europa.eu, 2024).

Albertfalva, is a neighbourhood in the 11th district of Budapest. It was selected for case study because previously it was an independent settlement, and with the revitalisation of the remaining (former) settlement centre (Szabó, 2016), it may be suitable for the creation of a sub-centre within 15 minutes' reach by "applying" the "15-minute city" model. Moreover, the neighbourhood is characterised by a diversity of housing typologies, including residential properties with gardens, panel housing estates constructed during the socialist era, and ongoing development of residential parks, thus providing a diversified urban context for the analysis.

After formulating the key planning–urbanistic and sociological questions related to the 15-minute city model, I examine the centre–subcentre context of the area, with particular attention to whether the traditional centre, through deliberate development, can continue to fulfil a central (core) role in the 21st century. The following research questions are linked to this overarching objective:

- The most important central functions are commercial, transport, and institutional functions. Are the basic institutions and services present within the neighbourhood?
- How can the sustainable concept of a 15-minute neighbourhood be implemented in Albertfalva?

## 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 The 15 minute city concept

The concept of the 15-minute city was first introduced by Carlos Moreno in 2016. The model under discussion is predicated on the notion that urban planning should be sustainable, and that cities, or in some cases city districts, should be designed in such a way that residents can reach all essential social functions and services within a 15-minute travel time (on foot or by bicycle) from their place of residence. This encompasses domains such as housing, employment, health and social care, education, entertainment, and other recreational activities (Moreno et al., 2021). The model is based on the concepts of neighbourhoods, diversity, density, digitalisation, and ubiquity (Moreno et al., 2021).

The neighbourhood is the smallest, yet arguably the most significant, unit of the urban structure. The concept of the “neighbourhood unit” was initially explored by Clarence Perry in 1923, with a focus on the planning of American suburbs (Szabó, 2016). As Pozoukidou and Chatziyiannaki (2021) argue, this space fulfils a dual function: it serves to meet the basic needs of residents whilst also facilitating community building and facilitating communication between people. It has been demonstrated that this contributes to the early detection of problems, the development of the local community, and the growth of mutual trust. The theoretical framework of neighbourhood units has exerted a significant influence on urban planning practices in Western Europe and within former socialist countries. The necessity to alleviate the burden on historic city centres was identified, and a potential solution was proposed as the creation of areas with neighbourhood unit functions in the outer parts of the city, involving the remaining centres of formerly independent settlements (Szabó, 2016).

The fundamental problem addressed by the 15-minute city concept stems from the increasing reliance on private car use and from cities that have been planned primarily to serve an automobile-oriented society (Moreno et al., 2021; Pozoukidou and Chatziyiannaki, 2021). In European – and thus Hungarian – cities, a key challenge is that they were not originally designed for cars and are therefore unable to cope with the current scale of motorised traffic. This situation may also entail economic consequences, as time lost in traffic congestion can result in productivity losses (Balletto et al., 2021; Forgács et al., 2010). Pollutant emissions constitute a particularly serious problem (Pozoukidou and Chatziyiannaki, 2021), and car-centred urban planning – often at the expense of public transport – negatively affects overall accessibility.

Researchers conceptualise the implementation of the 15-minute city through three main approaches. These include “avoidance,” whereby non-walking and non-cycling travel can be reduced through the development of compact urban forms; “shift,” referring to a modal shift towards walking and cycling, making shorter distances easily manageable; and the technological “improvement” of transport systems aimed at enhancing energy efficiency (Balletto et al., 2021).

### 3.2 Community and the city

Within the field of urban studies, organic thinking across generations can be interpreted as a fundamental principle. The present always reshapes its environment according to its own dynamics (Fülep, cit.Vidor 1977). The key concept of this logic is organic decentralisation (Gutkind, 1977). Within this framework, urban planning is understood as a medium- and long-term work process and set of activities through which “dense urban blocks – based on the example of Albertfalva, such as former industrial districts, etc. – may gradually be transformed into groups of separate residential communities, surrounded by green belts and spatially separated from one another” (Gutkind, 1977, p. 207).

Today, however, the prevailing spirit of the age does not necessarily place emphasis on separated and mutually isolated urban areas, as the 15-minute city represents a planning concept and form of implementation in which the emphasis lies on movement and mobility, as well as on equal access to the roles and functions provided by the city. Urban planning can essentially be understood as the aggregate of these preferences – historical traditions, local communities, families (households), commercial and industrial enterprises, as well as public institutions and the environmental expectations adaptable to them (Häussermann and Siebel, 2004).

## 4 METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the partnership principles of the European Union, it was hypothesised that representatives of institutions, collectives, and professional groups would be deemed experts on the subject in various prominent (elite) studies (Horváth, 2000). However, in the spirit of social consultation methodology (Letenyei, 2010), local residents were also surveyed, with a particular focus on potential individual actions related to the topic. Thirdly, content analysis was conducted using settlement-historical research, development plans, and the mapping services of Google Maps as primary sources.

In the course of the research, six semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with leading professionals and key stakeholders of Albertfalva. My aim was to reach individuals who not only possess substantial professional expertise in the architectural, historical, or sociological (community-related) aspects of urban planning, but who also have in-depth knowledge of the study area itself. The interviewees included the Chief Architect of Budapest’s 11th District, the Head of the Urban Planning Department, a staff member

of the Albertfalva Local and School History Museum and former district cultural officer, the municipal representative of the electoral district and former teacher at the (Albertfalva) Petőfi School, as well as the professional officer and cultural programme coordinator of the Albertfalva Community Centre. The findings of the interviews are presented in the form of paraphrases in the relevant section, in relation to the given topic discussed therein.

The survey of local residents was conducted within a closed Facebook group (Albertfalva neighbourhood forum), which functioned as a bounded sampling frame. The collection of data was facilitated by convenience sampling with voluntary participation. The participants were invited to complete a structured questionnaire, which also incorporated open-ended questions. Furthermore, I sought to interview local residents in depth in order to gain insight into the area's history, their personal attachment to the area, patterns of place use, neighbourhood relations, and their future visions, needs, and expectations. A total of 35 respondents completed the questionnaire, and one additional resident participated in a face-to-face interview. As the research is a pilot study aimed at identifying problems, its results cannot be regarded as representative.

## 5 RESULTS: THE SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF ALBERTFALVA

Both writings on the history of the settlement (Virt, 1999; Hoffmann, 1997) and the Integrated Settlement Development Strategy of Újbuda (2022) shows that Albertfalva currently lacks a space that fully serves central functions. The strategy's objectives include the recultivation of Albertfalva's historic centre over several planning cycles. However, despite the potential benefits of such a space, including improved quality of life for the population, enhanced personal relationships and community cohesion, it appears to be a low priority for the district. As posited by several researchers and prominent figures in the field, Albertfalva's peripheral location within the district has resulted in its development being accorded a lower priority (Virt, 1999).

### 5.1 Demography and spatial structure

According to the 2022 census data of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), the population of Albertfalva is 12,840 (KSH, 2023), which is just over 9% of the total population of District XI (this is directly proportional to the district's territorial distribution: Albertfalva covers an area of 3.05 km<sup>2</sup>, representing 9% of the district's total area (KSH, 2023)).

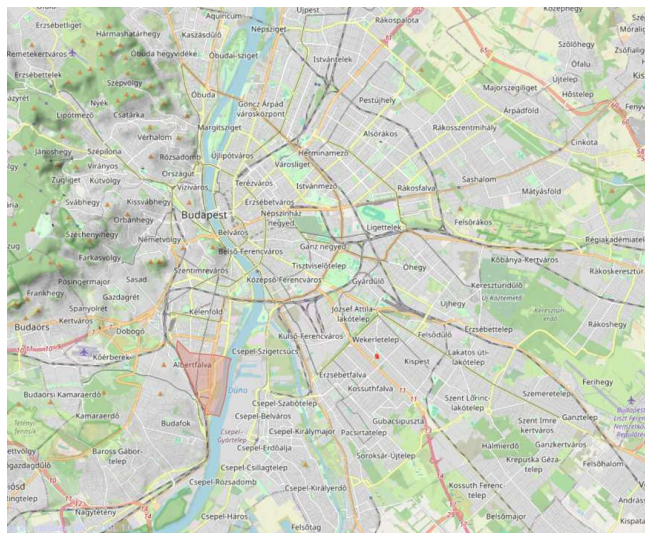


Fig. 1: Location of Albertfalva in Budapest (openstreetmap.org, own ed., 2026)

Researchers from Poland (Tcheta, 2020) published the capitals of the region in 2015, utilising data from the turn of the millennium. Budapest (primarily Buda) is distinguished by the homogenous appearance of social groups, while Albertfalva is still characterised by the “lower-middle”, “mixed”, and “polarized” category systems (at that time). This suggests that while Albertfalva was previously distinguished by its garden-suburban areas with detached houses and the Tisztviselőtelep (Civil Servants' Estate) inhabited by a population of higher social status, the “panel programme” and other mobility processes contributed to the polarisation of the population (Virt, 1999).

As demonstrated in the National Atlas of Hungary (Kovács and Dövényi, 2021), a further detailed dataset indicating the entrenchment of the middle class in Albertfalva can also be observed (based on 2011 census data).

Despite the decrease in population, there has been a consistent increase in the housing stock. A new wave of housing construction began in the 2000s, with residential parks being built and continue to being built in the area. today in the district. These successive waves of construction have resulted in the establishment of a diversified neighbourhood. The area is characterised by residential properties with gardens, panel housing estates, residential parks and industrial zones. Furthermore, Albertfalva has direct access to the Danube, thereby further enriching the spatial structure of the district (Halabuk, 2000).

## 5.2 Overview of the area and functional analysis

The objective of this subchapter is twofold: firstly, to examine the necessary functions of the 15-minute neighbourhood based on previous studies and research, and secondly, to attempt to identify these functions in Albertfalva. The categorisation of functions is defined in accordance with the methodology established by Papadopoulos et al. (2023). This categorisation was utilised as a reference in a survey conducted among the population, in which individuals were questioned on their needs and customary land use practices. The following section will present the findings of the research, including the facilities available in the district and the areas in which there are gaps in services.

The 15-minute city model proposed by Moreno does not necessitate the establishment or development of centres; rather, it emphasises density as a fundamental principle, underscoring the importance of optimising spatial utilisation (Moreno et al., 2021). The areas examined (sub-centres of the city) are not intended to concentrate and fulfil all functions in a single point or space; however, due to the size of the settlement (only 3.05 km<sup>2</sup>) and its spatial structure, I now refer to these as centers for the sake of analytical clarity and practical feasibility. Their long-standing historical development provides a foundation for their emergence as the central functions of everyday life are still evident in the presence of schools, a church, and an old market building. Residents predominantly move within these areas and along the north-south axis of Fehérvári Road, suggesting that the centralisation of key services and facilities in these areas would be a logical approach.

Furthermore, the study places emphasis on the following aspects of accessibility:

- state of the infrastructure: pedestrian walkways, public thoroughfares, the quality of public transport infrastructure, and the condition of cycle paths,
- availability of transport modes: public transport, smart devices such as scooters, bike-sharing and car-sharing
- car related issues: use of parking spaces.

Nevertheless, the involvement of the population – the promotion of participation – is imperative for the development of all these aspects. For this reason, the opinions of local inhabitants were sought with regard to the aforementioned aspects. Beyond these factors, the role of community constitutes a further key element. Putnam (2000) emphasises the importance of social capital, and Clarence Perry's neighbourhood theory also highlights the positive impact of community relations (Perry, cit. Szabó (2016), while identity, as a community-building and neighbourhood-strengthening factor, can also be key to implementing the 15-minute city model. In increasingly atomised and alienated societies, there is a clear need for spaces that foster a shared sense of identity. These could include places of worship, cultural institutions (such as community centres, libraries, theatres, cinemas, and to some extent cafes, restaurants, and bars). The Albertfalva case is distinctive in that it is an area with an extremely strong identity, where preserving traditions plays an important role. However, there is a lack of facilities and events in the district that are able to attract young people. The cultural representative of the Albertfalva Community Center also makes this observation, although he considers the ease of access to the inner part of District XI, the Bartók Quarter, to be a positive factor.

### 5.2.1 Institutions of education

Albertfalva is endowed with institutions providing primary education; however, residents are obliged to travel further beyond the neighbourhood in order to access secondary schools. Early childhood education and

primary schooling are available within the area with adequate spatial coverage, but only one primary school is publicly maintained and serves children primarily from the local community.



Fig. 2: Institutions of education (Google Maps, own ed., 2024)

### 5.2.2 Healthcare and social care institutions

The district is serviced by one adult and one paediatric GP practice, comprising a total of 9 adult and 4 paediatric doctors. According to the responses to the resident questionnaire, 20 and 15 respondents, respectively, consider this to be satisfactory (with an average score of 4.2 and 4.4 on a scale of 1 to 5). This finding is corroborated by personal interviews.

Dental care and other specialist clinics are only available in private practices within the district. While the function and service are provided, the issue of unequal access to these services may be problematic. However, it should be noted that this is not, of course, a deficiency specific to the district.

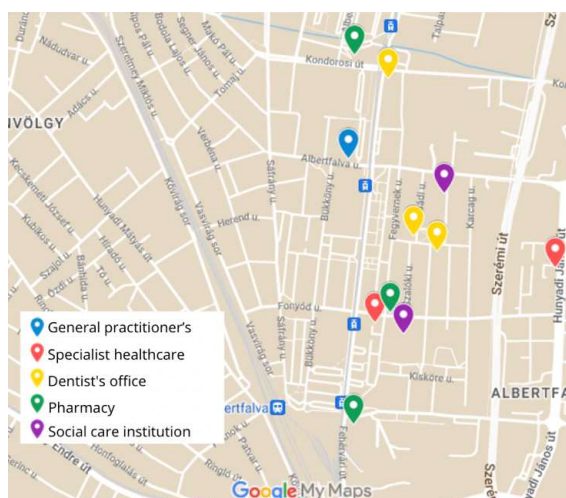


Fig. 3: Healthcare institutions (Google Maps, own ed., 2024)

A positive aspect of the district is the presence of numerous pharmacies, which are dispersed throughout the area.

At present, there are no specialist clinics or hospitals in Albertfalva. In terms of specialised healthcare and hospitals, the nearest facilities are accessible to residents within approximately 20 minutes by public transport.

With regard to social care provisions, the presence of a temporary and day care facility in Albertfalva operated by the Down Foundation is commendable. Despite the presence of a Senior Citizens' Club, it must be noted that the absence of a nursing home within the district constitutes a significant deficiency.

### 5.2.3 Administrative institutions

Although several post offices previously operated within the neighbourhood, currently only one is available, located in the shopping centre on the southern periphery of the neighbourhood. Despite the absence of a police station and a fire station in Albertfalva, a district police office was established in the area in 2023. For residents of Albertfalva, administrative procedures cannot be carried out within a 15-minute walking distance; however, in the context of Budapest this limitation is more a matter of administrative organisation than of neighbourhood-level urban planning.

### 5.2.4 Commercial services

Commercial spaces have functioned as the focal points of urban areas since the early stages of urban development (Vazzoler and Roveroni, 2016). In the case of Albertfalva, it is not the quantity but the quality of commercial services that poses a greater challenge.

The district is home to a substantial shopping centre, which serves as an example of a multifaceted commercial hub. This establishment encompasses not only grocery stores but also a variety of commercial units, restaurants, and a post office, thereby fulfilling its role as a service centre. It was reported by all interviewees that the ability to accomplish multiple tasks simultaneously was a key benefit of the platform in question. The data from the resident questionnaire lends further support to this hypothesis, as it demonstrates that people do indeed use the facility, however, their attitude suggests that they do not consider it a convenient location to “quickly pop into” or “on the way”, but rather consider it a more distant destination.

The survey of the local population revealed that there are currently two supermarkets in Albertfalva (a figure that was three at the time of the survey). In addition to the aforementioned commercial establishments, there are a number of diminutive retail outlets dispersed throughout the district. However, it is notable that the predominantly single-family residential area is under-served in this respect. Such local shops have the potential to provide a significant degree of support to elderly residents.

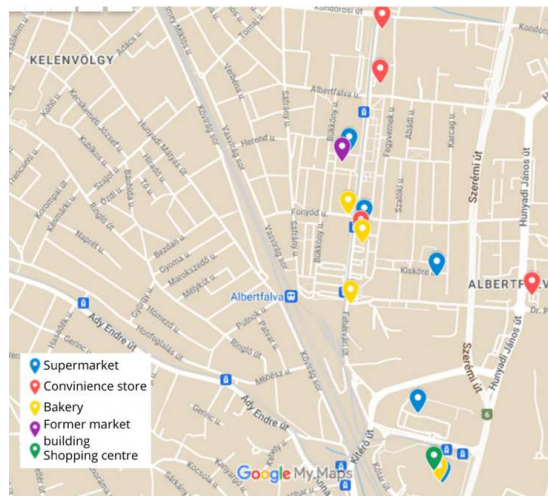


Fig. 4: Commercial services (Google Maps, own ed., 2024)

The inner part of the neighbourhood has a limited number of commercial service providers specialising in non-food items. However, the presence of such professions is shaped by market demand. While they may represent valuable everyday amenities at the local level, they are more commonly concentrated in district-level centres. Consequently, the shopping centre functions as a focal point for a variety of these services. In addition, a variety of smaller commercial enterprises and service providers are located along the northern end of Albertfalva.

### 5.2.5 Entertainment services

The current situation of hospitality and entertainment venues in Albertfalva presents a distinctive picture. The majority of establishments fulfilling such functions are concentrated along the central “retail strip”. However, the actual usability of these facilities and the quality of the services provided raise several questions. Most restaurants are primarily oriented towards takeaway and delivery services, lack dedicated seating areas or outdoor terraces, or are designed mainly to serve office workers, with opening hours

adjusted accordingly. The place-use patterns reported by residents reflect this situation, as fewer than one third of respondents (ten individuals) visit these establishments on a monthly basis, while the remainder do so even less frequently or not at all.

Albertfalva is a neighbourhood with a single pub, which is currently unable to fulfil its function as a place for civilized social leisure activities or to serve a wide range of age groups. According to the respondents' own statements, 60% of those who completed the questionnaire never attend.

Several interviewees highlighted the absence of a cinema, which could serve as an important venue for entertainment and recreation, particularly given that such a facility had previously existed in the area.

#### 5.2.6 Cultural facilities

The representatives of the Albertfalva Community Center place great emphasis on serving older people and parents with young children, organizing programs, and providing space, however, they find it difficult to reach younger demographics. They agree that it is easier to build on existing communities, and they see the strength of the community center in Albertfalva's strong identity.

The Community Centre organises courses, provides space for civic initiatives and the activities of civil organisations, hosts various interest-based clubs, and serves as a venue for occasional events. Although Albertfalva does not have a theatre, the Petőfi Musical Studio operates within the Community Centre, partially fulfilling this cultural function.

In principle, the Community Centre could be considered one of Albertfalva's main meeting places; however, 40% of respondents to the resident survey reported that they had never visited the facility. At the same time, two respondents indicated that they visit the centre on a weekly basis; both have lived in Albertfalva since birth. These findings are consistent with the observations shared by the interviewees. Furthermore, the neighbourhood is without a public library, a facility that was previously present in Albertfalva.

#### 5.2.7 Religious institutions

In Albertfalva, faith and religion play a significant role as forces of community formation. According to the shared views of the interviewees, the Saint Michael's Church functions as an especially important communal space, particularly for older residents. In the immediate vicinity of the church, a community centre serving the religious congregation has recently been established; this facility supports not only religious activities but also provides space for other organisations and community initiatives.

#### 5.2.8 Recreational areas, parks

Although Albertfalva's suburban character might lead one to conclude that it has a sufficient quantity and quality of green space, the map-based functional assessment does not support this assumption. The assessment concluded that there are seven parks in Albertfalva. According to the assessment, there are seven parks in Albertfalva, but a closer look reveals a different picture: both field observations and residents' opinions indicate that only two of these areas function as genuine recreational spaces. Even in these cases, several shortcomings can be identified, such as limited suitability for all age groups and the lack of complementary functions (e.g. hospitality services or sports facilities). In general, the parks within the neighbourhood tend to be small-scale green areas, in some cases lacking even tree cover.

One interviewee noted the presence of a community garden and a community composting facility in Albertfalva. However, the extent to which the population makes use of the garden located in the garden house area is questionable.

Albertfalva's waterfront location offers untapped opportunities for neighbourhood development, as the area is bordered along its entire eastern side by the Danube. The Árasztó-bank, in particular, represents a high-potential development area due to its direct riverfront connection and its unbuilt character.

Playgrounds are distributed throughout almost all parts of the neighbourhood and are actively used by local residents. They are generally of good quality. These playgrounds play an important role in the life of the local community, as they not only provide a safe and entertaining place for children to play and exercise, but also serve as a meeting point for parents and local residents. This assertion is substantiated by the observation that two respondents who completed the survey regarded the playgrounds as the "heart" of Albertfalva.

The district has a long-standing swimming pool and sports complex, which has recently undergone complete renovation (Albertfalva Local History and School History Museum, 2024).



Fig. 5: Recreational areas, parks (Google Maps, own ed., 2024)

### 5.2.9 Transportation

Albertfalva is a neighbourhood with strong spatial connectivity and is very well integrated into Budapest's transport network. Several lines of the Buda interlinked tram network pass through the area, including tram lines 17 (connecting Savoya Park and Óbuda), 41 (between Kamaraerdő and Óbuda), 47 and 48 (linking Budafok Centre with Deák Ferenc Square), and 56 (operating along the Budafok–Hűvösvölgy route). In addition, bus line 7 – one of the main east–west corridors crossing the entire city – also runs through Albertfalva, with one of its termini located at Albertfalva railway station and stops at several major transport nodes across Budapest. Bus services connecting Budafok with Móricz Zsigmond Square likewise pass through the neighbourhood.

Albertfalva railway station could also function as an important transport node; however, only a limited number of train services operate from here to Kelenföld railway station or to Kőbánya-Kispest (primarily from the direction of Székesfehérvár). While the rail infrastructure is therefore in place, its more intensive use could represent a further opportunity for improving local and metropolitan mobility.

At the same time, these favourable transport conditions raise questions regarding the feasibility of implementing the 15-minute city model. Several participants in the expert interviews pointed out that Albertfalva's very good accessibility and transport connections may, paradoxically, hinder the development of more locally oriented, proximity-based urban functions.

In my view, strong spatial connectivity should not hinder the emergence and long-term viability of liveable neighbourhoods and accessible local services. Where local transport is supported by appropriate infrastructure – of the kind required for the 15-minute city – residents tend to make natural and routine use of these systems.

A quote from Fred Kent (2005) “If you plan cities for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic. If you plan for people and places, you get people and places.” This principle highlights how the design of infrastructure and urban spaces determines how people use them.

Albertfalva's cycling infrastructure consists of a semi-separated cycling path along the eastern edge of the neighbourhood on a major arterial road, which is located at a distance from the areas most actively used by residents, and a cycling lane running through the low-density residential zone, however, cyclist movement is impeded by cars parked on the lane. The street where tram services operate and the majority of local traffic occurs lacks dedicated cycling infrastructure. This represents a significant development opportunity in implementing the 15-minute city concept. The expansion of the cycling network, particularly in routes connecting residential areas with local amenities, has the potential to enhance the frequency of bicycle use. This has the potential to increase the frequency of bicycle use, which is significant for both environmental sustainability and public health.

The following diagram illustrates the transportation habits of residential respondents. The diagram indicates that walking is the predominant form of transportation in Albertfalva, with cycling being less favoured. The

survey data indicates that the majority the responding local residents primarily utilise public transportation for intra-district and urban mobility. However, in both scenarios, private vehicle usage ranks second.

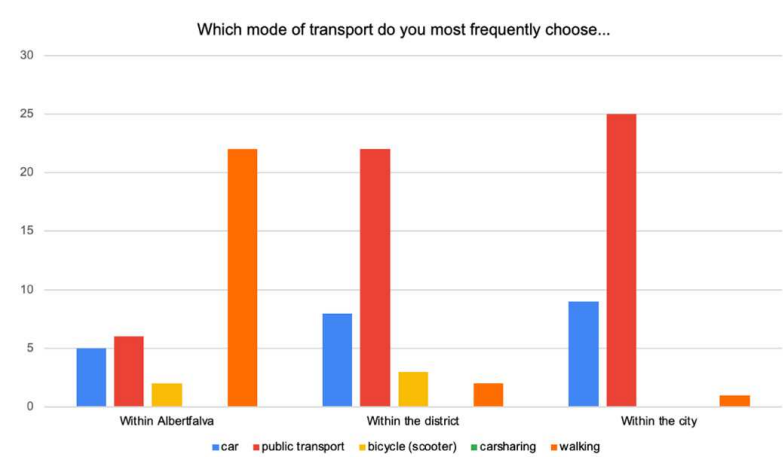


Fig. 6: Mode of transport used by respondents (own ed., 2024)

The concept of the 15-minute city is based on reducing car use, therefore, issues related to automobility warrant particular attention. Several interviewees mentioned the division of parking zones as a problem, as at the time of the data collection Albertfalva lay outside the regulated parking areas and, as a result, the neighbourhood effectively functions as an informal park-and-ride (P+R) area for commuters arriving from the metropolitan agglomeration. This situation implies that parking demand in Albertfalva is shaped not only by local car use but also by the needs of inbound commuters. This trend has a negative impact on the use of space in Albertfalva and the quality of life of its residents in several ways, as the mass presence of cars from the agglomeration increases the demand for parking spaces, making it more difficult for local residents to find free parking spaces near their homes, increased car traffic has adverse environmental impacts and the spatial constraints imposed by increased traffic and the occupation of land by parked cars serve to impede the feasibility of establishing community spaces and green areas, both of which are pivotal components of the 15-minute city concept.

Smart, sharing-based transportation options, such as car-sharing services (e.g., Mol Limo, GreenGo), bike-sharing (e.g. Mol Bubi) or shared scooters (Lime), play a significant role in the future of modern urban mobility. However, it can be observed that the use of these services in Albertfalva is less widespread, based on the fact, that the MOL Bubi system is not currently available within the neighbourhood, on interview reports and the above diagram. However, the integration of these modes of transport contributes to all aspects of sustainability: they are a more environmentally friendly alternative, they can be more cost-effective than owning a car (especially if it is rarely used) and finally, in some cases, they can even have positive social implications, as they encourage community thinking and a culture of sharing. In addition, reducing the number of parking spaces can “give back” space to people.

It is evident that public transport facilitates convenient access to the central areas of District XI and even to the primary centres of Budapest (a direct tram connection between Albertfalva and Deák Ferenc Square). Nevertheless, there is a need for sustainable transport developments within the district that offer local alternatives and aim to ensure a liveable neighbourhood and access to local services (e.g. bike paths and walkable sidewalks).

### 5.3 Identity and community

Prominent figures in Albertfalva emphasise the profound roots and resilience of the district's identity. According to their interpretation, the origins of this lie in historical factors, as Albertfalva was once an independent settlement with a homogeneous society and significant industrial activity. All this not only evokes the past, but also defines the present identity and cohesion.

They also attribute importance to the fact that in certain areas, such as the Tisztviselőtelep, the population has lived for decades, across generations, in a protected area which, due to building regulations, has been able to preserve its original character and appearance. As a result, the houses still faithfully reflect the former form of this part of the settlement. The strong identity of Albertfalva's community is further supported by

various tradition-preserving groups and their activities, which play an important role in the preservation and transmission of local culture.

This approach is closely linked to the perspective of the planners and the district chief architect, who emphasise that the past must not be forgotten in the development of the town. They argue that preserving local history is not only about respect for the past, but also about creating a strong and cohesive community.

The interviews and resident questionnaires highlight the importance of community and participation for Albertfalva's residents. The interviewees further emphasize the importance of neighbourly relationships, particularly in the case of the Tisztviselőtelep. Respondents to the residential questionnaire also tend to perceive their neighbourhood relations as rather strong.

The Advent season, for instance, is perhaps the most striking example of this phenomenon. During this period, the houses in Tisztviselőtelep are transformed into a living Advent calendar, and residents gather at the decorated houses.

#### 5.4 Suggestion for a neighbourhood “centre”

So where could a district center emerge that could serve as a starting point for implementing the 15-minute city model? Based on interviews with prominent figures and surveys of residents, this study focuses on the characteristics associated with the traditional centre of the area.

Following the analysis of functions in question, it can be concluded that although Albertfalva does not currently have a clearly defined centre, the most promising area in this respect is Albertfalva Street and its environs, i.e. the historic centre. This area is considered to be in the centre not only in the eyes of the residents but also in spatial terms.

However, Savoya Park should also be mentioned as a new central area defined in terms of architecture and urban planning.

Albertfalva Street and its surroundings were considered the nucleus of old Albertfalva, and even today one can find facilities with a centralising force here (such as a church, schools, and a doctor's office), but by now, several functions have disappeared from the area and thus from the district as well, such as the cinema, restaurants, and pubs. According to one of my interviewees, there were at least ten of the latter (and these services were not separate from each other in Albertfalva's past (Virt, 1999)) in this neighborhood or nearby until 40-50 years ago.

In my view, therefore, if a neighbourhood centre is to be established in this area – which is also geographically located at the heart of the district – or if the emergence of such a centre is to be supported through urban development instruments, particular attention must be given to the reintroduction of community-oriented, recreational, and cultural functions. Not only is there limited space for such functions elsewhere in the neighbourhood, but local traditions and a strong sense of identity also suggest that residents would be most inclined to use these facilities in this location.



Fig. 7: Albertfalva Street and surrounding area: key local functions (Google Maps, own ed., 2025)

At the same time, the mere creation of meeting places (such as cafés or community spaces) is insufficient if these services are not underpinned by appropriate infrastructure. From this perspective, I consider road-

related interventions and traffic restrictions in the surrounding area to be necessary, particularly in the vicinity of the former market. This, however, is complicated by the presence of a supermarket and its associated car park in the immediate proximity of the former market site, as such a large-scale retail facility not only requires substantial space but also generates significant traffic. However, in my assessment, all this only further weakens the former center of social life, whilst reinforcing rapid, task-oriented use, encouraging people to conclude their activities (i.e. shopping) in this location as quickly as possible and depart. In light of this, it is worth to pay attention to various traffic calming (and elimination) measures. The modernisation of the market building, the rehabilitation of its function, and its renovation have the potential to contribute significantly to the enhancement of the quality of life in the district and the promotion of community life.

My interviewees emphasized that the first step would be to modernize the building's heating system so that it could be used all year round. To do this, the local government must attract private investors willing to fund the renovation and operation of the building, contingent upon certain conditions. These include the preservation of the building's original function during the renovation process, thereby ensuring the continuity of operations as a market.

However, the indisputable role of the supermarket can also be approached from another angle. One of my interviewees believes that the proximity of the store would also promote the use of the market and, what is more, would rather revitalize it.

A local government representative from Albertfalva said that the market had never fulfilled its traditional role, and based on this, it was suggested that the building could be treated as a mixed-use area (especially considering that market days do not take place every day), with functions such as a cinema, other retail shops, or various catering establishments, which could have terraces opening from the inside or even outdoor "street-front" spaces (depending on traffic calming/elimination), allowing people to spend their free time in the open air while using the services.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The 15-minute city model is a potential response to the socio-spatial transformations occurring in contemporary urban spaces. While city centres were once prominent in terms of economic activity and real estate values, today the structure of cities is increasingly being reshaped by a network of decentralised, functionally diverse sub-centres. These areas are capable of functioning independently, but through their rich networks of connections, they become part of the city as a whole – in terms of transportation, services, and community life.

In this study, the role of district centres was examined in the context of the 15-minute city concept, with the Albertfalva neighbourhood serving as a case study. The study revealed that, while the area exhibits certain urban functions, it currently lacks an integrated community and service centre that would be capable of operating in accordance with the principles of the model. The proposed developments are primarily aimed at improving non-motorised transport accessibility, community spaces, and service diversity.

However, it is important to emphasise that the 15-minute city concept is not based solely on the existence or designation of centres. Rather, the model focuses on functional accessibility within the urban fabric, access to services necessary for everyday life, and residents' opportunities to use space. Consequently, the identification of centres is not a prerequisite for the implementation of the 15-minute city, rather the revitalisation of an underutilised area with potential can most effectively become the practical basis for the model.

This pilot study provides a foundation for further, more comprehensive research that extends beyond a single neighbourhood and incorporates multiple urban areas with differing characteristics, in order to examine the feasibility of implementing the 15-minute city model across different urban contexts.

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