

**Giant intruders in our cities**  
**New Years' photo essay by Iván Tosics**

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In October 2011 I was invited to an EU conference to Warsaw. The organizers booked a room for me in the centrally located Metropol hotel.

Arriving late evening I took the first picture, on which you can see a well-lit giant poster with four nicely dressed ladies. Although the picture is quite dark, you can discover the hotel behind the poster: this fashion ad covers eight storeys on the facade of the hotel.



My room was on the fifth floor, close to the corner, below the elbow of the lady on the right side. I took the second picture next morning from my room: outside the sun was shining, but from my window very little could be seen through the thick material of the giant poster.



The conference was interesting but when I could I have spent some time outside, 'hunting' giant posters. This was not difficult as Warsaw is full with these: besides the eight-floor women I saw three-floor men, one man in the size of four floors and, of course, giant cars.





Similarly to Warsaw, also the historic city of Cracow cultivates giant posters, illustrated by this four storey high movie ad. You can see that the poster-holder building has been nicely renovated before covering the facade with the giant figures of the two movie stars.



Bucharest is a larger city and has correspondingly larger giant posters. The internet ad is four floor high and covers the entire facade of a long building. The fashionable man is five storey high, just above a horizontal giant ad of sweet delicacies. These two advertisements cover some 34 balconies and windows – no doubt, with the agreement of the home owners. The 7 storey high lady (!) manages alone to cover even more balconies...





Having seen so many examples I started to think, how do people feel who are living behind such posters? Life must be strange behind the 6 window large boots in Bucharest and even more so behind the lady just using a mouth-spray covering an entire building in Budapest...





As these pictures show, European cities are increasingly changing into advertising sceneries of large international companies. The Firefox ad or the Aeroflot ad (both in Budapest) can probably also be found in other European cities.





The use of giant posters is not at all the 'privilege' of the east-central European cities. Among others, the largest mobile phone companies are active all over Europe, covering many buildings – as this picture illustrates, proudly announcing that 'HTC has installed seven 'giant' billboard posters in the UK's biggest cities totalling over 2,500 sqm in size'.





To put up a giant poster must be quite expensive. Even so, this is a vivid business in many of the European cities. The winners are the production companies, the intermediary advertising companies and the buildings themselves which get substantial amount of money for the 'selling' of their facades. Even so, this is not a win-win business. There are many more losers: the residents of the cities and also the visitors. The organic structure of streets and buildings, the beauty of the centuries-long developed architecture is brutally destroyed by these 4-6-8 storey high men-women-cars-mouthsprays-mobiles...

Some people raise economic arguments in favour of the giant posters, emphasizing that this is the only way to collect money for the renewal of the poster-holder buildings. Even if this were true, the advantage for one building should not be at the expense of the public interest. In most cases, however, the argument is not at all true – many of the buildings, which serve as holders of giant posters, are in quite good physical shape.

The beauty of the historically grown European cities is our common value. This should be protected from the shameless and brutal attack of the commercial companies (who find good allies in some property owners). We should use strong tools, e.g. improved planning regulations, to be able to resist this attack, in order to better protect our common values against the particular interests.

I wish you strength in 2014 in your fights for nicer European cities!

Iván