



ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL  
CLASSICISTIC COUNTY HALLS IN  
HUNGARY, SZEKSZÁRD, MIHALY  
POLLACK, 1827

JEDEN Z NAJKRAJŠÍCH  
KLASICISTICKÝCH ŽUPNÝCH  
DOMOV V MAĎARSKU, SZEKSZÁRD,  
MIHALY POLLACK, 1827

Source Zdroj: [www.panoramio.com](http://www.panoramio.com)

# Changes of Town Centres in the Era of State Socialism – Processes and Paradigms in Urban Design

## Premeny mestských centier v ére štátneho socializmu – procesy a paradigmy v urbanistickom navrhovaní

Kornélia Kissfazekas

Dobové prístupy k mestským centrá v mnohom vypovedajú o súdobom spôsobe myslenia a názoroch na minulosť a budúcnosť. V období štátneho socializmu bol tento prístup silne protichodný: v priebehu niekoľkých desaťročí fungovania režimu podliehal ustavičným zmenám v závislosti od hlavných zvrátov hospodárskej a sociálnej politiky. Tieto zmeny zanechali svoje stopy aj v urbanistickej štruktúre, mimoriadne výrazne v prípade stredne veľkých miest a ich centier. Niekoľko dekád štátneho socializmu ovplyvnilo morfológiu, urbanizmus a architektúru týchto miest, pričom veľmi podobné procesy možno nájsť vo viacerých postsocialistických krajinách.

Príspevok sa zaoberá týmito procesmi v mestských centrách, rovnako ako ich základnými príčinami a ich vplyvom na mestské politiky, urbanizmus a architektúru. Napriek tomu, že sa diskutované detaily a príklady týchto procesov zameriavajú na Maďarsko, vzhľadom na mnohé historické podobnosti možno nájsť množstvo súvislostí s ďalšími krajinami strednej a východnej Európy.

Obdobie štátneho socializmu sa v Maďarsku skladalo z niekoľkých kratších fáz, ktoré sa striedali približne raz za desať rokov. Ich odlišné prístupy možno rozpoznať v nápadných rozdieloch v mestskom plánovaní a v architektonických ideáloch, pričom sú nanajvýš dobre badateľné pri analyzovaní zmien v mestských centrách.

Štátny socializmus mal veľmi ambivalentný vzťah k mestským centrá, ako pripomienkam bývalej sociálnej štruktúry, ktorú sa usiloval vymazať. Deklarovaným zámerom bolo, aby socialistické mestské centrá vo forme, ako aj v obsahu sledovali svoje vlastné, nové paradigmy. Prispôsobovanie a kombinovanie nových paradigiem s historickými centrami sa často stretávalo s ťažkosťami. Novonavrhované mestá sa síce javili ako vhodné na reprezentovanie socialistických ideálov vo svojej „čistej forme“, avšak výstavba centier týchto nových miest bola považovaná za menej naliehavú než ostatné funkčné zóny (priemyselné, obytné). Preto vo väčšine miest boli centrá vybudované v oveľa neskoršej fáze, často až o desaťročia neskôr.

V rokoch po druhej svetovej vojne boli v strede záujmu rozhodnutia týkajúce sa rekonštrukcie, zakladania a rozvoja priemyselných zariadení. Tie na dlhý čas zatienili všetky ostatné záležitosti týkajúce sa rozvoja miest. V päťdesiatych rokoch 20. storočia všetky priority špecifických plánovacích úloh a oblastí výskumu urbanistických vied stanovovalo politické vedenie

V tomto období neboli historické mestá cieľom vládou stanovených nariadení, transformácia mestských centier bola riešená len ako teoretická otázka. Čo sa týka skutočnej výstavby, obdobie od konca druhej svetovej vojny do začiatku šesťdesiatych rokov možno v histórii centier miest považovať za relatívne „pasívne“.

Boli vypracúvané podrobné dokumentácie hodnotných budov a uličných čiar, ktorých hlavným cieľom bolo zmapovať a zaznamenať hodnotné mestské prvky, mestskú krajinu a pamiatky, pričom však často neobsahovala žiadne úvahy o budúcej situácii a o úlohe mestských centier. V istom zmysle išlo aj o prípravu na socialistický realizmus, ktorý sa stal oficiálnym štátnym prístupom, štýlom a metódou v roku 1949.

V období socialistického realizmu bolo postavených veľmi málo centier, s výnimkou menších centier socialistických banských miest, no niektoré dobové kompozičné princípy sa v mestskom plánovaní ustálili na dlhý čas. Socialistickorealistickej prístup k urbanistickému plánovaniu využíval tradičné princípy a nástroje. Bloky boli zviazané do ulíc, ktorých kompozícia pozostávala z prázdneho priestoru a výplne. Prominentné miesto zastávali zvyčajne veľké, pravidelne tvarované ústredné priestory obkolesené budovami administratívnych a politických inštitúcií, využívané na politické a spoločenské príležitosti.

Dokonce aj počas tohto relatívne krátkeho obdobia sa architektúra musela prispôbiť dvom zásadným ideologickým a štylistickým zmenám. Maďarské mestá si stále uchovávali štylistické elementy kvalitného modernizmu, pozostatky medzivojnového obdobia, povinný socialistický realizmus neskôr vystriedal neskorý modernizmus a jeho rozličné kombinácie.

Vzhľadom na politiku spriemyselnovania a s ním súvisiacimi politikami osídľovania a rozvoja sídiel – sa mestské centrá meniace sa na slumy začiatkom šesťdesiatych rokov stali celoštátnym problémom. Na nasledujúcich dvadsať rokov sa rozvoj mestských centier stal konštantne prítomnou úlohou mestského plánovania a následnej výstavby. Nová organizácia mestských centier, obnovenie ich inštitúcií a verejných priestorov v súlade so socialistickým spoločenským a inštitucionálnym ideálom sa stali hlavnou prioritou.

V rýchlym slede bol vytvorený rad urbanistických plánov centier rozličných miest rozličných mierok. Kvôli pomalým byrokratickým procesom však ešte dlho nedochádzalo vo výraznejšej miere k výstavbe komplexov rôznych inštitúcií.

Po roku 1968 (keď vošiel do platnosti nový ekonomický mechanizmus) bol do istej miery uvoľnený striktný mechanizmus centralizovaného rozhodovania a plánovania. Nové centrá začali byť navrhované podľa nových paradigiem mestského plánovania. V čase rozsiahlej výstavby inštitucionálnych komplexov sa prinavrátili aj základné princípy modernizmu. Tieto princípy neuprednostňovali hodnoty tradičnej mestskej štruktúry. Dôležitým prvkom každého konceptu urbanistického návrhu sa stali otvorené bloky, teda budovy už neboli organizované po obvode jednotlivých blokov. To malo za následok zneprehľadnenie a dezorganizáciu okolitých ulíc. Komplexy inštitucionálnych budov vybudované v toto období si nenašli svoje miesto a kontext v rámci historického prostredia.

Sedemdesiate roky 20. storočia sa pokladajú za jedno z najrušnejších období realizácie novostavieb rôznych inštitúcií v centrách maďarských miest. Ekonomická efektívnosť navrhovania a výstavby sa stala základným princípom uplatňovaným práve v tom istom čase, v akom sa začal klásť dôraz na rozvoj centier miest. Na urbanizmus a politiku výstavby mala svoj vplyv aj energetická kríza z rokov 1973 – 1974. Kombinácia viacerých faktorov – nedostatku peňazí, túžby zapôsobiť a puritánskej modernosti nového architektonického prístupu – ktorý chcel ostentatívne zavrhnúť prístupy a nástroje socialistického realizmu, definitívne ukončeného v roku 1957 – malo veľmi negatívny dosah na urbanizmus.

Koncom šesťdesiatych rokov sa zjavila prefabrikácia: na trh vstúpili priemyselne vyrábané konštrukcie určené pre budovy inštitúcií, plánované na základe princípov šandardizácie a vzájomného pomeru rozmerov. Šandardizácia, normatívne myslenie a plánovanie rovnako poznačili kvalitu architektúry tohto obdobia.

## Introduction

Central-Eastern European countries proceeded along similar routes during the era of state socialism. Everywhere, the rules were set by the same global power – the Soviet Union – and these countries were forced to exist within the same artificially created economic and political force fields. Naturally, many details differed, but the mechanism and the logic of the system were fundamentally the same. This is a common legacy, with its own set of “language” rules that only those on “this” side of the Iron Curtain can fully understand – others can decipher its messages only with great difficulty.

It is, therefore, easy to understand the motivations behind scholarly discourse analysing the functions and social composition of socialist towns and exploring the differences between them and their Western European counterparts.<sup>1,2,3</sup> This shared historical path resulted in common visual features that can be observed in the urban design and architecture of countries characterized by state socialism. Each country has their own specific subtleties, but on a regional scale, these shared features undeniably show a common ideology. This is especially true of the socialist realism of the 1950s, which sought to represent the new social structure by spatial, structural and stylistic means. However, Central-Eastern European modernism has easily recognizable connections with Western European modernist examples as well, despite its own unique features (which led to it recently being called “socialist modernism”).

State socialism in Hungary, based on its specific start (1949) and end (1989/1990) dates, can be perceived as a well-defined, compact era. Throughout this clearly defined historical period, the underlying trend behind urban development and town constructions basically remained the same: a hierarchical decision-making and executive model with centrally designated directives. However, this period was also comprised of many smaller phases, which, with their shifts in approach, resulted in conspicuous differences in urban design and architectural ideals. The strongly politicised

Až do začiatku osemdesiatych rokov 20. storočia neboli aspekty týkajúce sa dopravy v mestských centrách považované za príliš dôležité, no neskôr sa znižovanie dopravného zaťaženia a vytváranie zón pre chodcov stali prioritou v rámci mestského rozvoja. Odklonenie tranzitnej dopravy mimo centier zlepšilo funkčnosť a obyvateľnosť týchto oblastí. Prostredníctvom reorganizácie verejného priestoru len nedávno zbaveného dopravy, ako aj diferenciaciou ich jednotlivých funkcií v priestore a čase otvorilo centrá novým možnostiam. Plány mestských centier už v tomto čase využívali takýto prístup, používali subtilnejšie zásahy ako výstavbu na prázdnych parcelách a projekty rehabilitácie blokov. Hoci veľmi oneskorene, ale predsa, sa vynorila aj postmoderna. Dlhो opustený prístup, ktorý bral do úvahy tradíciu, historicitu a previazanosť architektúry a urbanistického plánovania, opäť našiel svoje právoplatné miesto v profesii.

Mestské centrá v strednej a východnej Európe sú dôležitými pripomienkami na ich spoločnú minulosť.

Obdobie socialistického realizmu výrazne nepoznačilo centrá väčšiny maďarských miest. Vďaka jeho konzervatívnemu prístupu k mestskému plánovaniu mohli byť produkty socialistického realizmu neskôr ľahko asimilované. Rola modernistických „nových“ inštitucionálnych centier je, naopak, omnoho kontroverznejšia. Stále boli živými časťami mestských centier, pričom boli stále spoločensky akceptované a mali relevantný politický kontext. Po zmene politického režimu však stratili svoju podstatu a funkcie a ocitli sa v kontextuálnom vákuu, ktoré viedlo k dramatickým zmenám. Ich nové využitie predstavuje zložitú otázku pre lokálne vlády kdekoľvek predovšetkým preto, že dokonca aj ich dosiaľ zachované dobré kvality vnímajú a docenujú len samotní architekti. Pre mestské obyvateľstvo predstavujú cudzí, všeobecne odmietaný architektonický štýl.

**SOCIALIST REALIST BUILDING,  
DESIGNED ON THE BASIS OF  
CLASSICISTIC PRECURSORS  
TOLNA, COMMUNITY CENTRE,  
BÉLA PINTER, 1952**

SOCIALISTICKOREALISTICKÁ  
BUDOVA, KTOREJ NÁVRH  
VYCHÁDZA Z KLASICISTICKÝCH  
PREDLŔH, TOLNA, COMMUNITY  
CENTRE, BÉLA PINTER, 1952

Source Zdroj: <http://meonline.hu>



'50s, the more “open-minded” ’60s, the economical and funding-based, technocratic approach of the ’70s and finally the post-modernistic standards of the ’80s – each decade formed its own separate subperiod based on the products and philosophy of urban design it generated.

These processes can be observed especially well in analysing the changes undergone by town centres. The approach to town centres in a given era says a lot about that period’s way of thinking and its normative view of both past and future. State socialism had a very ambivalent relationship to town centres: they were remainders of a former social structure that it wished to erase. It was a declared objective that socialist town centres should follow their own, new paradigms in both form and substance. Fitting or combining these paradigms with historical centres often led to difficulties: this struggle is still visible in the morphology, urban design and architectural details of these settlements today. However, newly planned towns seemed suitable for representing socialist ideals in their “pure form” without limitation. Therefore, to understand the changes in town centres in this period, it is essential to be familiar with contemporary ideas regarding centres of New Towns. It is a peculiar contradiction that the political will mentioned above—unable to identify with anything pre-existing, desperately trying to redefine itself spatially and formally, typical of the strongly politicized 1950s— eventually settled for the most traditional toolset possible in urban design and architecture (central, formal squares with building providing vertical accent, symmetry, etc.) as a form of self-expression.

This paper deals with changes in town centres during the state socialist period.<sup>4</sup> While the details of the processes and examples focus on Hungary, they also have strong connections with their counterparts in other Central-Eastern European countries, due to the countless known and presumed similarities. The Hungarian aspects and urban design perspective of this topic have emerged and gained international attention only very recently, and internationally accessible publications of results in English are extremely scarce. Therefore, this paper may be relevant for all researchers studying similarities and differences in this era.

### **The relationship between state socialist urban politics and town centres: The 1950s**

In the early days of state socialism architectural and urban design requirements needed to be met without questions, while later they were more implied than explicitly stated. For years after World War II, decisions regarding reconstruction, placing and development of industrial facilities were the focus of attention, overshadowing any other interests in urban development for a long time. In the 1950s, specific planning tasks and research fields of urban sciences usually followed the priorities set by the political leadership. At this time historical towns were not targeted by government-designated tasks, and the transformation of town centres was treated only as a theoretical question. Town centres were usually not affected by construction projects or their preliminary plans. However, the topic almost immediately became one of the most prominent fields of scientific research after the war. An especially important base of research was the Urban Planning Office (Városépítő Tervező Iroda, hereinafter VÁTI), one of the largest of the state planning companies, established in 1950. VÁTI created a so-called “Analyses of Townscape and Monuments” for several dozen Hungarian settlements after its establishment.<sup>5</sup> The unspoken purpose of these detailed documentations



**THE FIRST CENTRAL BUILDING OF DUNAÚJVÁROS, THE COMMUNIST PARTY HEADQUARTERS, ERIKA MALECZ AND TIBOR WEINER, 1951**

PRVÁ CENTRÁLNA BUDOVA V DUNAÚJVÁROSI, SÍDLO KOMUNISTICKEJ STRANY, ERIKA MALECZ A TIBOR WEINER, 1951

**Source** Zdroj: BME Department of Urban Planning and Design, photo archives



**THE TOWN CENTRE IN THE EARLY 1970S, WITH THE BUILDING OF THE CITY COUNCIL, BUILT IN 1967**

MESTSKÉ CENTRUM ZAČIATKOM SEDEMDESIATYCH ROKOV S BUDOVOU MESTSKÉHO ZASTUPITELSTVA, POSTAVENOU V ROKU 1967

**Source** Zdroj: BME Department of Urban Planning and Design, photo archives

of valuable buildings and streetscapes was to “provide examples and lessons to be learned for new urban constructions, using historical patterns”<sup>6</sup> In a way, this served as a preparation for socialist realism as well. Socialist realism became the officially required approach, style and method<sup>7</sup> in 1949, with classicism, and its especially early 19th century, “puritanical” form, named as its official (Hungarian) precursor.<sup>8</sup>

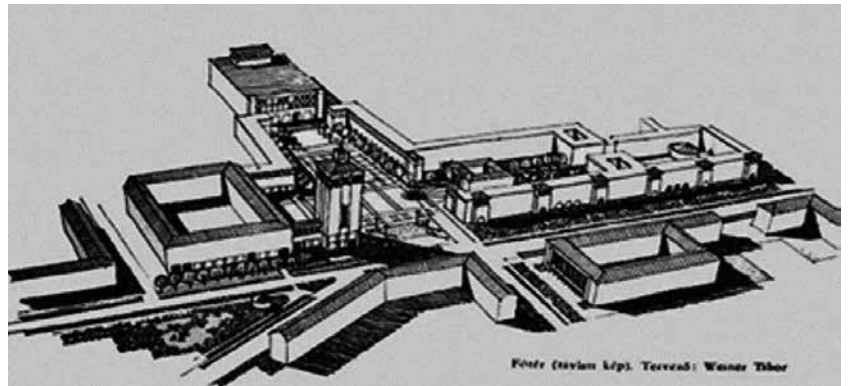
The predecessor of today’s Department of Urban Planning and Design, Budapest University of Technology and Economics<sup>9</sup>, led by Imre Perényi, a very influential person in contemporary urban politics, was established as the second centre of urban design theory and research. Research<sup>10</sup> on several different town centres commenced here during the 1950s, with a monographic approach that included urban structure, history, and a unique and uniform methodology. Both these and the “Analyses of Townscape and Monuments”, mentioned above, were created as “health checks”. Their main purpose was to map and register valuable urban features, townscapes and monuments, and often did not include any considerations concerning the future situation and role of town centres.

Along with the products of research, a very large number of plans and alternative proposals were also created. Certain strict – and, in part, imported<sup>11</sup> – directives on centres were defined primarily in the context of New Towns.<sup>12</sup> The construction of centres for New Towns was considered to be a less urgent priority than other (industrial, housing) areas, and therefore most town centres were created only in a much later phase, often decades later. Even the construction of the

**TWO UNREALISED URBAN COMPOSITION PLANS OF SOCIALIST REALIST TOWN CENTRES FROM THE 1950S**

DVA NEREALIZOVANÉ PLÁNY URBANISTICKEJ ŠTRUKTÚRY SOCIALISTICKOREALISTICKÉHO MESTA Z PÄŤDESIATYCH ROKOV 20. STOROČIA

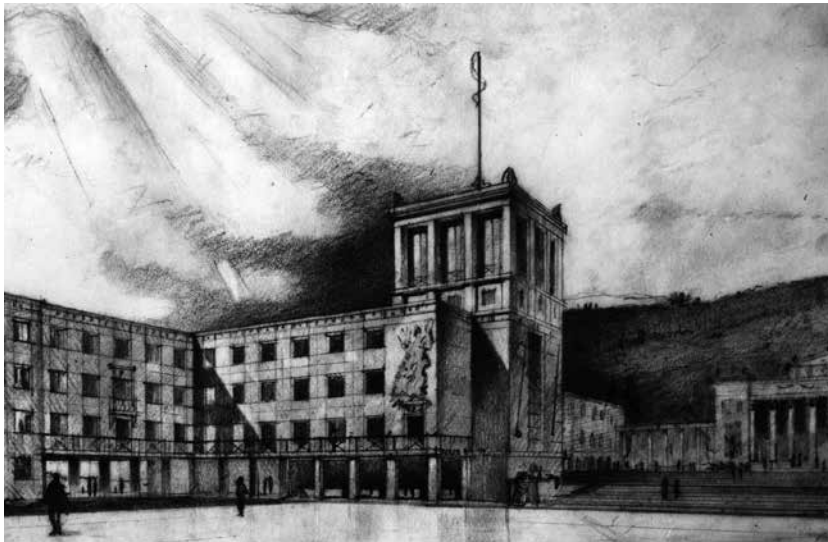
Source Zdroj: BME Department of Urban Planning and Design, photo archives



Férfi (távolon lépi). Tervező: Wenner Tibor

**PLANS OF THE CENTRE OF SZTÁLINVÁROS (DUNAÚJVÁROS)**

PLÁNY MESTSKÉHO CENTRA SZTÁLINVÁROS (DUNAÚJVÁROS)



**PLANS OF THE CENTRES OF TATABÁNYA**

PLÁNY MESTSKÉHO CENTRA TATABÁNYA

centre of Dunaújváros (formerly known as Sztálinváros, “Stalin Town”), the first, exemplary, and therefore politically and professionally very important Hungarian socialist industrial New Town was unsuccessful in terms of functionality and urban composition. Despite the detailed town centre programme<sup>13</sup> created by the state leadership and the abundance of plans, the centre remained a torso in many ways.<sup>14</sup>

Based on the analyses mentioned above, a unique plan type, the so-called “Urban Composition Plan”<sup>15</sup> was put into practice during the ’50s, only to be gradually forgotten. This plan dealt with the compositional connections between the main squares and roads of a settlement from the viewpoint of urban design and the aesthetic aspect, often with the explicit goal of advocating socialist realist design principles of.<sup>16</sup> Using socialist realism in urban design was a high-level political requirement, as its compositional elements were considered to be useful tools in conveying political messages.

The socialist realist urban design approach utilised traditional principles and tools. Blocks were bounded by streets, construction consisted of spaces and boundaries. Usually a large, regularly shaped central space, enclosed by buildings of municipal or county-level administrative and political institutions and used for political and social events was given a prominent role. This central space was almost always marked with a vertical element, a tower, placed asymmetrically in the most highly praised plans.<sup>17</sup> Hierarchy, axuality and symmetry were typical elements of spatial organisation.<sup>18</sup> The so-called “Composition Plans” were independent from the official hierarchy of plans, and as their connection was uncertain and unregulated, their contents were usually not incorporated in officially approved urban plans.<sup>19</sup> Their importance, however, is indisputable, as due to their formal independence, they could achieve the integrated assessment and visualisation of architectural and urban design aspects.

Regarding actual construction, the period between World War II and the early 1960s can be seen as a relatively “passive” time in the history of town centres. Even though some important pub-



**TWO EXAMPLES OF REALISED  
SOCIALIST REALIST PROJECTS**

DVA PRÍKLADY REALIZÁCIE  
SOCIALISTICKOREALISTICKÝCH  
PROJEKTOV

**THE CENTRE OF OROSZLÁNY  
MESTSKÉ CENTRUM OROSZLÁNY**

Source Zdroj: <http://postcards.hungaricana.hu>; Zemplén Museum, Szerencs



**THE MAIN SQUARE OF KOMLÓ  
HLAVNÉ NÁMESTIE V KOMLÓ**

Source Zdroj: <http://fortepan.hu>

lic buildings were built, these structures can be considered as individual projects and not— despite their urban role, functional importance and architectural quality—as part of a targeted, deliberate concept to develop the centre.

As the construction of centres for New Towns was delayed, historical town centres were abandoned. Very few centres were built in the socialist realist period, apart from the smaller centres of the socialist mining towns Oroszlány and Komló. Nonetheless, certain compositional principles of the era became fixed in urban design for a long time to come. To state one example, marking squares with high-rise buildings remained one of the main architectural elements of new urban spaces for at least 25 years after this period.<sup>20</sup>

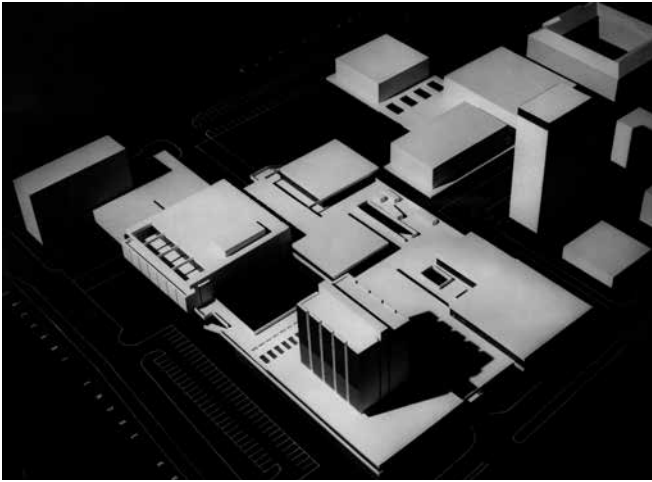
In the same way that the very idea of socialist realism originated in the Soviet Union, subsequent critical evaluation followed the Soviet example as well. Khrushchev, who succeeded Stalin as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, announced a change in building policies and architectural theory at the 1954 Moscow Building Industry Conference. He named progressive economic and technical considerations as the primary concern<sup>21</sup> for architects, and denounced socialist realism.<sup>22</sup>

“General urban design problems for our historical town centres” was the theme at the 1961 board meeting of the Hungarian Association of Architects.<sup>23</sup> This indicated how urgent an objective assessment of town centres had become due to everyday “urban management” difficulties. The question of town centres had become a critical, urgent problem to be solved.

## The 1960s

Due to industrialisation policies – with the related policies of settlement and settlement network development – and forced housing programmes, town centres turning into slums had become a nationwide problem by the early 1960s.<sup>24</sup> Town centres of poor quality, providing a low standard of living, did not conform to the socialist ideals proclaimed by political rhetoric and propaganda. The developments in town centres that commenced during this phase became a constantly present urban design task – later involving construction as well – for the next 20 years.

While the question of centres remained the focus of attention of researchers, now it became one of the most important target areas of “official” plans as well. By the 1960s, every settlement had already had its own general urban plan, and some of them had already begun making the first modifications. A series of design contests were held



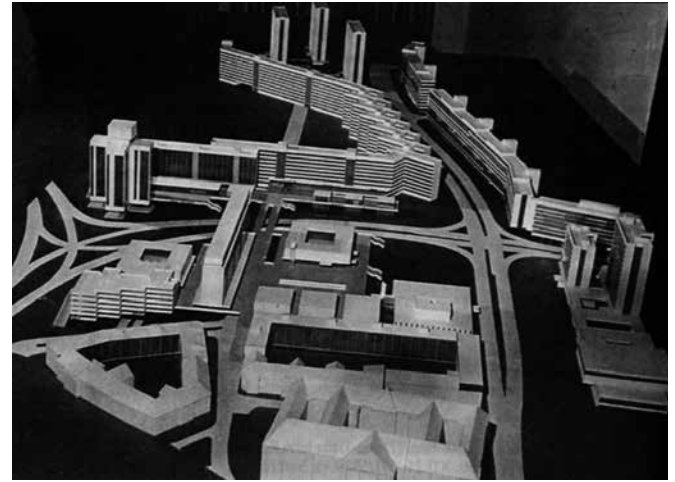
**MODELS OF CENTRAL INSTITUTION COMPLEXES**

MODELY KOMPLEXOV BUDOVI CENTRÁLNYCH INŠTITÚCIÍ

**SZOLNOK – COMPLETED**

SZOLNOK – ZREALIZOVANÉ

Source Zdroj: BME Department of Urban Planning and Design, photo archives



**KECSKEMÉT – PARTIALLY COMPLETE**

KECSKEMÉT – ČIASTOČNE ZREALIZOVANÉ

Source Zdroj: BME Department of Urban Planning and Design, photo archives

for town centres, which led to plans being made for centres of several towns of varying size (Eger, Kecskemét, Mosonmagyaróvár, Nyíregyháza, Pécs, Szeged, Szekszárd, Székesfehérvár, Szolnok, Szombathely, Veszprém, etc.) in rapid succession. The centres of historical towns became a popular subject for these in universities as well.<sup>25</sup>

Institutional complexes were still not being built in significant numbers, however: this trend continued for a long time. One reason behind the delay in construction was that there was still no well-established bureaucratic routine and system for town centre redevelopment.<sup>26</sup> The top-down, directly controlled urban development and construction mechanism seemed to make bureaucratic procedures easier, but in actuality, they did the opposite. Complaints about difficulties in urban planning and economic conciliation processes and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures – which could only be sped up by encouragement from the Party Committee – were abundant in the contemporary press.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, almost every significant town centre development is known or presumed to have had an ambitious or influential local (Party) leader lobbying for it.

One of the main ideas behind 1960s urban planning was to transform historical town centres in order to make them suitable for the “progressive” urban functions centrally designated for them – “to house new, still very much unexplored forms of social life”. However, the spatial and structural characteristics of historical towns were usually unfit for this. This made the realignment of town centres and recreating their institutions and public spaces in accordance with socialist social and institutional ideals a central priority. The condition of historical centres had deteriorated significantly, however, in the absence of proper maintenance. In certain towns – where county seat status meant increased institutional programmes – large-scale projects were carried out according to unified compositional plans. These centre constructions went far beyond the necessities of their towns in both programme and volume. Often they were prestige projects forced on these settlements because of the personal ambitions of a local political figure.

Some positive examples can nonetheless be found from this era; the central square of Salgótarján,<sup>28</sup> an industrial New Town, was praised in a book dedicated to the square<sup>29</sup> written by Frigyes Pogány,<sup>30</sup> a highly esteemed professor of architecture and art history. In addition, the centre of Szekszárd is one of the most cited, high-quality urban compositions of the era: it remains a success to this day.<sup>31, 32</sup>

The Third Five-Year Plan of 1965 – 1967 brought several significant changes. Even though the so-called New Economic Mechanism was only officially launched in 1968, signs of changes in approach had already been visible for years. The strictly centralised decision-making mechanism of previous years was relaxed somewhat.





**AN EMBLEMATIC BUILDING OF  
SALGÓTARJÁN'S NEW CENTRE  
COMMUNITY CENTRE,  
GYÖRGY SZROGH, 1962 – 1966**

EMBLEMATICKÁ STAVBA NOVÉHO  
CENTRA SALGÓTARJÁNU  
SPOLOČENSKÉ STREDISKO,  
GYÖRGY SZROGH, 1962 – 1966

Source Zdroj: contemporary postcard



**SZEKSZÁRD'S NEW CENTRE,  
KÁROLY JURCSIK, LEVENTE  
VARGA, 1965 – 1967**

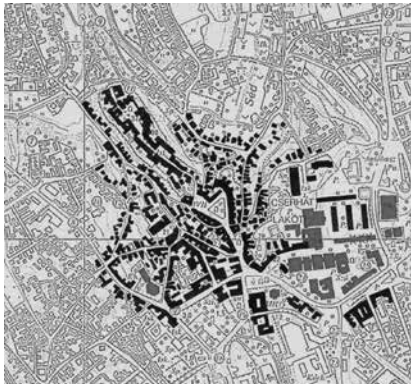
NOVÉ CENTRUM SZEKSZÁRDU,  
1965 – 1967, KÁROLY JURCSIK,  
LEVENTE VARGA, 1965 – 1967

Photo Foto: Kornélia Kissfazekas

New centres were planned according to new urban planning paradigms. While socialist realism – as discussed earlier – was conservative in many aspects, its basic structural and spatial principles were compatible with the composition and structure of historical towns. However, by the time of large-scale construction of institutional complexes, the basic principles of modernism had returned. These principles did not favour traditional urban design values. In each case, open blocks were an important element of the urban design concept, and buildings were not organised around the block perimeter. This made the role of the surrounding street confused and disorganized. Institutional complexes built in this period did not find their place and context within the historical environment.<sup>33</sup> While strongly politicised socialist realist spaces could be easily assimilated in the course of time due to their traditional spatial structure, modernist town centres with their self-contained tools of urban design and architecture and their often provincialised, “ cliché ” shapes posed serious contextual problems for historical towns.<sup>34</sup>

**3 EXAMPLES OF LARGE INSTITUTIONAL COMPLEXES BUILT WITHIN A HISTORICAL URBAN PATTERN**

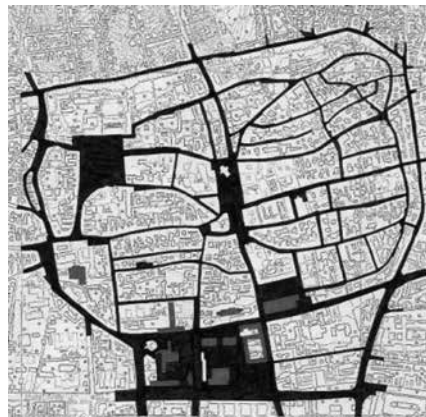
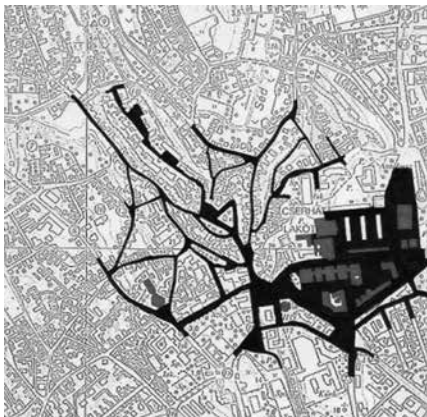
TRI PŘÍKLADY VELKÝCH KOMPLEXOV SÍDEL INŠTITUCIÍ POSTAVENÝCH V HISTORICKEJ MESTSKEJ ŠTRUKTÚRE



**VESZPRÉM, PÉCS, SZOLNOK BUILDINGS – URBAN TISSUE**

BUDOVY VO VESZPRÉME, V PÉCSI, V SZOLNOKU – MESTSKÉ TKANIVO

Author Autorka: Kornélia Kissfazeakas



**VESZPRÉM, PÉCS, SZOLNOK – URBAN STRUCTURE (NEW BUILDINGS IN GREY)**

VESZPRÉM, PÉCS, SZOLNOK – MESTSKÁ ŠTRUKTÚRA (NOVÉ OBJEKTY ZNAČENÉ SIVOU FARBOU)

Author Autorka: Kornélia Kissfazeakas

**The 1970s**

After several years of preparation, the National Settlement Network Development Framework Plan was adopted in 1971 as a long-term national directive. One of its main objectives was to develop five large towns (Debrecen, Miskolc, Pécs Szeged and Győr) into sufficiently significant regional centres to provide a counterbalance to the central and privileged situation of Budapest. The intention to decentralize, as formulated in the Framework Plan, had been present for years, but only the official adoption of the plan itself only gave it a green light to proceed.

The framework assigned hierarchical roles to settlements, prescribing the “contents” of town centres – in other words, the type and range of central services they had to provide to their surroundings based on their situation within the settlement network. Towns were also tasked with the establishment of new institutions which were necessary to achieve long-term goals in availability of public services, in accordance with their newly designated roles. These public service assignments, entailing obligatory tasks for settlements, as well as the obvious competition for



**CENTRAL INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS CONSTRUCTED USING THE PREFABRICATED UNIVÁZ FRAME**

BUDOVY ÚSTREDNÝCH INŠTITÚCIÍ POSTAVENÉ S VYUŽITÍM PREFABRIKOVANÝCH KONŠTRUKCIÍ UNIVÁZ

**THE BUILDING OF THE CITY COUNCIL, ZALAEGRSZEG KÁROLY SZERDAHELYI, MIKLÓSNÉ SEREGDY, 1969**

HLAVNÁ BUDOVA MESTSKÉHO ÚRADU, ZALAEGRSZEG KÁROLY SZERDAHELYI, MIKLÓSNÉ SEREGDY, 1969

Source Zdroj: Magyar Építőművészet, 1972, 5



**HOUSE OF PIONEERS, SZEKSZÁRD GYULA LÓRINCZI, 1974**

DOM PIONIEROV, SZEKSZÁRD GYULA LÓRINCZI, 1974

Source Zdroj: Magyar Építőművészet, 1977, 6

prestige, generated significant quasi-demands for development. The 1970s are regarded as perhaps the most eventful era for building central institutions in Hungarian towns.<sup>35</sup> The guiding principle of cost-effectiveness, however, became prevalent almost at the same time as town centre developments did. A new ministerial instruction was decreed in 1972 to block “costly and excessively demanding town centre development projects containing self-serving decorative elements so as to use available financial resources in a more practical manner”;<sup>36</sup> it also named housing projects as the new priority. The energy crisis of 1973 – 1974 had its impact on urbanism and building policy as well. The Ministry included the National Planning Bureau in the process of issuing permits, which in turn kept investment costs under strict control. The investment costs of planned buildings were monitored by means of established financial norms: target numbers could only be exceeded with an exemplary permit.<sup>37</sup> The combination of the shortage of money, the desire to impress and the puritanical modernity of the new architectural attitude – wishing to ostentatiously renounce the approach and tools of socialist realism, which had permanently come to an end in 1957 – had a very negative effect on urbanism.<sup>38</sup> For most of the 1960s there was no prefabricated structure on the

VESZPRÉM: HOUSING PROJECT, DEVELOPMENT PLAN CREATED IN PREPARATION FOR A COMMERCIAL AND SERVICE BUILDING COMPLEX, OBLITERATING PRE-EXISTING PLOT STRUCTURE AND REWRITING THE HISTORICAL STREET NETWORK

VESZPRÉM: SÍDLISKO, PLÁN ZÁSTAVBY SÚBORU BUDOV PRE OBCHOD A SLUŽBY NAVRHOVAL ZBÚRANIE PÔVODNEJ HISTORICKEJ ŠTRUKTÚRY A PREPÍSANIE HISTORICKEJ ULIČNEJ SIETE

Source Zdroj: BME Department of Urban Planning and Design, photo archives



THE COMPLETED BUILDING COMPLEX, LÁSZLÓ MÁRTON, 1975

DOKONČENÝ SÚBOR, LÁSZLÓ MÁRTON, 1975

Source Zdroj: <http://www.legifoto.com/>

market for constructing public institutional buildings, but by the end of the decade, as prefabrication emerged, UNIVÁZ – an industrially produced frame for institutional buildings, based on the principles of size-standardisation and size-coordination – entered the market.<sup>39</sup>

Practicality, standardisation, normative thinking, as well as planning had a marked impact on the architectural quality of the era as well. The construction of standardised and schematic central buildings and building complexes was the logical consequence of an approach that considered buildings to be elements of a network with varying functions rather than individual structures.

The construction industry had command over planning processes. A combination of poor technological quality provided by the industry, low-quality materials, the lack of a sufficient intellectual-material culture and morale for architecture for modernism, which was encouraged, for the most part, only in a formal sense, negligence and funding problems resulted in an unfortunate architectural atmosphere.

Nothing demonstrates the failure of these increasingly practical and fiscally-driven plans—as well as that of the “scientific” analysis of town centre reconstructions and the accompanying concept of reorganisation—more so than Pál Granasztói, a prominent Hungarian urban designer and theorist, who went as far as to question the necessity itself of town centre planning in his 1976 book analysing the era and his own career. His view is especially interesting as he himself had analysed town centres and their reconstruction in several in-depth studies from the early 1950s onwards.<sup>40</sup>

## The 1980s

Up to the early 1980s, traffic and transportation aspects were not considered to be of much importance in town centre planning, but reducing congestion, building bypasses and creating low-traffic and pedestrian zones was quickly to become a priority in urban development. The diversion of through traffic away from centres improved the functionality and liveability of these areas, and allowed for new possibilities in the reorganisation of these public spaces by employing structural, architectural and landscaping tools. The functions in space and time of these environments, newly relieved of traffic congestion, could now be differentiated, providing the ground floors of surrounding buildings with new functions as well. A more complex urban renewal approach emerged, its focus the protection of values. A ministerial work programme was implemented in 1980 in order to clarify the problems regarding these rehabilitation projects.

Town centre planning was at this time already employing this approach and involved more delicate changes – building in empty plots and block rehabilitation projects. Post-modernism emerged, very belatedly. At the Faculty of Architecture in Budapest, students were translating the works of Aldo Rossi, Robert Venturi and the Krier brothers, filling the college newspaper with their architectural drawings and urban design schemes.

The approach that considered tradition, historicity and the connectedness of architecture and urban design as values to be cherished finally began to regain its rightful place in professional



**INSURANCE HEADQUARTERS,  
NYÍREGYHÁZA, ISTVÁN LENGYEL,  
LATE 1980S**

RIADITELSTVO POISŤOVNÍ,  
NYÍREGYHÁZA, ISTVÁN LENGYEL,  
KONIEC OSEMDESIATYCH ROKOV  
20. STOROČIA

Source Zdroj: Magyar Építőművészet,  
1990, 5



**COMMERCIAL CENTER  
ISTVÁN KISTELEGDY, LATE 1980S**

OBCHODNÉ CENTRUM  
ISTVÁN KISTELEGDY, KONIEC  
OSEMDESIATYCH ROKOV  
20. STOROČIA

Photo Foto: Kornélia Kissfazekas

circles, after a period of long neglect. The results, however, in practice, were not always unequivocally positive. In many cases, the only satisfactory option for fitting a building to its environment was considered to be the use of a sloped roof, denouncing modernist flat roofs. Today we can see that the architectural and landscaping design elements and tools used in reference to traditionalism, and fitting into the environment were often become obsolete quite rapidly. Nevertheless, it was a great revelation that can be viewed as the urban planning aspect of changes in political atmosphere resulting in the political transformations of the fall of communism in 1989/1990.

**1** HIRT, Sonja: Whatever happened to the (post)socialist city? *Cities* 32, 2013, pp. 29 – 38.

**2** GERMUSKA, Pál: Ipari város, új város, szocialista város. *Korall*, 11 – 12, pp. 239 – 259. Available at <http://epa.oszk.hu/00400/00414/00008/pdf/11germuska.pdf> 04.11.2014. Accessed 13 April 2016.

**3** SZIRMAI, Viktória: 'Socialist' Cities (New Towns) in the Postsocialist Era, Social Change and Urban Restructuring in Central Europe. Ed. György Enyedi. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó 1998, pp. 169 – 189.

**4** The underlying research relies on the contemporary professional press (books, journals), a significant amount of them having strong ties to the author's place of research. The predecessor of the Department of Urban Planning was the educational centre and base of theoretical knowledge of urban design for many decades, and the site of a large part of contemporary research and publication.

**5** GERŐ, László: Építészeti műemlékek feltárása, helyreállítása és védelme. 1959. Available at <http://ep-tort.bme.hu/doc/mueml/mueml12.doc>. Accessed 15 April 2016.

**6** *Ibid.*, p. 42.

**7** PRAKFAALVI, Endre – SZÜCS, György: A szocreál Magyarországon, Budapest, Corvina, 2010.

**8** *Ibid.*, p. 53.

**9** At that time, the Department of Urban Construction, Technical University of Budapest.

**10** In 1960 – 1962, led by dr. Imre Perényi, involving Faragó Kálmán, dr. Pál Granasztói – Dénes Ihrig (Vác), György Keresztély, Lajos Mező (Szentes); as external contributors: prof. János Brenner (Szombathely), Imre Pap (Kecskemét, Szeged), dr. Tibor Weiner (Miskolc).

**11** BOLZ, Lothár: A városépítés alapelvei. *Településtudományi Közlemények* 1952. júl. pp. 115 – 135.

**12** Approximately a dozen so-called socialist New Towns, with industrial and/or mining roles, were constructed in Hungary. The construction of the first one, Dunaújváros (then called Sztálinváros) commenced in 1949, on the basis of plans by Tibor Weiner. SZIRMAI, Viktória: Egy 'új' városfejlesztési út ígérete. Ed. Viktória Szirmai. *Csinált városok a XXI. sz. elején*,

Budapest, MTA-Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont, Szociológiai Intézet, 2013, pp. 11 – 29. KISSFAZEKAS, Kornélia: Relationships between politics, cities and architecture based on the examples of two Hungarian new towns. *Cities* 48, pp. 99 – 108.

**13** Előterjesztés Sztálinváros városrendezési tervének jóváhagyása tárgyában. MOL. XXVI-D-8-f/1952/88. d. (Magyar Országos Levéltár – Városépítő Tudományos és Tervező Intézet – Tervtár – 88. doboz. Available at <http://sztalinvaros.uw.hu/egyeb/eloterjesztes.htm>.

**14** KISSFAZEKAS, Kornélia: Metamorphosis of public spaces in Hungary or the question of context within the public spaces of the communist and post-communist period. *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 37 (3). 2013, pp. 182 – 193.

**15** A felszabadulás utáni 25 év városrendezési irányzatainak és módszereinek tudományos analízise és értékelése – javaslat a városrendezési elveinek és módszereinek továbbfejlesztésére I-II. Budapest, Városépítési Tanszék 1973, pp. 109 – 130.

**16** BARKA, Gábor – FEHÉRVÁRI, Zoltán – PRAKFAALVI, Endre: Dunaújvárosi építészeti kalauz, 1950 – 1960. 2007. Dunaújvárosi Megyei Jogú Város Önkormányzata; SYLVESZTER, Ádám: Különutas magyar szocreál; *Magyar Építőművészet Utóirat* XIV, (75) 2014, pp. 33 – 35; KISSFAZEKAS, Kornélia: Relationships between politics, cities and architecture based on the examples of two Hungarian new towns. *Cities* 48, pp. 99 – 108.

**17** In 1955, Imre Perényi, the primary official urban design theorist of the period, launched an attack on the stylistic orientation he thought was "meant to be romantic, but is essentially archaic" and created pronouncedly axial and symmetric compositions following Soviet examples, without considering that this style had had a much longer historical context in the Soviet Union. He introduced "Socialist romanticism" as a new – positive – concept, which was characterised by intelligence, gracefulness, liveliness and diversity, along with monumentality. *Ibid.*

**18** KISSFAZEKAS, Kornélia: Transformations of Hungarian traditional town. *AR* 1. 2013, pp. 92 – 101. Available at <http://www.fa.uni-lj.si/>

## Conclusion

Centres of towns in Central-Eastern Europe are important reminders of their common histories. Several decades of state socialism left its mark on them in morphological, urban design and architectural ways, and these have very similar properties in former socialist countries. Apart from unique local features, many similarities can be found in the socialist realist architecture of the 1950s and the stylistic elements of socialist modernism. This is a legacy that all of these countries have to deal with in a similar way. The socialist realist era did not substantially affect the centres of most Hungarian towns. Due to its conservative urban planning approach, the products of socialist realism could be easily assimilated later. The role of modernist “new” institutional centres is much more controversial. These were viable parts of town centres while they were still socially accepted and had a relevant political context. However, after the change of regime, they lost their substance and functions and found themselves in a contextual vacuum, which led to dramatic changes. Their rigid form, morally and physically degraded condition and, most of all, their public perception made them unable for transformation or adaptation. Their functions were replaced by new urban elements. Their reuse was a hard task for local governments everywhere, mostly because even their existing good qualities are only visible for architects. For the urban population, they represent a foreign, widely rejected architectural style. Nevertheless, transforming and reinterpreting their public environment with contemporary tools provides a peculiar opportunity and possibility that a large number of towns are currently trying to address with varying degrees of success. Apparently local leaders see this as one of the most manageable and popularly accepted ways to reinterpret state socialist urban heritage.<sup>41</sup>

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**21 SIMON, Mariann:** ‘Megteremteni elméletünk és gyakorlatunk egységét ...’ Elmélet és gyakorlat 1952 – 1956. Kortárs építészet II. (2) 2000. Available at [http://arch.et.bme.hu/arch\\_old/kortars6.html#2](http://arch.et.bme.hu/arch_old/kortars6.html#2). Accessed 30 October 2014. **BARKA, Gábor – FEHÉRVÁRI, Zoltán – PRAKFULVI, Endre:** Dunaújvárosi építészeti kalauz, 1950 – 1960. 2007. Dunaújvárosi Megyei Jogú Város Önkormányzata

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**24 BRENNER János:** Salgótarján városközpontjának rendezésére kiírt tervpályázat. Városépítés, február 1966, pp. 13 – 16.

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**31 Designed by Károly Jurcsik and Levente Varga (planned in: 1965 – 1967).**

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