

MSG Moderne Stadtgeschichte, Bd. 50/1 (2019), 46-62

DOI: 10.60684/msg.v50i1.2019104

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A City of Multiple Hearts. Historic Squares of Budapest from the 19th Century to the Present

MSG Moderne Stadtgeschichte

ISSN: 2941-6159 online

<https://moderne-stadtgeschichte.de>

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A City of Multiple Hearts: Historic Squares of Budapest from the 19th Century to the Present

Budapest is one of those European cities which do have a historic centre but do not possess one dominant main square today. The article traces the evolution of Budapest as a multi-focal city, concentrating on the network of its historic squares and seeking explanations for the city's polycentric character. Among the explanations, historical discontinuities will be featured alongside radical inner-city reconstruction projects, carried out at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries; that was the time when the original town hall and town hall square of the Pest side disappeared, together with much of the Pest Inner City's premodern urban tissue. Subsequent sections emphasize further, unrealized plans of grandiose inner-city reconstruction in various phases of the city's history, including the failed attempts of establishing a new central "Forum" in the inter-war period, the cancelled plans of Communist governments to refashion the inner city in the spirit of "Socialist" architecture, and the never-completed project of erecting a new, central City Hall throughout the 20th and early 21st century.

The article pays special attention to the functional diversity of historic squares, highlighting various types of squares which have augmented each other since the time of their construction and which all carry some functions of single-centre towns' traditional main squares. As far as the present physiology of Budapest is concerned, today's municipal government structure and the extensive autonomy of the individual districts will also be identified among the reasons for the city's multi-focal nature.

1. Introduction

Several European towns and cities possess imposing main squares, marking out the traditional forum of civic life, and reminding visitors as well as residents of the place where public activities, commerce, and spiritual life used to be concentrated in earlier centuries. Although these cities have long outgrown their historic cores, their centres have preserved much of the former, early modern and medieval urban tissue, including the distinguished central square, home to a town hall, cathedral, or marketplace – or all these together.¹

¹ For the typical spatial patterns of European town development in the Middle Ages, see Leonardo Benevolo, *The History of the City*, Cambridge, MS. 1980, especially Chapter 6 (European Cities in the Middle Ages), pp. 287-500. For the varieties of medieval cities' transformation of during the modern period, see Thomas Hall, *Planning Europe's Capital*

Other European towns developed differently, and evolved into multifocal cities. A third type of city, although it also developed radially outwards from a medieval or early modern core, began to lose its clear, traditional focus by the modern period; instead of having one distinguished central square attracting most important functions, a city of this type came to be characterized by a network of several, equally important squares, with communal, social, commercial, political, and symbolic functions often divided among them. The latter pattern became particularly characteristic of larger cities, especially if the broadly defined city centre was composed of formerly separate, independent townships, each possessing their own main squares and marketplaces. The lack of one dominant central square is also typical of those cities whose innermost core underwent radical reconstruction at some point during the 19th or 20th century – most prominently Paris –, and therefore the medieval and early modern urban tissue was overlaid by newer patterns.

Budapest is one of those European cities which do have a historic centre but do not possess one dominant main square today. Although the Pest side of the city, lying east of the river Danube, is characterized by geographers as monofocal in the morphological sense that is, it has developed in concentric circles or zones outward from the historic core)², that side of the city lacks a clear, dominant focal point today. West of the Danube, the Buda side is even less focussed; due to its hilly geography and the former separateness of its constituent parts, Buda has developed throughout its entire history in a multifocal or multicore manner.

Concentrating on the network of its major squares, this article traces the 19th- and 20th-century evolution of downtown Budapest seeking explanations for its multifocal character. Among the explanations, the article will discuss historical discontinuities as well as radical inner-city reconstruction projects, carried out at the turn of the 19th to the 20th centuries; but it will also emphasize further, unrealized plans of grandiose inner-city reconstruction, including the failed attempts of establishing a new central ‘Forum’ in the interwar period and the never-completed project of erecting a new, central city hall. As far as the present physiology of Budapest is concerned, the district system and today’s municipal government structure will also be identified among the reasons for the city’s multifocal nature today.

Cities. Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Urban Development, London 1997.

² Tamás Csapó/Tibor Lenner, *Settlement Morphology of Budapest*, Cham 2016, p. 10, quoting Éva Izsák, *A városfejlődés természeti és társadalmi tényezői. Budapest és környéke* [Natural and social factors of urban development. Budapest and its surroundings], Budapest 2003.

2. How Budapest has developed multiple hearts: historical reasons for the city's multi-focal character

Hungary's capital city Budapest as such was created in 1873 by the unification of three formerly independent parts, namely the two royal chartered towns of Buda and Pest, and a non-chartered, minor noble town named Óbuda.³ Prior to the administrative merger, each of the three constituent towns had had a long history of autonomous development, disrupted at times by historical events and disasters.

After the end of the Ottoman rule in the late 17th century, the rebuilding of the two war-ravaged towns produced an entirely new housing stock, although the street network still preserved much of the mediaeval structure. New town halls were erected in the centers of both Buda and Pest, overlooking spacious squares.

18th-century Buda and Pest, and the modern city which grew out of them later, were barely continuous with their pre-Ottoman predecessors as far as their building stock was concerned. Apart from the street network and some renovated ecclesiastical buildings, the earlier, mediaeval and early modern heritage lay buried under the 18th-century Baroque town houses. On the Pest side, those 18th-century town houses and palaces did not persist for too long either. Some were replaced by new structures erected as part of city beautification efforts during the first decades of the 19th century⁴, and some were destroyed by a natural disaster: in March 1838, a devastating flood of the Danube River damaged much of the Pest side housing stock, reaching even relatively remote suburbs of the city.⁵

After the reconstruction, the inner city of Pest acquired a new look: in the 1840s, it was characterized by the dominance of two- or three-storey, Classicist buildings. Some churches and public buildings, which survived from the 18th century, changed beyond recognition; the Town Hall of Pest is a case in point.

³ For the unification of Pest, Buda, and Óbuda, and the legal background of the merger, see Károly Vörös, *Birth of Budapest. Building of a Metropolis, 1873-1918*, in: András Gerő/János Poór (eds.), *Budapest. A History from its Beginnings to 1998*, Boulder, CO/New York 1997, pp. 103-138; Gábor Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience. Fin-de-Siècle Budapest*, Boulder, CO 2004, pp. 3-9.

⁴ For the activities of the Pest Commission for City Beautification see László Siklóssy, *Hogyan épült Budapest? A Fővárosi Közmunkák Tanácsának története 1830-1970* [How Budapest has been built. The history of the Council of Public Works, 1870-1930], Budapest 1931 (reprint 2004), p. 39.

⁵ About the flood of 1838, the subsequent reconstruction and their impact on the cityscape see, for example, Vera Bácskai/Gábor Gyáni/András Kubinyi, *Budapest története. A kezdetektől 1945-ig* [History of Budapest: from the beginnings to 1945]. Budapest 2000, p. 97.

When reconstructed after the flood of 1838 by József Hild in Classicist style, the originally Baroque-style Town Hall completely changed its external look. During this reconstruction in 1842, a second floor was added to the building, and a further, third floor later in 1863.⁶ Despite the vigorous renovation activity of the 1840s, the inner city of Pest preserved the atmosphere of a premodern small town, due to the dimensions of the mostly two- or three-storey buildings and the network of irregular, often narrow streets dotted by several little squares.⁷

The modernizing ambitions of the fin-de-siècle, however, called for the creation of a new Budapest, a metropolis of international acclaim, and that entailed the transformation of the still small-town-like inner city of Pest as well. The first plans for the area's regulation were drawn up by 1872 as part of Budapest's general development plan, but little of those plans was carried out in practice. In the 1890s, however, a truly radical reconstruction of the area's urban tissue began.⁸ In accordance with the city's general development plan of 1872, Act XIV of 1893 ordered the construction of two new bridges, one of them soon to be named after Empress Elisabeth, spouse of Emperor Franz Joseph I, r. 1848-1916 (in Hungary, Queen Elisabeth and King Franz Joseph I, crowned in 1867). This new bridge would connect the inner city of Pest with the Tabán area of the Buda side, and was supposed to serve as a major transportation connection, carrying a significant amount of traffic across the Danube. Urban planning considerations and traffic reasons together demanded the construction of a broad thoroughfare that would break through the inner city, channeling the traffic of today's Rákóczi (at that time Kerepesi) Road onto the would-be Elisabeth Bridge.

The construction of Elisabeth Bridge and the roadways leading up to it triggered off an extensive and thoroughgoing reconstruction of the inner city of

⁶ See Berza, p. 600.

⁷ The atmosphere of the small squares is well visible in contemporary drawings and engravings: see, for example, Fischplatz und Stadtpfarrkirche in Pest (Fish Square and the inner city parish church). Engraving by J. Riegel based on L. Rohbock's drawing, 1850s, Municipal Ervin Szabó Library / Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár, Budapest Képtárchívum 022982, <https://bpkep.fszek.hu/CorvinaWeb?action=onelong&recnum=794657&pos=4> [December 28, 2018]. To capture the image of the old town hall and its environs in the same period, see, for example, Stadthaus in Pesth (The Town Hall in Pest). Engraving by J. Poppel based on L. Rohbock's drawing, Municipal Ervin Szabó Library / Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár, Budapest Képtárchívum AN055063, <https://bpkep.fszek.hu/CorvinaWeb?action=onelong&recnum=793149&pos=8> [December 28, 2018].

⁸ The most detailed, richly documented history of the inner city's fin-de-siècle reconstruction is Emőke Tomsics, Budapest Atlantisza. A pesti Belváros átalakulása a 19. század végén [The Atlantis of Budapest. The transformation of the Pest Inner City at the end of the 19th century], Budapest 2015. For the plans of 1872, see pp. 154-155 and 158.

Pest, which did not only involve the demolition of the earlier building stock and the erection of tall, often five- or six-storey residential palaces (which define the cityscape of downtown Budapest to this day), but the intense rearrangement of the area's street network as well. The cosy little squares of the former, Classicist inner city were all but gone by 1910.⁹



Fig. 1: The old city hall around 1877. Photo: György Klösz.

The town hall with its clock tower – well visible in photographs from the 1870s and 1880s – was demolished in 1900, too. The square that used to lie before the town hall disappeared together with the building itself. The area is not even identifiable today as the place of a former town hall square, since a giant convent and seminary building of the Piarist order was constructed on the same plot between 1913 and 1917. Glancing down at the inner city of Pest from Gellért Hill today, the only structure preserved from the late 19th century cityscape is the Church of Our Lady, that is, the parish church of the inner city standing immediately next to Elisabeth Bridge on the Pest side.

3. The never-completed new city hall of Budapest

Given the radical reconstruction of Pest's inner city, which entailed the disappearance of the old town hall and its square, Budapest obviously needed a new building to house the city's municipal government. The structure selected for

⁹ Tomsics, pp. 200-214.

that purpose was a massive, 18th-century building complex with inner courtyards, which at the time of its construction was located next to the city wall of Pest. This complex was originally built as an asylum for former soldiers handicapped at war. After this institution moved to another location in 1783, the building began to be used as military barracks, and acquired the name Charles Barracks after Emperor Charles VI of Habsburg (r. 1711-1740 as Charles III, King of Hungary).

The spartan complex had only one redeeming feature, namely its relatively dignified façade overlooking Town Hall Street (Városház utca). Otherwise, its bare, stone-paved courtyards were not exactly ideal for the purposes of a central city hall; the building complex as a whole was neither elegant nor decorous enough to express the dignity of Budapest, which, besides being the official capital city of Hungary, by 1892 had acquired the title Royal Seat as well.¹⁰ But it met the basic needs of the municipal government, and was sufficiently large and well-located: it stood near the Inner Boulevard, the broad, semi-circular street which had evolved in lieu of the former city wall, and which was therefore structurally equivalent to Vienna's Ringstrasse. Exactly in that period, the Inner Boulevard – “the small Ring” of Budapest – was beginning to acquire a truly metropolitan look, its old housing stock being replaced by tall, elegant residential buildings; the shops which opened along the boulevard increasingly catered to a middle- and upper-middle-class clientele.

The municipality bought the barracks building in 1894, and, after the necessary renovation, moved into the premises.¹¹ The first competition for the reconstruction of the former Charles Barracks was soon launched as well – opening the long row of unfruitful competitions and unrealized plans. As we will see, the reasons for failure varied from period to period: lack of funding, disagreement over the concept, the advent of war, and political regime changes all contributed to the repeated postponement of the city hall's reconstruction.

¹⁰ The city's earlier title Budapest főváros meant Capital City of Budapest, while Budapest székesfőváros, used from 1892 to 1949, means Capital City and Royal Seat of Budapest. The latter meant that the city functioned as the royal seat of the Hungarian Kingdom, and the Habsburg emperor, who from 1867 was again crowned as king of Hungary as well, could in theory reside in Budapest and not only in Vienna. About the significance and circumstances of Budapest gaining its new title, see, for example, Robert Nemes, *The once and future Budapest*, DeKalb, IL 2005, p. 181.

¹¹ About Act XX of 1894 and the reasons for utilizing the Charles Barracks for the purposes of the municipality, see A Fővárosi Közmunkák Tanácsának hivatalos jelentése 1897. évi működéséről [Official Report of the Council of Public Works on its operations in the 1897], Budapest 1898, p. 35.

Between the two world wars, the issue of the city hall's renewal was closely intertwined with the concept of creating a new "Forum" for downtown Budapest.¹² The idea was to create a real center for the city, functionally similar to the Forum Romanum in Rome, which would in fact consist of a series of magnificent squares connected by the Inner Boulevard and would stretch from Saint Stephen's Basilica to Astoria. Although several good plans were submitted in 1929 and in the 1936 Forum competition, then also in a subsequent one announced specifically for the design of new city hall in 1939-40¹³, all the plans remained on paper, in spite of the fact that these competitions mobilized a large part of the Hungarian architectural profession, and there was also serious support for the concept on the part of the Budapest municipality. The entries of the Forum competitions proposed several spectacular ideas; some of them placed the new Hungarian National Theatre on either Elisabeth Square (an idea that would prevail into the 1990s) or at the inner-city end of a newly planned Elisabeth Boulevard, while others envisioned Elisabeth Square as the new location of a brand new city hall.¹⁴ Even though the majority of the architects left the existing city hall where it was, practically all of them proposed to extend, enlarge and modernize it, sometimes adding a high-rise tower to the city hall complex (see Fig. 2.) In the early 1940s, however, the war blocked large-scale plans for the town hall and the city centre, and after 1945, amidst the difficulties of the postwar years, these kinds of public projects were again postponed. The Buda side of the city – with the exception of the government quarter in the Buda Castle area – evolved as a predominantly residential area in the interwar period, with extensive parts undergoing dynamic development financed by private investment. That was one reason why unrealized plans were less characteristic of it than of the Pest side. On the other hand, South Buda involved into an important symbolic landscape of the "Christian-Conservative" Horthy Era, complete with several new churches, ecclesiastical schools

¹² For a discussion of the Forum concept, including the plans for the new city hall, see András Ferkai, *Pest építészete a két világháború között* [The Architecture of Pest between the two world wars], Budapest 2001, pp. 51-52. Ferkai's book includes the introductory essay "The Urban Development of Pest" in English as well as in Hungarian. For the origins of the Forum concept, see Ferenc Harrer, *A Fővárosi Közmunkák Tanácsa, 1930-1940* [The Council of Public Works, 1930-1940], Budapest 1941, pp. 106-110; for a contemporary discussion of the area's planning, see Virgil Bierbauer, *Városépítési problémák Budapest bevárosának északi oldalán* [Urban planning problems on the northern side of the Budapest Inner City], in: *Tér és Forma* 9:7, 1936, pp. 189-201.

¹³ Gábor Preisich, *A budapesti Városháza kibővítésének tervpályázata 1940-ben* [The planning competition for the extension of the Budapest City Hall in 1940], in: *Budapesti Negyed* 5:4, 1997 – 6:1, 1998, pp. 48-68.

¹⁴ Several outstanding plans are described in Bierbauer, pp. 198-201 (with illustrations).

and religious institutions, so those construction projects received substantial amounts of government funding.¹⁵

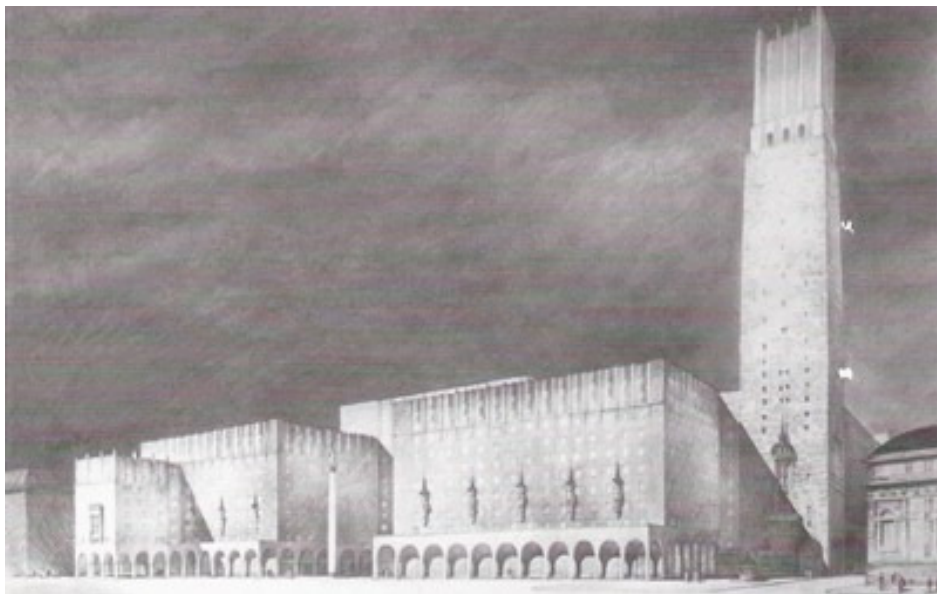


Fig. 2: Prize-winning plan of the new City Hall, 1940 (unrealized), Architects Róbert Kertész K. and Károly Weichinger.

A few years after the war, the Communist takeover made the construction of a new city hall pointless anyway. In 1950, when Greater Budapest was eventually created by decree under the Stalinist regime, traditional municipal autonomy disappeared together with everything else that the city hall used to symbolize. In the new Soviet-type council system, there was no need to underline the importance of the Budapest city council by awarding it a new building. The city council got integrated into the power machinery of the party state, and its role was largely reduced to the execution of orders and concepts arriving from the Politburo and the central government.

¹⁵ For an overview of the Buda side's development, see András Ferkai, *Buda építésze a két világháború között* [The architecture of Buda between the two world wars], Budapest 1995, pp. 10-29.

Ironically, the Stalinist regime also had great ambitions to transform the city centre along the lines of a new, “Socialist” vision¹⁶, but it was no more successful in accomplishing that goal than the interwar governments had been in creating their magnificent “Forum”. Under the pressure of tasks posed by postwar reconstruction and a severe housing shortage, caused partly by damages of World War II and partly by the fast growth of the postwar Budapest population, the plans of the city center’s large-scale reconstruction remained unrealized throughout the entire Communist period.

In sum, no new city hall has ever been constructed in Budapest since the municipal government moved into the Charles Barracks in 1898. Budapest’s City Hall, occupying the former barracks complex to this day, has been occasionally renovated but has never undergone significant reconstruction since the fin-de-siècle, despite recurring competitions and plans – including a recent competition in 2008. Although the competitors of 2008 submitted several ingenious plans, and the originality of the prize-winning design by Erick van Egeraat and his associates¹⁷ was undeniable, the project was eventually again taken off the agenda and remains unrealized.

4. The physiology of multiple hearts: the functional diversity of Budapest’s squares

As the building which houses the Budapest city hall to this day is very close to Charles Boulevard (Károly körút), no proper square could ever develop in front of it. The classic town hall square functions thus moved elsewhere, to certain nearby squares and to more distant locations.

¹⁶ The contributions of an urban planning symposium, the presentations of which also discussed the city centre, were published in Gábor Preisich/Aladár Sós/János Brenner (eds.), Budapest városépítészeti kérdései. Az 1953. nov. 20-21-én tartott ankét anyaga [Urban planning issues of Budapest. Proceedings of the symposium held on 20-21 November, 1953], Budapest 1954. The concepts are analyzed in retrospect by Endre Prakfalvi, Az 1953-as városépítészeti vita [The urban planning debate of 1953], in: Budapesti Negyed 3:3, 1995, (“Építők és építetők”), pp. 190-204.

¹⁷ For reports on the 2008 competition, introducing design plans by Egeraat’s atelier as well and other architects, see the Hungarian architectural journal *epiteszforum.hu*. About the prize-winning atelier and their plans, see Erick van Egeraat építészirodája a „Városháza Fórum” pályázat győztese [Erick van Egeraat’s atelier is the winner of the ‘City Hall Forum’ competition], *epiteszforum.hu*, 31 October 2008, <http://epiteszforum.hu/erick-van-egeraat-epiteszirodaja-a-varoshaza-forum-palyazat-gyoztese> [December 27, 2018].

4.1. Social and recreational functions: major downtown squares on the edge of the old inner city

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, several community functions of the missing town hall square were assumed by Deák Square and Elisabeth Square (Erzsébet tér). Those two large, interconnected squares are located near the city hall, just outside the imaginary line where the 18th-century city wall used to run. In the 1910s and in the late 1920s, Elisabeth Square featured as a possible candidate for the role of a town hall square; some planners and architects proposed the construction of a new city hall in the middle of the square's vast, landscaped space.¹⁸

Both squares functioned as bustling public spaces in the interwar period as well as in the post-war era, and continued to function as social hubs under the Communist regime. Today's Deák Square, at the intersection of three subway lines, is probably the most popular meeting point of the inner city, with street musicians and throngs of pedestrian traffic. Erzsébet Square, with its well-groomed park (attracting young picnickers day and night), historic fountain, playgrounds, skate park, giant ferris wheel, cafés, bars, and The Pit (Gödör), the largest terraced bar area of Budapest's downtown which includes concert venues, is nowadays a centrally important space of urban recreation and entertainment.

Vörösmarty, until 1926, Gisela or Gizella, Square, about a hundred meters from Deák Square, has been another candidate for attracting at least some functions of the non-existent town hall square throughout the 20th and early 21st century. Technically speaking, this square was not part of the early modern inner city either, as it evolved outside the city wall. In the early 19th century, however, it acquired cultural and social significance in the life of the dynamically expanding town of Pest as the site of the German-language theatre and as a promenade area of the urban elites (hence its changing 19th-century names such as Spazierplatz, Theaterplatz, Deutscher Theaterplatz, Alter Theaterplatz, Játékszín tér (Theatre Square)). Then it acquired the stable name of Gisela Square (Gizella tér) in 1874, re-baptized as Vörösmarty Square only in 1926.¹⁹

¹⁸ See for example Dr. Antal Heteés's concept (1912) and Péter Kaffka's plan (1929) presented in Virgil Bierbauer, *Városerépítési problémák Budapest Belvárosának északi oldalán* [Urban planning problems on the northern side of the Budapest Inner City], in: *Tér és Forma* 9:7, 1936, pp. 189-201, here pp. 197-199.

¹⁹ Péter Buza/Mihály Ráday (eds.), *Budapest teljes utcanévlexikona* [Complete Lexicon of Budapest street names], Budapest 1998, pp. 419-420. In general, Buza and Ráday's lexicon contains all the former historic names of Budapest streets and squares, including the customarily used German ones from before 1867.

Seeking a function in the late 19th century – after the theatre building was heavily damaged and eventually closed after 1849, and the German theatre as an institution moved to another location – Gisela Square fulfilled primarily social roles. Located at the end of shopping streets frequented by the middle classes and the elites, with its patisserie-café Gerbeaud and elegant shops around its central space, it occupied a distinguished place in the specifically female social life of the Budapest bourgeoisie at the fin de siècle and in the inter-war period²⁰, and retained some of those connotations even in the late 20th century.

All that said, Gisela (and later Vörösmarty) Square never quite made it to the rank of the *main* promenade site of middle- and upper-middle-class Budapest society. Until 1944, that function was monopolized by the “Corso”, the classic promenade route of bourgeois society on the Pest-side Danube embankments, in front of the most elegant, upscale Budapest hotels.²¹ In the late Communist period, namely in the 1980s, Vörösmarty Square was beneficially affected by the conversion of its neighbouring area into a pedestrian zone. In the last decades of the 20th century, the square found itself a new function as the site of fairs such as the annual Book Festival Week in June or the annual Christmas Fair, which has been intended to give the square similar functions to those of the Rathausplatz in Vienna during the Christmas season.

4.2. Political functions: major squares of the late 19th century as symbolic spaces

Not only the festive and social functions of the non-existent town hall square have been assumed by various public spaces in Budapest. Further *agora* functions of the ideal central town hall square have been taken over by other spaces, too, during the 20th and 21st century; public events, mass rallies, commemorations and demonstrations tended to take place on certain characteristic squares, all products of late 19th-century monumental city planning.

The functional diversification of urban squares and the appearance of new types of public spaces was an all-European phenomenon of the modern period. As a new feature of 19th-century city planning, monumental squares were created as part of great urban reconstruction projects, designed to accommodate

²⁰ About the public and semiprivate spaces which the female members of the urban bourgeoisie could attend, see Gábor Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban experience. Fin-de-Siècle Budapest*, Boulder, CO 2004, p. 54.

²¹ For the Corso's popularity in the interwar period, see, for example, a contemporary photograph: *Telt ház a Duna-korzón* [The Danube Corso full], 1940, Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár Budapest Gyűjtemény, 022466, <https://bpkep.fszek.hu/CorvinaWeb?action=onelong&recnum=796008&pos=14> [December 27, 2018].

spectacular public buildings with political, cultural and commercial functions. Those buildings were central to the self-representation of modern nation states, constitutional monarchies, and empires, symbolizing the power and cultural advancement of those European countries whose main cities they adorned.

The new squares were therefore often conceived as dignified settings of the monumental public buildings: spacious enough to allow grand vistas, carefully landscaped, and decorated with monuments and statues. The mid-19th-century reconstruction of Paris under Georges-Eugène Haussmann served as a model to several other European capital cities; imperial centres like Vienna, in turn, further mediated the Haussmannian concepts of urban planning to emerging capitals of their regions.

City planners and visionary politicians of Budapest drew upon both the Parisian and the Viennese model. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, no political obstacles and few financial constraints hindered the spectacular development of Budapest as a national capital city; Budapest being conceived as a national prestige project, the monumental public construction schemes were funded generously by parliamentary legislation and government decisions, while private capital joined in to build the private palaces and elegant residential buildings of the main streets and squares of the city.

Between 1880 and 1910, several dignified squares were created in Budapest as products of late 19th-century city planning, including today's Heroes' Square, Kossuth Square, and Liberty Square (Szabadság tér). They were all consciously planned as grandiose ensembles of public and private buildings, landscaped open spaces, statues, and monuments – the latter often added to the squares in later periods, and equally often replaced by new political regimes afterwards.

Heroes' Square was planned as the site of the Millennial Monument (1896–1929), the Hall of Arts (a major exhibition hall inaugurated in 1896), and the Museum of Fine Arts (1900–1906).²² Kossuth Square was conceived as the place of the Hungarian Parliament Building (1885–1904), the Supreme Court (1893–1896, today the building of the Ethnographical Museum), and the Ministry of Agriculture (1885–1887), later it became the setting of Hungarian statesmen's statues, erected in various periods.²³ Szabadság (Liberty) Square was created as

²² András Gerő, *Heroes Square. Budapest: Hungary's History in Stone and Bronze*, Budapest 1990.

²³ For the history of Kossuth Square, including the histories of individual buildings and monuments, see András Gerő, *Térrörő. A Kossuth tér története* [A History of Kossuth Square], Budapest 2008; András Török/Tamás Wachsler, *A nevezetes Országház és a tér, ahol áll*, Budapest 2016. Abridged English version: András Török/Tamás Wachsler, *The Remarkable Hungarian Parliament Building*, Budapest 2016.

the location of the stock exchange, several bank buildings, and from the inter-war period on, iconic monuments of changing political regimes; after 1945, it was chosen as the place of the largest Soviet war memorial in Budapest, located right in front of the United States Embassy.²⁴

Being the sites of key institutions, symbolic functions were coded into these squares from the start, enhanced also by the iconography of their monuments. The above three squares assumed further symbolic functions throughout the 20th century as the sites of innumerable official ceremonies, commemorations, and mass rallies; successive regimes represented their own new cults and ideologies in their public space.²⁵ On the other hand, in the late 20th and early 21st century, recurring mass demonstrations consecrated Heroes' Square, Kossuth Square and Liberty Square as symbolic places of popular protest.²⁶

Besides the above-mentioned main squares with major public buildings and monuments, several minor ones, such as Petőfi Square in the Inner City, next to Elisabeth Bridge, or Bem Square on the Buda side of the Danube, have served as customary sites of dissident behaviour over the past 70 years²⁷, occupying important places in the symbolic topography of popular dissent. In sum, even the spatial traditions of protest are multifocal in Budapest. The spatial logic of marching routes and customary itineraries of mass demonstrations in today's Budapest are very much based on major roads and thoroughfares connecting those symbolic squares and locations described above.

4.3. Homelands of one's own: neighbourhood squares of individual districts

As opposed to the monumental squares of Budapest which were designed as spaces of national significance and have functioned as major symbolic spaces

²⁴ András Török, *A Szabadság tér Budapesten* [Liberty Square in Budapest]. Budapest 2016; György Hajós, *A Szabadság tér* [Liberty Square]. Budapest 2004.

²⁵ To the concept of the conquest of public space, including references to Budapest squares as well as several other Central European cities, see the articles in Rudolf Jaworski/Peter Stachel (eds.), *Die Besetzung des öffentlichen Räumes. Politische Plätze, Denkmäler und Straßennamen im europäischen Vergleich*, Berlin 2006. For changes of regimes in modern Hungarian history, and their impact on the squares discussed in this section, see Gerő, Heroes' Square; Gerő, Tézerő; Miklós Zeidler, *A magyar irredenta kultusz a két világháború között* [The Hungarian irredentist cult between the two world wars], Budapest 2002; Török, *A Szabadság tér*; Török/Wachsler.

²⁶ Erika Szívós, *Orte der Erinnerung, Plätze des Protests – Erinnerung und politische Aktionen im städtischen Raum in Budapest in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: Máté Dávid Tamáska/Barbara Rief Vernay (eds.), *Stadträume des 20. Jahrhunderts in den Donaumetropolen Wien und Budapest* (forthcoming 2019).

²⁷ For the reasons and the symbolic histories of those squares, see Szívós, pp. 22-25 (forthcoming).

throughout their histories, the hearts of local community life have become those minor squares which were also created by 19th-century urban planners in the period of the city's great expansion – but with different intentions in mind.

During the 19th-century evolution of Pest-Buda and later Budapest, these “small-scale neighbourhood squares”²⁸, were often created as part of certain areas' regulation in the former suburbs of Pest (from 1873, districts VI-IX). Some of them served as local, open-air marketplaces in the late 19th century, so they were selected as the locations of municipal market halls in the 1890s when the system of covered markets was adopted in Budapest. Some other neighbourhood squares had parish churches or local schools, or housed the local, district-level offices of municipal administration after 1873.

Of course, such neighbourhood squares had community functions as well, and kept those functions throughout their later histories. It seems as if 19th-century city planners of Budapest had known that a capital city of half a million, one million or more could not be a real home for its inhabitants, and that people needed strong local attachments – a quite understandable consideration in the late 19th century, a time when the population of rapidly expanding Budapest consisted predominantly of first-generation immigrants, people who had come originally from villages and small towns of Hungary. In the 1870s and 1880s, planning experts of the Council of Public Works and the Budapest Municipal Government designed districts consciously with local squares²⁹, despite the high pressure exerted on the authorities by real estate developers, whose interests dictated the utilization of every square meter of the expanding city centre for purposes of property development; and some of those squares were clearly intended to resemble the main squares of premodern towns.

The fin-de-siècle redesigning of already existing, older local squares unfolded with similar aims in mind. Planners consciously strove to create neighbourhoods that could function as quasi small towns in the big city, and planted functions such as churches, administrative offices and schools there.

It can be assumed that these urban planners were not only intent on reproducing the formal characteristics of medieval town squares, but meant to evoke the spirit of those towns as well. They were living and working in the epoch in which the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies wrote *Gemeinschaft und*

²⁸ Kristin Faurest, 10 Spaces. The Stories of Budapest's Small-Scale Neighbourhood Squares, Budapest 2010.

²⁹ A Fővárosi Közmunkák Tanácsának hivatalos jelentése az 1872. évről. [Official report of the Council of Public Works about the year 1872], Budapest 1873, p. 7. This page mentions the already existing Teleki, Kálvária, and Lövölde Squares in the outer sections of districts VII-IX as targets of regulation, and proposes the creation of altogether five new squares, one specifically as a future “market hall square”, in the same areas.

Gesellschaft (1887); and although it is difficult to ascertain whether they were inspired directly by Tönnies' views, they were certainly concerned about the alienating effects of the modern city, and felt nostalgic about the lost community life of premodern towns. Especially those architects who were specialists in the architectural styles of the Middle Ages were preoccupied with mediaeval traditions; some of them viewed themselves as modern-age descendants of mediaeval guild masters and cathedral builders, and they cherished the memory of medieval communes.³⁰

The Hungarian masters of fin-de-siècle Historicist architecture were no doubt also influenced by contemporary Austrian architect Camillo Sitte.³¹ In Sitte's most influential work, *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* (1889), squares occupy a central place: several chapters deal with their morphology, types, the irregularity of historic squares, the relationship between squares and monuments, and the square as a closed unit.

The minor neighbourhood squares of late 19th- and early 20th-century Budapest thus evolved in that spirit, serving chiefly as places of recreation, socializing, and local trade, and kept those functions to this day. On certain occasions in the past, small-scale squares turned into sites of local festivals, both civic and religious, a custom that in some cases survived into the post-World-War-II years. Some of them, like Bakáts Square in District IX, are indeed like the center of a town in the imagined past: an enclosed, urban space framed by Historicist façades, one of the ornate buildings housing the district-level mayor's office and local government; the square is complete with a hospital, a primary school, a music school, a post office, cafés, small shops, and a magnificent neo-Romanesque church; it serves as the place for concerts, festivals, and various other local events in the spring and summer season. Bakáts tér and the other, similar local squares of Budapest, however, remain largely hidden from

³⁰ On Schulek and his views, see Béla Fodor, *Középkori céhmester a nagyvárosban*. Schulek Frigyes [A medieval guild master in the metropolis. Frigyes Schulek], in: *Népszabadság* 57:207, 1999, p. 28.; György Korompay, Steindl Imre és Schulek Frigyes alakja a műegyetemi hagyományban [The figures of Imre Steindl and Frigyes Schulek in the tradition of the Budapest Technical University], in: Alice Horváth (ed.), Steindl Imre (1839-1902) építész, műegyetemi tanár emlékezete [The memory of Imre Steindl, Professor of the Technical University], Budapest 1989, pp. 9-20. Lilla Farbakyné Deklava, Schulek Frigyes. (Az építészet mesterei), Frigyes Schulek (Masters of architecture series)], Budapest 2017; Alice Horváth (ed.), Schulek Frigyes építész önéletírása 1895. február 22-én (az eredeti kézirat szövegét kieg. Schulek János) [The autobiography of architect Frigyes Schulek, on 22 February 1895. Original manuscript augmented by János Schulek], Budapest 1991.

³¹ See Chapter 4 (Wien der Jahrhundertwende: künstlerischer Städtebau versus unbegrenzte Großstadt) in: Vittorio Magnano Lampugnani, *Die Stadt im 20. Jahrhundert I*, pp. 95-126; Schorske, pp. 62-110.

tourist eyes, in spite of their grace, their proximity to busy main roads, and their sometimes spectacular architecture.

5. Outlook

The intention to recreate – or at least simulate – small towns in the big city runs as a hidden thread through late 19th to early 21st-century city planning in Budapest. In the age of Fordist urban planning, the intention to create sub-centres stemmed from rational considerations; local centres were viewed in purely practical terms, namely as additional, outer hubs that could alleviate the burden on the historic city centre.³² Those policies, however, often had the side effect of producing focal points which did not function merely as hubs of traffic, commerce, and services, but as local centres in the civic sense as well. Unintentionally, paternalistic urban planning often ended up producing the framework for residents' local identity and place attachment.

The truly multifocal system taking shape after 1950, the year when Greater Budapest was created, was of course more complex than the functional multifocality of the broadly defined city centre described in this article. The multi-centred nature of post-1950 Budapest was based on several factors: partially on the incorporation of formerly independent suburbs, namely earlier towns and settlements which retained their own, traditional centres even within the framework of Greater Budapest; and partially on local centres of newly constructed residential areas, created in the Fordist phase of state socialist city planning. But the neighbourhood squares created by Revivalist dreamers of the late 19th century did remain part of the larger galaxy of Greater Budapest, and continued to contribute to the functional diversity of the capital city's system of public spaces.

One could even go as far as to say that the city's current urban government structure, a two-tiered system based on the strong local power, autonomy, and financial independence of the individual districts, as opposed to the relatively restrained power of the city-level municipal government, is a latter-day manifestation of the same hidden legacy. The post-Communist structure of municipal government, created in 1990 by law, in which districts of Budapest in many ways function as autonomous entities with extensive powers and budgets of their own, has strengthened the role of districts as quasi towns in their own right. It is no wonder the squares where district municipal offices or other

³² The role of sub-centres was proposed in this spirit in the 1970 modification of the General Development Plan of Budapest, drawn up originally in 1960. See Gábor Preisich, *Budapest városépítésének története 1945-1990* [History of urban planning and architecture in Budapest, 1945-1990], Budapest 1998, p. 39.

community institutions are located, sometimes side by side with market halls, shops, and cafés, in other cases with churches, schools, or libraries, sometimes fulfil public space functions similar to those of historic main squares in today's smaller, single-centred cities.

Abbildungsnachweis

Abb. 1: Fortepan / Budapest Főváros Levéltára, Budapest City Archives, HU.B-FL.XV.19.d.1.06.017.

Abb. 2:

https://galeria.index.hu/urbanista/2016/08/05/felhokarcolo_a_deak_teren/3.