

“Taste Must Arise from the Doctrine” Architecture in the Hungarian Cultural Media in the 1960s

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The Sixties

Contemporary Hungarian historians agree that the key to the understanding of the processes of the 1960s can be found in the political system.¹ The conscious, politically driven consolidation of the socialist system resulted in an optimistic period of the long Kádár-era²: it was the decade of thaw, breathing more freely, new chances, more freedom and raising living standard. However two phases are clearly distinguishable within the long decade. The first was the period of rebuilding political and ideological positions of the party between 1956–1962, while the second period was characterised by easing in politics, partial and then overall (though not fully realised) economic reforms and a certain openness in culture.³ The reorganised Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party – parallel with the political retaliation – also redefined the place of arts and literature within its politics. The aim was to diminish the leading social and political role of literature: the Hungarian Writers' Association was banned in 1957 and reorganised only in 1959, but with a radically changed membership. After a short break, some new literary and cultural periodicals were launched. The divisive cultural policy intended to create a neutral politico-literary life: political power offered media for intellectuals with controlled freedom on the political field but with greater openness towards cultural modernisation.⁴ Reorganising some existing informative scientific journals served the same purpose, however while the highlighted social role of literature ceased, the relative dominance of human intellectuals was present during the entire Kádár-era.

Architecture was also touched by the post-revolution reorganisation of the political and economic system but politics treated it differently than other art forms. The first part of the 1950s – not only in Hungary but also within the whole socialist camp – was characterised by the style known

1 For a detailed politico-historical analysis of the period see: Rainer M. János and Péteri György, eds., *Muddling Through in the Long 1960s. Ideas and Everyday Life in High Politics and the Lower Classes of Communist Hungary* (Budapest: Institute for the History of Hungarian Revolution, 2005).

2 Kádár János became the chief executive of the communist party already in the last days of the 1956 revolution and then acted as first secretary, prime secretary and finally as the head of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party until 1989.

3 Rainer M. János defines the first period as from November 4. 1956 – 1962–63 and the second from 1962–63 until 1972–74. Rainer M. János, “A ‘hatvanas évek’ Magyarországon. (Politika)történeti közelítések” [“The Sixties” in Hungary. Politico-Historical Approaches], in *“Hatvanas évek” Magyarországon* [The “Sixties” in Hungary], ed. Rainer M. János, (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2004).

4 For changes of cultural organisations after 1956 see: Kalmár Melinda, *Ennivaló és hozomány. A kora kádárizmus ideológiája* [Food and Dowry. Ideology of the Early Kádár-Era] (Budapest: Magvető, 1998).

as Socialist Realism, a state-required traditionalism.⁵ The political shift, that is, turning from formal and artistic demands to modern technology as a driving force for the future development, is dated to Nikolai Sergeyeveich Khrushchev's speech in December 1954. However, the long turnaround between the design and the construction of a building as well as the events of the revolution pushed the majority of the discussions after 1956. Return of modern architecture and technology raised a number of questions: the relationship between capitalist and socialist modern architecture, between modern architecture and national traditions and about the position of architecture between sciences and arts.⁶ However the three aspects were of different weights. In the early 1950s the main argument against modern architecture built in Hungary after the war was that it did not differ in appearance from the capitalist modern architecture, consequently it was cosmopolitan. Socialist content had to be expressed also in the shape of building – architects learned it well during the years ruled by Socialist Realism. When Hungarian architecture returned to modern technology it resulted in similar (modern) buildings as those built in the West. It seemed controversial not in practice but in interpretation, so it took some years until “modern architecture” as an attributive structure applied for recent architecture appeared in professional journals and in the public media again. Architects easily gave up the requirement for national architecture, but it was more difficult for them to lose the status of artist, a position they previously gained. The forced traditionalism of Socialist Realism, namely, had a positive aspect: the politics granted the profession a certain degree of appreciation, architecture was treated as an art, as a representational medium. When in 1958 the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party announced the new cultural policy guidelines architecture was not mentioned either among the arts or in any other respect.⁷ The Association of Hungarian Architects which was founded in the spirit of Socialist Realism in 1951 was not banned after the failed revolution; it simply lost its importance as an artistic organization. To sum it up: after 1956 architectural discussions touched three dichotomies – capitalist or socialist modern, international or national architecture and architecture as an art or science or both – but they were presented in various media in different ways.

This essay surveys how architecture appeared in cultural media from two perspectives. The first part of the analysis will examine how professionals – theorists, scholars and leading experts – tried to popularize modern architecture, to prove its relevance in socialism and explain its artistic beauty. The second part will consider the other side: how did lay intellectuals who mainly represented the area of humanities express their expectations concerning the social role of architecture.

5 Socialist Realism as a method should be distinguished from Socialist Realism as a style. The former appeared as a postulate in architecture already in 1948 and was present in theoretical texts until about 1966. Socialist Realism as an architectural style with exact formal specifications was in use in 1951-1955.

6 About discussions on the relationship between capitalist and socialist modern architecture see: Mariann Simon, “Progressive, Forward-looking and Advanced. Hungarian Architecture and Modernity 1956-1962,” *Architektúra & Urbanizmus* 1-2 (2013): 20-33. About discussions on modern architecture and national traditions see: Mariann Simon, “Flavouring ‘Goulash Communism’. Approaches to Modern Architecture in the Early Kádár-Era in Hungary (1956-1963),” *ALFA*, 2 (2013): 42-47.

7 “Az MSZMP művelődési politikájának irányelvei (July 25. 1958.)” [The Hungarian Socialist Workers Party's Cultural Policy Guidelines], in *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956-1962* [The Hungarian Socialist Workers Party's Decisions and Guidelines 1956-1962] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1964), 231-60.

Architects explain architecture

The wide range of cultural periodicals launched or re-launched after 1957 offered rich opportunities for discussing architecture as a cultural phenomenon. However, surveying the relevant press between 1958 and 1967 we find only thirteen articles dealing with architecture – beyond the two thematic debates to be discussed later. The preferred forums for writing about architecture were the literary periodicals which raised social issues regularly and the monthly magazine of the Scientific Educational Society which published studies from all fields of science. This is understandable if we take into account that the majority of the intellectuals read these editions in the early Kádár-era, so they offered the best opportunity to distribute ideas about architecture. It must also be noted that the authors of the hereinafter examined papers covered only five persons, moreover nine out of the thirteen articles were written by the same scholar: Major Máté, a university professor of history and theory of architecture.⁸ Given the above described predominance of one person representing architecture in the cultural media it could be said that the investigation of our theme might lead to modest if not boring results. Yet, Major himself modified his ideas during the surveyed period, while the few other contributors presented different approaches to the topic.

The articles with the intention to explain recent architecture to the public concentrated on two main questions: How could one find the socialist content of the politically re-accepted modern architecture, which still resembled the shape of the capitalist modern architecture? And: How could this modern architecture, based primarily on functional demands and technology create artistic works? It must be noted that those who dealt with this question avoided the use of the attributive 'modern' for a long time after the stylistic turn, as the word 'modern' was directly connected to capitalism. Instead they mentioned contemporary architecture or advanced architecture.

The first question that if architecture in socialism should differ from modern architecture in the capitalist world was important above all for the theorists not for practicing architects or the wider public. However, Major Máté persistently fought for creating the socialist theory of architecture and to find the socialist content within modern architecture. He found an obvious solution when he defined the product of architecture as a simultaneously large scale functional object and a piece of art. "Architecture is – summarising what has been said – the result of its own creative work, which basically is an individual concept upon which collective work via industrial means, produces large scale functional objects – or at least a part thereof – are not merely 'functional' but they also fulfil society's aesthetic needs and are generally 'beautiful', and some even perfect, undoubtedly 'artistic'".⁹ He stated that only those buildings can be truly beautiful which are good as well, that is, industrial building production is not necessarily excluded from attractive architecture. However Major differentiated between 'beautiful' and 'artistic'. Artistic architecture is not only beautiful but it also conveys notional content, the notional content of emerging socialism. When talking about 'artistic freedom and constraints' he meant building materials, structures, technologies, functional and economic demands under constraints, while 'the requirement of representation' was left for the artistic side, in which respect – as he recognized – "our architecture is still unable to fulfil the extremely high demands of the three functions of

8 Major Máté (1904-1986) architect, university professor, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and in the investigated period also the president of the Association of Hungarian Architects.

9 Major Máté, "A 'szép' és a 'művészi' mai építészetünkben" [The 'Beautiful' and the 'Artistic' in Today's Architecture], *Magyar Tudomány* 10 (1961): 608.

the artistic as it is stated in Marxism.”¹⁰ Major’s definitions of artistic architecture were not only difficult to achieve for architects but also difficult to interpret by the intellectual readers. Another scholar proposed a slightly different requirement for artistic architecture. In one of his articles, Pogány Frigyes expounded his views on aesthetic education whereby he considered architecture as part of a larger whole, the environment.¹¹ He did not separate architecture from other genres of visual artworks, and stressed the importance of artistic experience as a tool for understanding. The detailed analysis of the artworks (the age, the place and the artist) may help the viewer to seize the essence. This essence was – of course – the artistic content, but Pogány left in shadow what he meant by content. “Because grasping the content of the great works is such an artistic experience, which is not only an anaesthetic, a power which rocks us into a pleasant mood, but it is an educating and active power, which lies in deep cognition and serves development, consequently it is a proper cultural value.”¹²

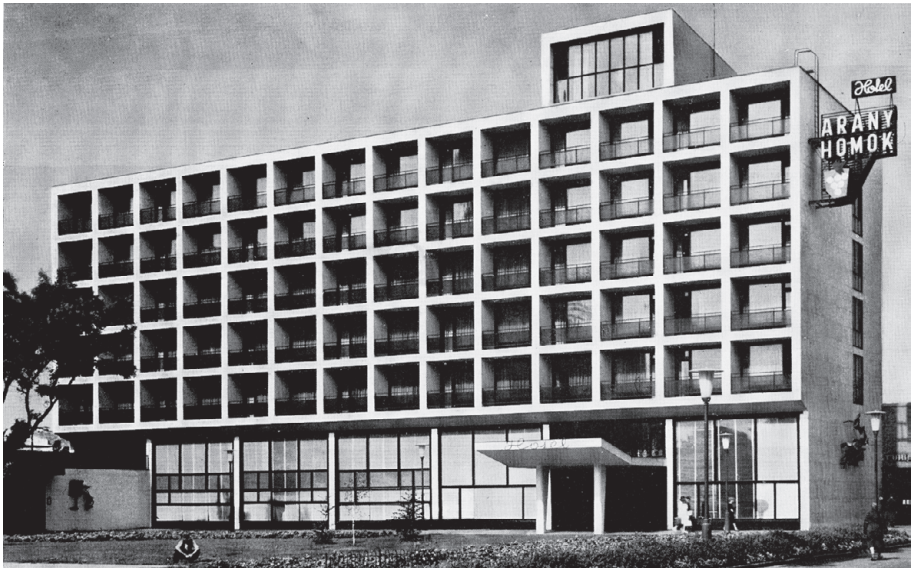


Fig. 1.

Major refined his demands on socialist architecture over time. The backwardness in materials, details and technologies of Hungarian building industry compared to modern architecture in the West became increasingly visible. Quantitative requirements in building construction became the main source of constraints against the architectural quality. Major adapted his Marxist architectural theory to the hand-on realities: in an essay from 1964 he already called for the conscious undertaking of necessities, which may result in a beautiful even in an artistic architecture. He admitted that we still did not have a creative architecture with a matured socialist

10 Major Máté, “Művészi szabadság és kötöttségek az építészetben” [Artistic Freedom and Constraints in Architecture], *Valóság* 4 (1960): 28. The three functions of the artistic according to Major are the following: the work should be beautiful, it should serve the understanding of reality and it should advertise the doctrine.

11 Pogány Frigyes (1908-1976) architect, art historian, urbanist, university professor.

12 Pogány Frigyes, “Az esztétikai nevelés problémái és a modern környezetalkítás” [Problems of Aesthetic Education and Modern Shaping of Environment], *Valóság* 5 (1962): 144.

consciousness and feeling of the world, which would be the foundation for a true socialist architecture, but he was sure we would have it soon.¹³ A few years later he saw the position of artistic architecture even more pessimistically. He asked for changes in the structure and operation of design offices and university education and for promoting the unfolding of artistic value in both cases.¹⁴ However he still insisted on the duality of the engineer and the artist that have to be present simultaneously in the architect. This is understandable given that his book on the theory of architecture based on the peculiarity (that is, the double face) of architecture was published in the same year.¹⁵



Fig.2.

The uncomfortable connotations of modern architecture, namely formal similarity with the western, capitalist architecture ceased over time and another aspect of classical modern architecture, its social commitment came to the fore. However this turn needed an ideological explanation which Pogány Frigyes delivered for the cultural media readers. His study can be interpreted as an official rehabilitation of the classics of modern architecture like Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe or Le Corbusier. Though “their political position was left in shadow”, they were the founding fathers of modern architecture whose main features – like the great ensembles, the human scale and the functional approach – are all in tune with the demands of the socialist men and socialist society. The argumentation leads straight to the conclusion: “The socialist and the correctly interpreted modern shaping of the environment are one and the same concept.”¹⁶ The fact that he equated socialist and modern architecture was

13 Major Máté, “Építészeti és realizmus” [Architecture and Realism], *Kritika* 4 (1964): 19-25.

14 Major Máté, “A mérnök és a művész az építésben” [The Engineer and the Artist in the Architect], *Magyar Tudomány* 7-8 (1967): 487-92.

15 Major Máté, *Az építészet sajátosságai* [The Peculiarity of Architecture] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967).

16 Pogány Frigyes, “A szocialista realizmus problémái a környezetalakításban” [Problems of Socialist Realism in the Shaping of the Environment], *Valóság* 11(1966): 95.

significant for the profession, since it offered new means and options in the dissemination of architectural culture. In his study Pogány mentioned the new scientific world view reflected in the modern environments as an artistic tool, while his colleague referred, in another essay, to the special experiences generated by the new structures and constructions.¹⁷



Fig.3.

On the other hand, the comparison between Western and Eastern modern architecture included also the danger that the existing Hungarian architecture could provide only a few good examples.¹⁸ It is not surprising that – with one exception – all nine buildings which illustrated

¹⁷ Kunszt György, "A modern építészet főbb jellemzői" [Main Features of Modern Architecture], *Valóság* 3 (1964): 40-49.

¹⁸ A contemporary survey on artistic taste came to the conclusion that modern architecture in Hungary was lagging behind the world level, if we could talk about modern architecture in Hungary at all. The students named only a few modern Hungarian

Major's essay, that he devoted to the twentieth anniversary of the new regime were public buildings and were made mainly with conventional construction technology, yet none of them with prefabricated materials.¹⁹ Major – against his deep political commitment – was not satisfied with the Hungarian architectural production. In the middle of the 1960s he accused architects that they did not interpret modern architecture as a method – like the great masters did – but as a style, copying recent, fashionable shapes. “What architects build in Japan or in South Africa today appears here tomorrow (...) if not in its full shape but in details, in some features, often in the right place but more often only in a formal, contradictory manner.”²⁰

Major blamed not only the architects who were enchanted by modern forms and imitated them. In his anniversary essay he complained also about the whole building organisation – including state design offices, construction industry and management and the omnipresent bureaucracy – which did not help improve quality.²¹ It is noticeable that while the above mentioned accusations appeared only in the second part of the investigated period in his essays, Major expressed his dissatisfaction with the users already in 1960. He stated that the users of the buildings – of the flats – have traditional, previously established ordinary and rigid ideas about living and architecture in general, including the layout, functionality and formal appearance of buildings.²² From then on he never ceased to blame people who built their family houses which he disapproved not only for their uneconomical and anti-community nature but also for being ugly and ordinary. He never forgot to add that the family houses refer to the former society and represent the lifestyle of the petty bourgeois.

It is clear from the above that the architects when explaining architecture could not change their strong professional position. All contributors came from the academic world, which provides an explanation for their long sentences and complicated language. Their ideas were harder to understand for the general public when formulated in that manner. Yet the biggest problem lies in the fact that their intention was the distribution of – politically, socially or professionally based – ideas. The dominant theoretician-ideologist of architecture, Major Máté did not realise that the ideological aspect of architecture had dwindled during the Sixties, keeping with the general tendency of the Kádár-era that ideology had a defensive character.²³ Neither the approaches which avoided or only slightly touched ideological aspects were written to generate discussions (discussions on architecture were rare even in professional circles), instead the authors intended to explain artistic values of architecture. The authors of the mentioned essays were convinced that they knew better what people and users needed. During the surveyed period only one essay was published in which the author tried to take the position of the user and expounded the question: What makes the inhabitant feel at home in the town?²⁴

buildings and none of them mentioned a modern building in Hungary when they had to name their favourite buildings. Beke László, “Művészeti ízléskérdés budapesti bölcsészhallgatók között” [A Survey on Artistic Taste Made among University Students of Humanities in Budapest], *Valóság* 10 (1965): 58-64.

19 Major Máté, “Gondolatok – tettek: építészetünk mozgatói” [Thoughts and Facts that Move our Architecture], *Kritika* 10. (1965): 12-26.

20 Major Máté, “Az építészet stílusa és a modern építészet ‘stílusa’” [Architectural Styles and the ‘Style’ of Modern Architecture], *Valóság* 11 (1964): 42.

21 Major, “Gondolatok – tettek,” 25-26.

22 Major, “Művészi szabadság,” 26.

23 Ripp Zoltán, “Volt-e kádárizmus? Ideológia és praxis” [Whether there was Kadarism? Ideology and Praxis], in *Kádár János és a 20. századi magyar történelem* [Kádár János and Hungarian history in the 20. Century], eds. Földes György and Mitrovits Miklós (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2012), 43-68.

24 Granasztói Pál, “A városi közösség problémái városépítészetünkben” [Problems of Community in our Towns], *Valóság* 9 (1965): 1-11.

Intellectuals on architecture – 1

In 1960, addressing the severe housing shortage in Hungary, the government decided on building one million flats within the next fifteen years. This remarkable plan – part of the policy of consolidation – placed housing and architecture in the centre of interest of intellectuals. The intended amount of flats sounded attractive but it also raised the question: what is the relationship between way of life and type of housing?

A journalist-poet launched the topic of socialist way of housing in the literary and critical periodical, *Kortárs* (Contemporary).²⁵ Sipos Gyula introduces his essay with the description of the two main forms of housing, namely the housing estate and the garden city and he blames both for functioning as an island.²⁶ Each flat is equipped with all modern conveniences, which is not only wasteful but it does not help in creating community either. He refers to his own dwelling where the inhabitants – instead of using the common laundry – strive to buy their own washing machine. “As I have already noted before: the tendency is the further separation, that is, we will have 17 washing machines in the 17 families, each in use a half day per week and each standing out of use for thirteen half days.”²⁷ As a possible – but not as a compulsory – example, Sipos refers to his own positive home experiences: living in the communities of schoolmates or colleagues. His conclusion is radical: “In my opinion our housing development doesn’t have a socialist perspective for the time being.”²⁸ The response arrived quickly and it came from Major Máté who – as we have seen above – was deeply touched by the topic.²⁹ In his essay Major concentrates on the problem of family houses as the current issue and he returns to the community houses only in the last paragraphs. Architecture has an educational function – he states based on his theory of architecture – and family houses don’t help in unfolding a community. Family houses are in close relationship with the pre-war middle-class culture; in addition, they are expensive and artistically kitsch, both inside and outside. To summarize: family houses “involve the waste of national income and their owners’ social separation, they constitute an obstacle to economic development of our settlements in the long run, and they fatally blemish the image of our villages and towns.”³⁰ Until we reach the final and perfect solution, which Major saw in collective houses, he suggested preferring condominiums to family houses, to involve better qualified architects into the design process, to offer standardized plans and to educate private builders.

Major picked up the topic of family houses not by chance, because the national economic development plan calculated with the inhabitants’ private building activity in 60-65% between 1961 and 1965.³¹ Housing was a current topic and (semi)opened discussions were also supported by the power. Parallel with Major’s article, the editors announced a debate on “socialist housing construction and culture” which resulted in fifteen comments in total, twelve out of which were published in the periodical *Kortárs*. The majority of contributors belonged to the literary world and only three architects (plus Major) expounded their opinion.³² The posts can be classified into three groups: the first group that was for, the second that was against the ideas presented in the

25 Sipos Gyula (1921-1976), journalist, poet.

26 Sipos Gyula, “Kinek építkezünk?” [For Whom Do We Build?], *Kortárs* 6 (1960): 920-25.

27 Sipos, “Kinek építkezünk?”, 924.

28 Sipos, “Kinek építkezünk?”, 924.

29 Major Máté, “‘Sziget’-ház, ‘sziget’-lakás – vagy közösségi otthon?” [‘Island’-House, ‘Island’-Flat – or a Home for the Community?], *Kortárs* 11 (1960): 749-54.

30 Major, “‘Sziget’-ház, ‘sziget’-lakás,” 752.

31 1961st annual II. Act on the Hungarian Workers Republic’s second five years national economic development plan for the period between 1. January 1961 and 31. December 1965. 89.§.

32 Among the three commenting architects there was an architect-urbanist and theorist, a practicing architect who presented his own mega-construction for 70.000 inhabitants and the Minister for Building Affairs.

first two articles and the third group whose members tried to agree with both parts and find a compromise or they simply overlooked the raised questions. The three types of comments were represented equally, presumably, as a result of editorial selection, though the most interesting are those which represented a clear position. Those agreeing with the statement that the type of housing has a defining effect on our way of living, and who believed in the educational power of architecture proposed different solutions for the improvement of this architectural function. Barsi Dénes³³ referred to his own experiences living in the number one socialist town, Sztálinváros.³⁴ He accepted the primacy of the “supreme command: to eliminate the housing shortage with producing more flats as quickly and as cheaply as possible”, but he added that in this way we implement only humanism, not socialist humanism. He suggested also a transitional solution – based on his personal experiences – and stressed the importance of creating a common room where the inhabitants of a dwelling can meet. Such a common room should be attached to each stairwell and could help in the development of further common activities like the shared use of household machines and daily child care, etc. Another writer-contributor, Sőtér István³⁵ also made his proposal of how to improve housing estates to create a socialist community.³⁶ He deals with the problem on urban level and after describing his ideas on a future Budapest comes to the conclusion that: “in our country the largest and the smallest scale buildings breed separation and loneliness the most, and the medium scale ones bring people closest to each other.”³⁷ Sőtér also reflects on Major’s attack on the family houses named as a hotbed of kitsch, and remarks that we cannot connect the presence of kitsch to a certain social layer. In this respect he believes in the power of the doctrine of socialism – “Taste must arise from the doctrine, increasingly embodied in the new type of man, in the new society” – consequently kitsch will disappear when the doctrine permeates all spheres of life.³⁸

Among those who did not agree with the thesis that architecture determines lifestyle, was Granasztói Pál³⁹ who approached the theme neither from ideological nor from aesthetic point, but from the concept of home.⁴⁰ Granasztói maintains that according to the sense of community it is irrelevant if people live in detached family houses or in collective blocks, the community spirit may emerge or may not in both housing forms. “The inhabitants of most of the apartment blocks, even those living in the new collective houses don’t know each other, not to mention the neighbours who live in the nearest building; perhaps they use the same elevator but then they close their door and disappear in their own isolated world.”⁴¹ Instead – based on recent developments in urban design – he stresses the importance of variety in housing forms and apartment types within a settlement and the transparency of the built structure. The principle of home requires the right proportion between being in community or alone. “Alternation of loneliness and togetherness – in suitable proportion for each – is a basic demand and element of life for people just like days and nights, being awake or asleep” – he states.⁴² However, he gives a chance for Sztálinváros (and makes a gesture toward the politics) when he reports in the closing paragraph about the familiarity felt while walking the streets of the socialist town.

33 Barsi Dénes (1905-1968), writer, journalist.

34 Barsi Dénes, “Kulcs a lépcsőházban: lakásépítészeti tünődés Sztálinvárosból” [The Key in the Stairwell: Pondering on Housing Architecture from the City of Sztálinváros], *Kortárs* 1 (1961): 120-23.

35 Sőtér István (1913-1988), writer, literature historian.

36 Sőtér István, “Városi ábrándok” [Urban Daydreams], *Kortárs* 3 (1961): 443-47.

37 Sőtér, “Városi ábrándok,” 445.

38 Sőtér, “Városi ábrándok,” 447.

39 Granasztói Pál (1908-1985), architect, urbanist, theorist.

40 Granasztói Pál, “Város és otthon” [Town and Home], *Kortárs* 1 (1961): 113-19.

41 Granasztói, “Város és otthon,” 115.

42 Granasztói, “Város és otthon,” 116.

Németh László, the professionally highly appreciated writer⁴³ shared Granasztói's opinion, that the human aspect should be the first in architecture.⁴⁴ Right at the beginning of the article Németh summarizes the previous contributions, representing two characteristically different approaches and gives a clear description of the two extremities the politics of the early Kádár-era had to find a compromise between. He points out that while the officials are talking about the architecture of socialism, the inhabitants have an idea about their home. Standing by Granasztói he stands by the inhabitant, that is, by the emerging politics of easing. His ideas about a liveable city are based on his personal experiences, when living in different towns and apartments and lead to a similar conclusion as Granasztói: settlement and housing forms may help in the formation of the community, but the most important is the initiative for the development of a mutual aid among the inhabitants. Németh László prefers the inhabitants' desires to the ideals of socialist way of living and also the inhabitants' desires to the ideals of modern architects. In the last part of the essay he compares modern architects to aristocrats: modern architects intend to spread the taste from top to bottom, as the aristocrats did before. "I rather believe in the 'democratic' way of spreading taste which comes from the bottom up. Without it, the state consists of mere a few clerks and the designers are 'officers,' which means that their kiss is rarely fiery enough to conceive a new taste."⁴⁵

The young aesthete, Almási Miklós⁴⁶ joins those who considered the human demand important and stated that architecture did not shape society.⁴⁷ Instead: "It is the society that gives slowly a different, new shape for the human and in this way – that is by the changes in the lifestyle – it reforms architectural structures and functions."⁴⁸ His remark – hidden in the middle of a paragraph – that the small new flats themselves may work against the community development, because they do not have enough space to invite guests, raises a sensitive, undesirable aspect at that time. However, Almási tries to reconcile the demands of human atmosphere, socialist society and modern architecture. He makes a clear distinction between life, feelings and requirements of the capitalist and the socialist men. The author's interpretation of the fully glazed western homes is a good indicator of the politico-cultural spirit of the early Kádár-era. Almási, who was well informed about the recent western sociological literature, explains the fully glazed, uncurtained openings of the skyscrapers with the inhabitants' hopeless attempt to make – at least visual – contact with others in the lonely crowd. The evident differences between the two worlds make social investigations all the more urgent – warns the author. "We should have to build up the conditions of the human atmosphere, houses, urbanism and home-culture formed after the image of our society. But it can be done only with the thorough knowledge of the society, even with sociological surveys, with intensive and independent architectural thinking and experimentation."⁴⁹

The debate was officially closed by the comment of the minister of Building Affairs⁵⁰, who celebrated the many posts which proved that "solving the problems of housing is a common case for the whole nation."⁵¹ He stressed the huge requirements of building industry, that is, the

43 Németh László (1901-1975), doctor, writer, dramatist.

44 Németh László, "Lakásépítés – országberendezés" [Housing Construction – Country Furnishing], *Kortárs* 3 (1961): 436-443.

45 Németh, "Lakásépítés – országberendezés," 443.

46 Almási Miklós (1932-), aesthete, philosopher.

47 Almási Miklós, "Új módon élni és régi módon gondolkodni?" [A New Way to Live but an Old Way to Think?], *Kortárs* 5 (1961): 769-73.

48 Almási, "Új módon élni," 770.

49 Almási, "Új módon élni," 772.

50 Trautmann Rezső (1907-1995), architect, 1957-1968 minister for Building Affairs.

51 Trautmann Rezső, "Otthon és társadalom" [Home and Society], *Kortárs* 8 (1961): 262.

constraint of quantity: the government has decided on building one million flats until 1975, but the capacity of the economy is limited. This requires understanding from both sides; the architects should refrain from useless luxury in design while the users should refrain from extra demands. Consequently the minister also stood by privately funded family houses, which would be “of course good, economic and tasteful.”⁵² Besides expressing that he understood the problems of socialist housing he could hardly promise anything concerning the question of quality. Politics focused on how to solve the quantitative housing shortage, which pushed the question of quality into the distant future. The practical demand of eliminating the housing shortage got primacy over the imagined socialist way of living as a declared ideology, as well as over a better architectural quality, based either on modern ideals, on recent urban development or on social research. It is not surprising that the minister could propose only the launch of a magazine which would allow further discussions on the topic.



Fig. 4.

Intellectuals on architecture – 2

The next discussion on architecture which involved more comments, took place in 1967. The journal supporting the dispute was the same as in 1960-61, that is, the literary and critical magazine *Kortárs*. The initiator was again a humanist intellectual but the further elements featuring this second event were very different from the previous one and they referred to the changed cultural status of architecture.

⁵² Trautmann, “Otthon és társadalom”, 265.

The librarian and art critic, Szíj Rezső⁵³ published a thorough and exhausting analysis of contemporary urban and architectural problems in his keynote essay.⁵⁴ He listed several shortcomings and errors in urban and architectural design and mentioned only a few excuses, which was unusual as the theme was Dunaújváros, the “first socialist town”.⁵⁵ He pointed out numerous architectural failures: the flats are too small, not only the rooms but especially the kitchens, there are no elevators in the three-story buildings, the few family houses built by the state have only one room and are equipped with half comfort, etc. However he found urban problems – analysed at practical, aesthetic and human level alike – more serious. The errata started with the lack of town centre, unusable spaces between the buildings, boring townscape, cheap building materials and grey plastering of the buildings up to the unorganized public transport, the failed location of some factory plants and the lack of commercial warehouses. The general conclusion of his study was that the town planning work in Dunaújváros was hasty and done without concept which resulted in a settlement without unity and variety at the same time. He blamed architects and primarily the chief town architect for the existing shortcomings. “Several designers gladly refer to the circumstances they had to work within, namely, that they had to plan a socialist town in a time when the society wasn’t entirely socialist”⁵⁶ – Szíj mentioned, but he could not accept this excuse. Of course he admitted that the forced standard design in housing and the building administration also can be blamed, but he stressed that the architects should have made more even within these restricted possibilities. “The town doesn’t reach the required and desirable quality that would be available on own efforts.”⁵⁷ Architecture mirrors and propagates the social order rather than creates it – he stated – and architects should work hard to make this image as attractive as possible. In 1967 – the year before the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism in Hungary – a careful criticism of administration was allowed, but Szíj’s relevant paragraphs show that he attacked professionals not politics for the lack of clear

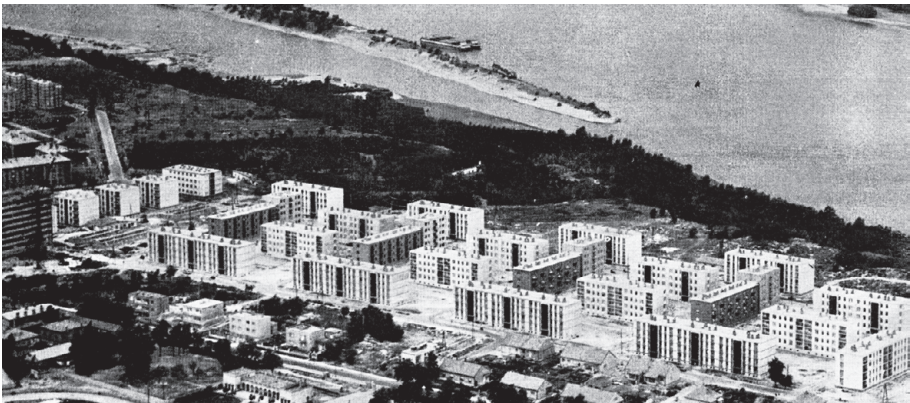


Fig.5.

53 Szíj Rezső (1915-2006), Calvinist pastor, librarian, art critic.

54 Szíj Rezső, “Építészeti problémák. Töredékes jegyzetek Dunaújvárosról” [Architectural Problems: Fragmentary Notes about Dunaújváros], *Kortárs* 3 (1967): 459-70.

55 The intensive town development began in the village Dunapentele, when the Communist Party decided to plant there a huge metallurgical factory and housing estates in 1950. The village became a city in 1951, named as Sztyálinváros and was renamed as Dunaújváros in 1961. The factory and the town was the largest investment of the 1951-1955 five years plan that is why the politics regarded and treated it as the first socialist town.

56 Szíj, “Építészeti problémák,” 459.

57 Szíj, “Építészeti problémák,” 470.

and fixed design program. "The trouble began when already at the time of the rebuilding of the country incompetent people were entrusted to solve the problems. From the minister to the heads of departments people decided on the coming fatal issues who either were not professionals or if they were architects they did not have a previous experience in praxis. People who were writing and writing, making decisions and judging but they never completed a single major building."⁵⁸

The journal published five reflections on the keynote study in the next two issues, all written by architects. Non-professionals did not react as well as they left without comments the architects' posts. The architects acknowledged almost all the shortcomings listed by Szij, though they explained them slightly differently and tried to find excuses for the failures. The author of the first article was Kathy Imre,⁵⁹ whose key aspect was the lack of character in the town, for that he blamed failed town planning.⁶⁰ According to Kathy town planning became the victim of different (mainly scientific) considerations like transport, sociology, statistics, economy which overshadowed the aspects of human life and architecture. In his interpretation architecture was innocent but it was suffering under the pressure of external forces, and he left for the reader to connect any of them to politics. Farkasdy Zoltán⁶¹ defended the former chief architect of the town⁶² from the accusations, as well as the profession in general.⁶³ He transferred the responsibility – at least partially – to the circumstances. "The job included all the contradictions of its time which couldn't have been solved either by the whole society of architects at that time and at that place."⁶⁴ However he referred also to the emerging problem of the confusion between building and architecture. "Concepts of building and architecture have been mixed somehow in the society's awareness"⁶⁵ – which means that architects shouldn't be blamed alone for these failures. Molnár Péter⁶⁶ also talked about the deformed relationship between society and architecture and evaluated it as the common responsibility of the building industry and the architects.⁶⁷ The economically forced use of standard design resulted in "blankly staring" buildings, while the architects overestimated technology and functionality against the human aspect. He proposed to revitalise debates on architecture, because "it is impossible to talk about architectural culture without an existing architectural criticism."⁶⁸ Károlyi Antal⁶⁹ – the oldest among the contributors – made the most radical criticism of contemporary building industry and building management.⁷⁰ He blamed building industry which treated standardisation as a tool that solves everything; he blamed the state design offices which worked like factories instead of workshops, and he blamed the Ministry which played the role of the 'omnipotent boss' instead of taking care for creating good regulations. As a conclusion, this second discussion was rather one-sided. All the reflections came from the profession and all tried to pass responsibility, though they interpreted the situation differently.

58 Szij, "Építészeti problémák," 461.

59 Kathy Imre (1927-2001), architect, university lecturer.

60 Kathy Imre's comment on Szij Rezső's article, *Kortárs* 4 (1967): 647-51.

61 Farkasdy Zoltán (1923-1989), architect, winner of the architectural Ybl-prize in 1963.

62 The chief architect of the Dunaújváros (former Sztálinváros) was Weiner Tibor (1905-1965) whom Szij attacked personally in his study.

63 Farkasdy Zoltán's comment on Szij Rezső's article, *Kortárs* 5 (1967): 788-92.

64 Farkasdy Zoltán's comment, 790.

65 Farkasdy Zoltán's comment, 788.

66 Molnár Péter (1925-2000), architect, winner of the architectural Ybl-prize in 1964.

67 Molnár Péter's comment on Szij Rezső's article, *Kortárs* 5 (1967): 792-94.

68 Molnár Péter's comment, 793.

69 Károlyi Antal (1906-1969), architect, winner of the Ybl-prize in 1953.

70 Károlyi Antal's comment on Szij Rezső's article, *Kortárs* 5 (1967): 794-96.

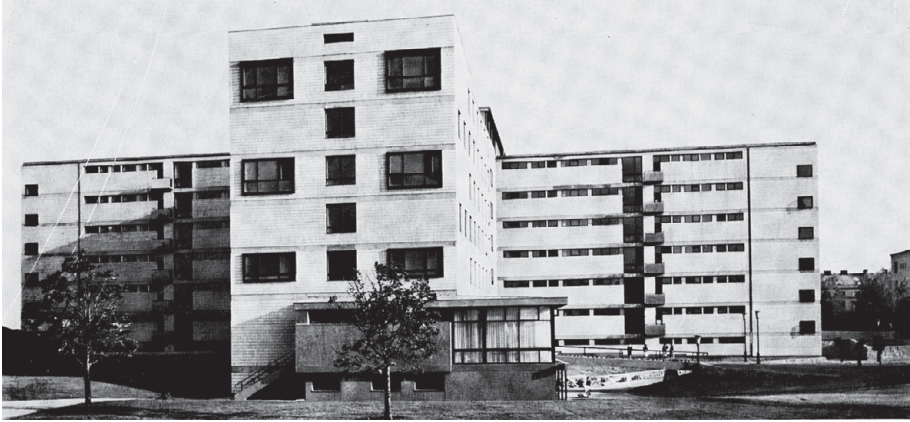


Fig.6.

Architecture and culture

The new situation – liberation from the traditionalism of Socialist Realism and the more lenient political power – offered a challenge for architecture to find its new place within culture. Leading scholars of the profession tried to redefine architecture's position among the arts, based not on form but on content and to reconcile technical aspects of modern architecture and socialist ideology. However to connect ideological content to artistic value proved to be outdated and was not in tune with the defensive ideological turn of the Kádár-era. On the other hand, introducing modern architecture as the relevant form of socialist architecture based on its social commitment, soon contaminated the global assessment of modern architecture: experts tried to explain artistic quality of modern buildings in a country where the bulk of new (modern) buildings looked poor and boring. While the scholars invested much to convince the intellectuals of the ideological and aesthetic value of architecture, readers of the cultural media were touched by the question: What is the relationship between architecture and society? The first discussion which took place in 1960-1961 showed that a number of contributors believed that architecture could shape society and that doctrine could shape taste. The second discussion of 1967 already mirrored a change in the situation: the existing socialist modern architecture had several practical shortcomings which overshadowed questions of ideology and artistic quality. Not a single comment questioned the description of the keynote study that socialist architecture failed in matters of both functional and artistic aspects: namely, it is neither functional nor beautiful. The majority of scholars who explained architecture in the cultural media – with a few exceptions – were convinced that they know better what people and users need, so it is not surprising that when the problems around architecture and town planning began to multiply they were blamed for almost everything. Modern architecture as a socialist doctrine defeated architecture as culture.

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