

## HUNGARY

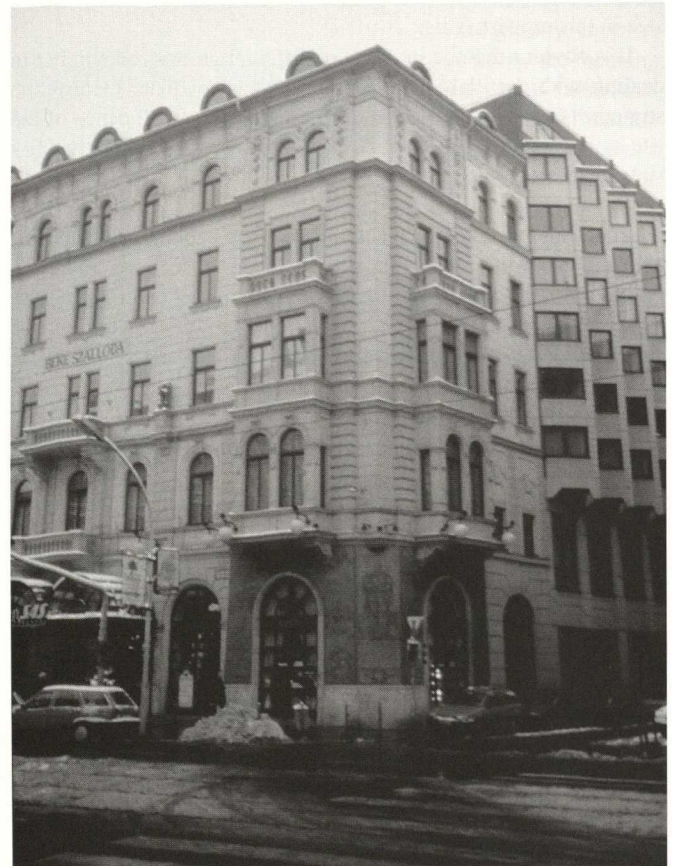
### Façadism

It is not only natural elements or inefficient protection against them that endanger our heritage, but also personal elements may lead to harm. One of these phenomena may be – and it is rather characteristic in Hungary – when heritage is considered only as a resource for profit, when certain investors partially or totally sacrifice the heritage asset for the sake of better income. Talking about conservation we may say that the physical manifestation of this attitude, in many cases, is ‘façadism’.

In Hungary, due to the transition to a market economy, the ownership of heritage has basically changed. During the time of State socialism nearly all heritage property was owned by the State. Since the political changes, private ownership predominates. At the same time, there has been a significant increase in the price of plots, that – in the lack of a real property market – did not have a real market-value beforehand. The characteristic trend of a market economy – that the value of the plot is higher than the value of the building standing on the plot – has started in the recent years in Budapest and in other big Hungarian cities. If an investor might hope to gain more profit from a new development than from re-utilising the original building on a plot, he is unlikely to take any heritage protection issues into consideration.

Some years ago, the fate of such buildings was sealed, unless they were listed monuments. Many buildings were demolished in Budapest for better exploitation, or to build (for example) under-

Façadism of another Budapest hotel under construction



An accomplished façadism of a Budapest hotel

ground parking lots. Probably these buildings were not of special significance, but they were part of a consistent 19th-century streetscape, and they harmonised better with their environment than the new developments. Large-scale demolition has evoked opposition from authorities as well as from heritage-conscious citizens, so instead of complete demolition the new solution seems to be façadism.

This sort of intervention does not have a long tradition in the life of historic towns. The first examples appeared internationally some 15 or 20 years ago, raising a new challenge for conservation experts. They were not prepared for this new trend, and could not really respond to it. The first international scientific conference to address this problem was organised in Paris in 1999. The meeting resulted in the following conclusion: façadism may be accepted in certain cases, but it should not be a general solution. There is no reference to façadism in the 1987 Charter on Historic Cities and there is no expression for it in the Hungarian professional vocabulary. Neither is it proposed that this present article will make a clear statement how and when façadism may be accepted in historic cities. Rather, we intend to draw attention to this new and – at least in Hungary – increasingly wide-spread practice. Investors like to make façadism appear as if it is a method of heritage protection, but it is not. On the contrary: in most cases it is the destruction of heritage.

Walking around Budapest we may see many examples of façadism; some of them are finished, while others are still under

construction. It is a common characteristic of hotel developments. Investors strive to build hotels that have a unique and historic atmosphere, but at the same time provide up-to-date comfort and luxury of an international standard. They have recognised that those well-to-do tourists, who wish to stay in downtown hotels instead of suburban ones, prefer air-conditioned and well-equipped hotels, which have a special historic flavour. They like the appearance of arriving at a 100-year-old building (or one that looks like it is of that age), but want to find the comfort of the 21st century inside.

The attitude of local authorities is somewhat similar. They are tired of being criticised for giving permission to developments that cause a change in the townscape. Local officers are happy with façadism because it means that the townscape stays intact – and nobody should ask what happens behind the facing walls. They do not really care about the loss of historic interiors or the lack of integrity of internal and external spaces and of a basic principle respected over centuries. They only sigh and talk about necessary and rational compromises.

In downtown Budapest, three large façadist hotels were built before 2002 and another one remains under construction. The first one was built in the 1970s in the Castle District, which is part of the Budapest World Heritage Site. In this case façadism was reasonable, as the new hotel block was built among the ruins of a former public building that was burned down during World War II. Interestingly, the new wing is joined to the block built behind the façadist shell of the former monastery.

There are other cases where the façade that was suggested to be kept by the authorities was demolished and rebuilt according to its original appearance, because it was quicker and the constructor

The worst form of façadism: even the façade was pulled down and now façadism is allowing its 'recreation'; the new building is towering over the left-behind façade of an industrial building.



The mistaken regulation results in façadism in Zalaegerszeg, a little town

did not have to work with the special care that is required when dealing with old structures. Examples of this include the construction of a new hotel, and the still unfinished erection of a new office block. The planning permission prescribed that the façade of the neighbouring housing block be kept where the office-extension was designed, but it was demolished and rebuilt in front of the newly erected structure.

The newest trend is that façadism is used as a 'fig leaf'. In architecture the result is that the new building gushes out from behind the old façade, the new and old structures visually mingle with and intrude on each other. It happens mostly in the case of former industrial buildings and sites. Similar to other large cities, we have this problem in Budapest. Industrial sites, which were built at the perimeters of the town in the 19th century, now find themselves in the inner districts. There are other industrial and transport sites, for example transformers or tram sheds that were built within the town borders, but they have lost their function. These sites are mainly targeted for the construction of malls or office blocks, where the 21st-century demands do not really need a 19th-century look and façade. In addition, these new developments often need bigger and higher volume. At the same time it is chic to preserve the fabric of old buildings, and this attitude may be welcome by a cautious authority. The result is a new building growing out of façadism that only partially keeps the original fabric.

Similar solutions may be encouraged by the faults of even well-intentioned local authorities. A middle-size Hungarian town, Zalaegerszeg, has set out in its local building regulations that the locally characteristic 19th-century residential buildings must be preserved. These buildings are commonly single-storey structures. But the new demands at such a developing, lively town need investments into new office blocks, banks and shops, and these buildings need more floor-space. The fault in the regulation is that it only prescribes the retention of the façade of the old buildings, or at least that they are built into the newly constructed façades. The result is the loss of the characteristic single-storey townscape, and sometimes ridiculous or misshapen architecture, characterised by a formerly single-storied facade standing in front of the separated wall of a new two-storey building.

With respect to the above-mentioned problems, it can only be concluded that heritage protection and urbanism have to now deal with façadism far more intensely.

## Flood at the Upper-Tisza River Region

Hungary lies in the Carpathian Basin; its main area lies on a plain, but there are high mountains around it. Rivers that spring from the neighbouring countries slow down and wind across the landscape. In the case of ordinary water-levels, they flow quietly and gently, but they get very dangerous when the water-levels rise unexpectedly.

The large-scale construction of dikes began mainly at the Tisza River around the middle of the 19th century. The aims were to speed up the flow of water, to ensure higher security, to lessen the marshland and to gain more land for agricultural cultivation.

The subsequent complex of dikes, sluices, pumps and water reservoirs has been fulfilling its duty generally well, but during the recent years the threat of disaster has arisen many times in the Upper-Tisza Region. After the drought years there was much snow and during the sudden melting there were also heavy rainfalls on the drainage area of the Tisza. At the beginning of March 2001 the flooded area was more than 50,000 hectares and the evacuation of 20 settlements had to be organised.

In addition, the flood has affected historic buildings. Mainly vernacular heritage was damaged, encompassing some 55 buildings. The walls of these houses were made of adobe, so they had little resistance to water. The National Office of Cultural Heritage has taken part in the reconstruction work, mainly in the preliminary arrangements, design and supervision, and partly in organisation and completion.

Problems also occurred after the flood had receded, as the condition of the buildings continued to deteriorate because of the dampness of the ground. Unfortunately the available grants only covered the reconstruction costs of the residential buildings, although the outbuildings, stables or barns were of nearly the same value. Nevertheless, many of the refurbished residential buildings provide a higher level of comfort than before. Instead of being used as residences, some of them will serve for rural tourism in the future.

Churches suffered less damage from the flooding, as most of them are of mediaeval origin so they were built on higher, safer



Tákos is flooded (Photo: István Szatmári)

plots, generally with brick walls. Certainly the dampness absorbed from the upper-level subsoil and the change of the load-bearing capacity of the ground has caused much damage.

Historic buildings have been finally renewed, but their environment went through comprehensive change in some places. Brand new buildings are substituting the former houses, in Tákos alone more than 100 new buildings were constructed.

It is worth mentioning that the valuable, integrated, eclectic townscape of Szeged has been developing since the big flood in 1879, and the particularly beautiful townscape of Hollókő village, which is a World Heritage Site, has been taking shape in the reconstruction following the fire in 1909.

To strive for such distinction is not possible in this case, but an architectural competition was organised to design the new residential buildings. From several designs, 17 were selected as feasible plans of different building-types. All of these designs took the local decaying architectural traditions into consideration and paid attention to the historic environment of listed monuments.

Meanwhile, the development of the flood prevention system has also restarted.

Ádám Arnóth  
ICOMOS Hungary



Vámosatya at the time of the flood  
(Photo: István Szatmári)