

THE (INDIRECT) IMPACTS OF THE EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE YEAR IN A FORMER “SOCIALIST COUNTRY” – SKETCHES FOR A HUNGARIAN CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT The *European Architectural Heritage Year 1975* (EAHY 1975) took place just at the time of the conclusion of the *Helsinki Accords*, in a context of a still divided Europe. The political and economic divide made it difficult, but could not prevent the effects of this event of great importance even in the former socialist countries. Without making direct reference to the documents adopted in 1975, Hungarian experts (involved in the field of protection-conservation of historic monuments and ensembles) – positioned both inside and outside of the communist party – started to influence decision makers in order to change their attitude toward the existing built heritage. This process of changes definitely had several roots and different outcomes, leading us finally to a ‘legalised’ recognition of historic building stock as an existing value which is being threatened by accelerating degradation, whilst it has a special potential for development and to create economic benefits. It is also worthwhile to mention the role of the media and the so-called (mostly officially organised) ‘civil movements’ both laypeople and professionals, and also the role of ‘international’ recognitions, e. g. *the Europe Prize* of the F.V.S. Foundation. After 40 years, the time really has come to take stock of this post-EAHY period.

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Forty years later, and after having experienced fundamental changes in the political, economic and social situations in Hungary, transforming the whole context, it is quite a serious challenge to evaluate the impacts of those actions and achievements in the Eastern part of Europe being ruled then under Soviet-type communism. Certainly there is no need to outline the detailed historical background as to how and to what level Europe was divided after WWII, nor to present the process of rapprochement between the two sides. The launch of the European Architectural Heritage Year (EAHY 1975) preceded by a little the *Helsinki Accords* (*Helsinki Final Act* or *Helsinki Declaration*), which was the first act of the *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe* held in the Finlandia Hall of Helsinki, Finland, during July and August 1975. Thirty-five states, including the USA, Canada, and most European states except Albania, signed the declaration in an attempt to improve relations between the Communist bloc and the West. The *Helsinki Accords*, however, were not binding as they did not have treaty status.¹ At that time, Hungary² was not a member of the Council of Europe (it joined this body only in November 1990). The most important, indeed almost the only international organization in the field of culture and cultural heritage, more precisely in the field of the conservation of Monuments and Sites, was ICOMOS. Hungary has always been an active member of ICOMOS since its beginnings during the famous 2nd *International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments*, Venice, 1964; and from its foundation in 1965, in Warsaw, ICOMOS Hungary³ took part in most of ICOMOS’s activities.

2. THE ROLE OF ICOMOS

The role of ICOMOS as a forum for cooperation between ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ professionals has not yet been studied and evaluated by historians as it would merit, but there is no question about how important it was. Without entering into details, it has to be mentioned that ICOMOS was absolutely instrumental in creating, sustaining or even enhancing cooperation between western and eastern countries during the cold-war period. The fact that the international community of historic monument conservators decided to launch ICOMOS in a socialist country (Poland) was already a promising sign of a good chance of much open cooperation.

For Hungarians – after the defeated revolution in 1956 – ICOMOS offered the possibility of re-establishing international relations, and this was true not only for professionals! It was highly welcomed also by politicians when it was possible to manage to receive the 3rd General Assembly of ICOMOS in Budapest – thanks to good personal relations between Austrian, Polish and Hungarian experts (national ICOMOS committees) and also the traditionally close connection with Italy and with ICOMOS’s Founding Father, Piero Gazzola. One of the receptions connected to this General Assembly was arranged in the building of the Hungarian parliament and participants were greeted by the Vice-President of the Presidential Council.⁴ It was only through ICOMOS that the strong commitment and achievements of Hungarian experts in monument conservation, on the basis of the principles laid down in the *Venice Charter*, could be shown to and recognised by the international professional audience. Cooperation in the ICOMOS allowed mutual recognition and respect among professionals, notwithstanding the political system of their countries.

3. CHALLENGES FOR SOCIALIST COUNTRIES – HOW TO DEAL WITH THE EAHY 1975?

Searching for the appearances in the Hungarian context of the idea of the EAHY 1975, I found the first mention of this in a detailed report on a meeting, co-organized by the ICOMOS Committee of the Soviet Union and ICOMOS Czechoslovakia. This meeting was held in Vilnius, Lithuania, in September 1973, having the title and the main topic of the colloquium: *Protection of Historic City Centres in the Socialist Countries*. The report (Román 1974) on this event was published in the *MŰEMLÉKVÉDELEM*, the bi-monthly periodical published by the central state-institution of historic monument conservation in Hungary.⁵ The article – written by András Román,⁶ Secretary General of ICOMOS Hungary – recalls that this meeting made reference to the achievements of the scientific symposium of the 3rd General Assembly of ICOMOS,⁷ and repeats “in extenso” the final decisions of the Vilnius meeting. It would be really meaningful to quote here the whole decision of the symposium with its long preamble and the 7th point of the recommendation, because there is a large overlap between this text and the later Declaration released in connection with the EAHY 1975. This one, as a forthcoming event, was also mentioned in the 7th point of the declaration as follows: “[it is recommended] that the professionals of the Soviet Union and of the European Socialist Countries meet regularly in the framework of ICOMOS [!] in order to discuss regional questions of the *socialist reconstruction* [my emphasis] of historic cities, and that at the same time they could discuss the possibility and forms of participation in the campaign of the European Architectural Heritage Year – 1975.”

Still in 1974, the next issue of the same revue, there is another report on the meeting organized by the *Monuments and Sites Commission of the Council of Europe*, held in Bologna (Italy), October 22–26 (Hokkyné Sallay 1974). The author gives a detailed and substantial overview on the work and on the final recommendation of this meeting and one could also learn about the previous meeting, held in Edinburgh (UK) in January 1973 and about the following one which was to be held in Krems (Austria) in April 1975. Unfortunately it was not possible to find information concerning those other meetings, but there is no doubt that all of them were in connection with the EAHY 1975 preparations.

Interestingly, another, absolutely personal piece of information came to me during the preparation of this very text, and I think I shall quote this personal letter⁸ of Ágnes H. Vladár, as it could help to understand better the situation and the feelings Hungarian experts had at that time – a strange mixture of gladness at being able to participate in international events, and of anxiety created by domestic official restrictions:

“I remembered the year 1975 (then the European Architectural Heritage Year) and a conference held in London in connection with it. The venue was the Royal Naval College in Greenwich – gorgeous place, amazing internationalism. (At that time it was not ‘common things /a matter of course’ like – let’s say – twenty or even ten years later!). I was chosen by Professor Dercsényi as delegate and I had to give a lecture, I strongly prepared myself for this performance (of course using a lot of slides). I had to send my text beforehand to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (at that time it was a very different world ...!). They didn’t interfere with my text; I was only instructed not to mention that this conference was going to be organized in the framework of the European Architectural Heritage Year (which obviously featured in the introduction of my speech). Not that! – Why not? At that time I thought that stupidity is connected to specific eras but in the meantime I have learned that it is a common phenomenon, namely one can find it anywhere, anytime. I could say a lot about it [...] Apart from me, the ‘Socialist countries’ were represented by a colleague from the GDR (there was also a person from West-Germany too, as far as I could observe, they took this situation with good humour; they had enough wisdom for that) and it was foreseen that Jan Zachwatovich would also be coming, but unfortunately he did not come. As I remember he was said to be ill. Everybody had awaited him with great interest, knowing that his lecture would present the ‘restoration’ of the Royal Palace in Warsaw! At that time – you could imagine – this seemed to be a very interesting topic! (Strictly speaking this is still the case.) [...] The event was really memorable if only because of the venue, – one of the lunches was in the ‘Queen’s House’ by Inigo Jones, opposite the hill of the Greenwich Observatory, and we managed – together with a nice young lady, a journalist – to get there (literally running) just to step over the Meridian.”

Further to the above information, there were only a very few other sources in which it was possible to ‘detect’ a reference, relations or an impact of the events, recommendations and achievements of the EAHY 1975. However, the possibility of finding mentions or descriptions of special features with linkage to that year is probably not only a fiction: those cases are mostly connected with a significant growing interest and activity concerning historic cities and their restoration and rehabilitation – let’s present them as follows. There is one already from the very year of 1975, and once again connected with ICOMOS: the 4th General Assembly *The Small Town*, held in Rothenburg, Germany, May 26–30, 1975, which created an indirect interest and way to be informed of how the EAHY 1975 went on, however – except for the fact that this event was held – it was not possible to find written evidence on that impact, or a detailed report.

4. EUROPEAN GOLD MEDAL OF THE MONUMENT PROTECTION 1975

The next interesting ‘news’ is again a report (already from 1976) on a special action which took place certainly in connection with the Amsterdam event: namely the award in October 1975 of the *European Gold Medal for Monument Conservation* from the Alfred Toepfer Foundation (Hamburg, Germany) – as recognition of the outstanding quality and results of the urban rehabilitation of the city of Sopron, Hungary. The *MŰEMLÉKVÉDELEM* journal gives a detailed report of the event (Fig. 1), and the Awards Speech given by Professor Walter Frodl (famous Austrian art historian, then president of the relevant jury) is presented “in extenso”, however only in Hungarian translation (Frodl 1976). One could say that it is very characteristic that neither in the speech nor in the report was there any mention of the relations with the EAHY 1975. The reason behind this might be different for western participants, because for them this relation was so obvious that it was not necessary to mention it; for eastern (Hungarian) participants, it was better not to highlight that they were too much involved in a “tricky” western action suspected of creating an influence on the life in a socialist country.



Fig. 1: The front-cover of the revue *MŰEMLÉKVÉDELEM* from 1975 showing a detail from the historic city centre of Sopron

It was only many years later (in 2012) that it became possible to read the memoirs (Dercsényi and Bardoly 2012) of Professor Dezső Dercsényi about the background and details of this story with some specific mentions of the EAHY 1975. “In his yet unpublished recollection entitled *The Europe Prize of Sopron* revives the interesting background events of awarding the Europe Monuments Prize to Sopron in 1974 [...] Dercsényi discusses in detail the circumstances, political negotiations and background agreements in the Eastern bloc of divided Europe, through which it was possible to accept a prize from a Western Foundation – especially from one operated in the German Federal Republic – as a result of

the outstandingly clever and tactical cooperation by Walter Frodl, the professor of the Technical University of Vienna, and Dezső Dercsényi, the Deputy Manager of the National Inspectorate of Monuments. In spite of the circumstances, that appear anachronistic today, in 1975 it was possible for Sopron to take



on the high award with all solemnity.”⁹ There is a specific mention in this text of EAHY 1975: “On the occasion of the European Architectural Heritage Year an application opportunity was effectively launched, for a participation of which I informed six Hungarian cities with the permission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs” and “after negotiations, official proposals, arguments and a very long waiting period, the decision finally was taken that Sopron should be allowed to accept the prize, but the prize should not be handed over here but in Amsterdam” and further: “the Ministry of Foreign Affairs changed its decision and stated that we were not going to participate in the Amsterdam Congress” (Dercsényi and Bardoly 2012). Finally – after the Prize had already been delivered in Sopron to the city-leaders – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave its permission, and two persons¹⁰ represented Hungary in Amsterdam (October 23) (Figs. 2a, b).



Figs. 2a, b: The Gold Medal award for Sopron in 1975; Above: in German; Below: in French

5. DELAYING IMPACTS...

Summarising the above presented sporadic mentions and 'stories' about fragmented knowledge concerning preparation and results of the EAHY 1975, and especially of the → *European Charter of the Architectural Heritage 1975* or → *The Declaration of Amsterdam 1975* (see appendix), issued by the Congress on the European Architectural Heritage (October 21–25, 1975), in Hungary there was neither an organized participation in the *events* during the EAHY 1975 nor a planned dissemination of its results.

The → *Amsterdam Declaration* certainly was known (at least through personal information obtained by Hungarian participants during meetings, including the Amsterdam conference) but not officially recognised and disseminated. However it is also clear that a non-official, indirect impact could be detected; not only in the acceleration of urban rehabilitation activity realized in the protected areas of a number of Hungarian historic cities, but also in the mentality of professionals – conservators, architects and urbanists. Given the framework of the socialist-communist regime, the main question to be answered here could be: how and at which level this change in mentality reached decision-makers, the higher decision making bodies of *the Party*; which means the Communist Party.¹¹

Before trying to find an answer to this substantial question, it might be necessary to remind ourselves of the fact that the preservation of historic monuments and sites after WWII in Hungary – unlike in the large majority of other European Countries – was in the responsibility of the *Ministry of Construction and Urban Development*, just like construction activity and urbanism; and fields connected with the built heritage too. This structural solution was established on the concept that the protection of historic monuments is closely connected with the neighbouring built environment and its changes on urban level: all those disciplines were under the guidance and control by the same Ministry. Unfortunately this 'theory' has proven to be validated only partially by the practice: in a 'socialist' country the highest priority was given undoubtedly to new *socialist development*, which means to new construction. And furthermore: the overwhelming majority of the existing building stock was seen as a kind of product of the 'retrograde' past, and the governing idea was that sooner or later, it was to be replaced by 'progressive' new creations of the powerful new society. Comparing the number of all built items in the territory of Hungary, which is about 4 million units, with the number of scheduled historic monuments, amounting to about 9 to 10 thousand pieces of property, it is easy to understand that in the responsible Ministry it was not the heritage issues that had the highest priority. It has to be mentioned that the minister responsible for culture had also, but only limited, co-responsibility, namely in the process of classification (the declaration of protected items had to be issued by these two ministers). This situation lasted until 1989, followed by series of successive changes of the ministries' scope of controlling the field of heritage conservation issues – but this is already another story...

In the mid-1970s it became more and more clear, also for the leaders of the communist party, that there was a need to reassess the concept of planned 'total replacement' of the building stock. This approach – looking for a slight (?) modification in ideology – emerged on the basis that they had to understand that the economic sources were and remain limited (we should not forget the oil crisis either, which had its impact on the whole economy; it might be that the impact was felt a bit later in socialist countries, but the delayed effects were not less serious), to replace all existing buildings, just construction would be not only too ambitious, but also would result a huge loss both in material and non-material values of towns and villages. This second 'built-heritage friendly' argument was added – and highlighted repeatedly – by those professionals who had membership in the Party or at least had influential connections with some leaders of the Party.¹² As far as I know, in this context they never used openly or explicitly EAHY 1975 and its documents or achievements as references, but they used all information they had – mostly via ICOMOS – to convince decision-makers of the importance of the existing 'built heritage', however they did not yet use this denomination; 'historic buildings' and 'historic city quarters' were mentioned.

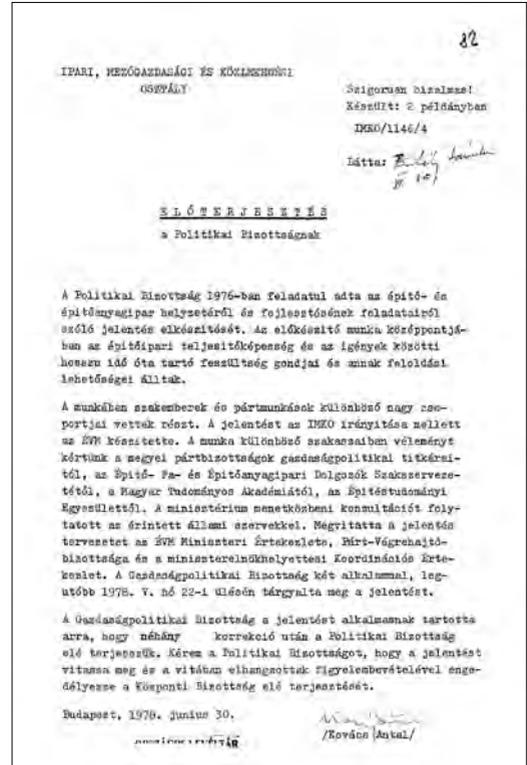
Those professionals – as initiators of a new approach concerning historic buildings and ensembles (architectural heritage) – also played the special card of national pride: making reference to a really valuable initiative taken after WWII, a legal instrument adopted in 1949, which was the so called *Decree of Legal Force*, issued by the Presidential Council of the Hungarian People's Republic (D-L. No. 13/1949). This legal tool, which contained a particular chapter, including two paragraphs on “Protected areas,” proved useful even in those politically turbulent years, at least as a basis for launching investigations in order to identify values of historic cities in Hungary. This programme was initiated and at the beginning also implemented by MUMOK – *National Centre for Museums and Historic Monuments*, an institution established by the above-mentioned Decree of Legal Force, too. The program, having the title *Identification of Historic Monuments and Townscape Values*¹³ lasted for a longer period and produced an extremely valuable survey of historic values of the built assets in a number of historic cities – eventually about 70 localities were thoroughly documented. All documentation has the same structure, following the guidance of a ministerial letter containing detailed prescriptions for mandatory contents of volumes dedicated to a particular city. Descriptive text, maps and black and white photographs were used to establish an inventory of values of the built environment, in a certain degree also dealing with related values of the internal and surrounding natural environment. The concept of this above-mentioned survey could be seen as an early initiative concerning a larger understanding of the built heritage, but knowing the communist ideology about the overwhelming priority given the new socialist achievements, it is not a surprise that the results of this survey basically were not taken into account in subsequent actions until the mid-1960s, when the first protected areas were declared.¹⁴

One more feature helped to introduce the EAHY 1975's mentality and initiatives into the Hungarian reality, which is connected equally with the specificity of the communist regime: the ownership issue. After the large-scale nationalisation of properties after WWII, with some exceptions, the large majority of immovable properties belonged to the State. With time, this ownership became a huge burden for the State; during almost thirty years there was no, or only limited maintenance, and in a quite large number of buildings, repairs made immediately following the war only aimed to eliminate the greatest damage, and have never been completed as real renovations of those buildings.

6. LAUNCHING A NEW APPROACH CONCERNING THE EXISTING HISTORIC BUILDINGS STOCK

The time has come to reassess this situation, also because of the accelerated degradation of historic buildings; however, the Party adopted a relevant decision only in 1978. A special report preceded this action, which was submitted (June 1978) to the *Industrial, Agricultural and Traffic Division of the Central Committee* of the MSZMP with the title *Situation and Tasks for Development of Construction- and Construction Materials Industry*.¹⁵ In this report and in its summary recommendations there were only two quite short articles to deal with existing buildings, and not like built heritage but as a kind of assets having use-value and needing more attention. On the basis of this report the decision of the Party was surprisingly more explicit when it declared that the rehabilitation of the inner parts of cities is of the same importance as the construction of new flats (Figs. 3a, b).

From this decision there leads quite a straight (but as for the financial basis still narrow...) way to lead us to the second *Europa Prize* (Gold Medal) which was given to the City of Győr, in recognising its achievements in urban rehabilitation (regeneration) – it is a nice coincidence that it happened in the year of the 10th anniversary of the EAHY 1975. In this case we can speak about the real influence of the spirit of 1975, because in Győr not only protected monuments were taken into account but also ensembles and units in the city's urban structure.



Figs. 3a, b: The front and the first page of the report prepared for the Central Commission of the Party (Top right, the qualification of the document: *Szigorúan bizalmas!* Top secret!)

7. DISSEMINATION OF THE SPIRIT OF THE EAHY 1975

Forty years later, it is not only worthwhile and interesting but also challenging to try to make an evaluation of the possible or ascertained impact of the EAHY 1975. There is no question that, in the very year of 1975 and shortly after, it was not openly mentioned, but its indirect impact became more and more obvious. The so-called ‘Helsinki process’ also helped the expansion of European ideas; hence, a growing number of professionals had the chance to learn about achievements and recommendations of the EAHY 1975. One experience – which might be too personal – about how this was possible is also connected with ICOMOS’ activity. It happened that ICOMOS organised (strongly supported financially by UNESCO, too) – and for first time in 1978 – a training course concerning “rehabilitations of centres and quarters of historic cities” for young professionals coming from Western Europe (including the US and Canada) and Eastern Europe. Among the seventeen young participants, I also could learn about driving principles in this very field of conservation, and during the first week high-density training courses – lectures, study trips – held in Paris,¹⁶ the results of the EAHY 1975 were also dealt with. Participants of this training course continued in their training-program with study trips, one by one in different countries: persons coming from Western countries had to go to an Eastern one and vice versa. As for my four-week study trip in Italy, in continual movement from Venice to Syracuse, I also had the chance to find on the spot how the ideas raised during the EAHY 1975 had started to be realised in practice.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the personal stories are not the more relevant, we should never forget the importance of personal relations and contacts that existed during those difficult decades too, especially between experts of the two neighbouring countries, namely in Austria and Hungary, being at the opposite sides of the iron curtain dividing Europe. Solidarity and helpfulness received from Austrian colleagues (both from ICOMOS and *Bundesdenkmalamt*) across the border proved instrumental in relation with EAHY 1975, but also in a much larger scope of cooperation of cultural heritage experts – we cannot express enough our gratitude for that. In 1985, ten years later, at the time of the adoption of the *Granada Convention*, considered a conclusion of the process started with the EAHY 1975, Hungary was still not a member of the Council of Europe, but at that time the international cooperation became more and more possible and when Hungary joined the Council of Europe in 1990, nothing was more natural to Hungary, and not only for experts, than to ratify this convention immediately – I truly believe it was possible also because of previous, strong and lasting indirect influences of the results and achievements of the EAHY 1975. (Texts of the → *Declaration of Amsterdam* and the → *European Charter of Architectural Heritage* are available in Hungarian (Román 2002) published by ICOMOS Hungary).

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¹ From the Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Helsinki Accords." <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/260615/Helsinki-Accords>, accessed February 18, 2015 (citation on the basis http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helsinki_Accords).

² Then the official name of the country was 'Hungarian People's Republic'.

³ It has to be highlighted that during the communist period the members of ICOMOS Hungary (which was a section of an international, professional NGO) were selected and mandated by the Secretary of State of the relevant Ministry.

⁴ Ödön Kisházi (1900–1975).

⁵ At that time the journal *MŰEMLÉKVÉDELEM* was published with a French summary: *Revue d'Histoire de l'Architecture et de la conservation des Monuments d'Art* XVIII,2 (1974): 110–114.

⁶ Dr. András Román (1929–2005), architect and urbanist, played a prominent role in the ICOMOS cooperation both in Hungary and on the international level. He was also the founder President of ICOMOS-CIVVIH; the main author of ICOMOS's *Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas* (the so-called *Washington Charter* 1987); former Vice-President and Honorary member of ICOMOS International etc.

- ⁷ 3rd General Assembly of ICOMOS was held in Budapest, Hungary in 1972. The main topic of the joint scientific symposium was *Modern Architecture in Historic Ensembles and Monuments*.
- ⁸ I received it as an e-mail in our personal correspondence just in February 2015 and I take this opportunity to thank Ágnes H. Vladár (Ybl-Prize bearer architect, conservator of Historic Monuments) for her contribution and kind permission to quote it.
- ⁹ From the English abstract see: of op. cit.
- ¹⁰ Dr. István Tilinger, then Director of the Inspectorate, and András Román, then the head of the Division of International Relations in the Inspectorate were selected by the Ministry to represent Hungary during the Amsterdam meeting.
- ¹¹ The exact name of the party was: Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP) = Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP).
- ¹² This part of the text is mostly based on information gained during personal discussions we had at that time with András Román and others in the National Inspectorate, about chances and possibilities of a renewal of urban rehabilitation policy in Hungary. He was among the experts who made efforts to influence decision makers.
- ¹³ In Hungarian: Városképi és műemlékvizsgálat.
- ¹⁴ In Hungarian: Műemléki jelentőségű terület (MJT) = in English as something like: "area of historic monument' significance" – which is practically equivalent to a kind of "conservation area."
- ¹⁵ National Archives (Országos Levéltár): A fond (állag) törzsszáma (Fond-number): M-KS 288 f; az irat jelzete (documents marking): 5/750-ö-e.
- ¹⁶ In the venue of the building of the Hôtel de Saint-Aignan (71, rue du Temple, Paris), then headquarters of ICOMOS.