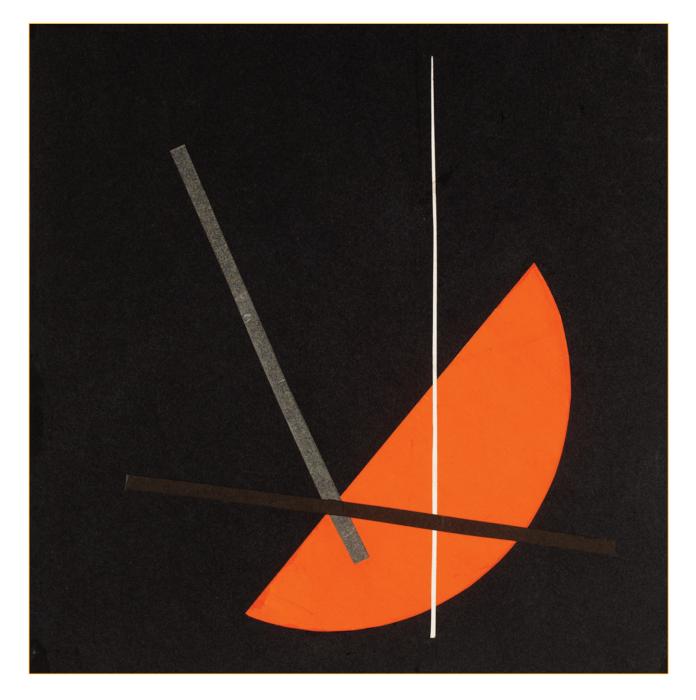
# Symmetry: Culture and BAUHAUS 100 Science

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## **BAUHAUS 100:** SYMMETRIES AND PROPORTIONS IN MODERN ARCHITECTURAL COMPOSITION

Guest editor: Vilmos Katona

A thematic issue

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### ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION IN HUNGARY FROM 1928 TO 1948 ACCORDING TO THE CONTEMPORARY SPECIALISED PRESS

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**Abstract**: Influenced by the Modern Movement and the Bauhaus, architectural education in Hungary underwent a major transformation in the late 1920s and early 1930s. From time to time, the Hungarian specialized press, especially the magazine Tér és Forma paid much attention to the issue of architectural education. Because of the latter, this study examines the process of change in architectural education over the 20 years of existence of Tér és Forma (1928–48), and the specialized press's reactions to the changes. It can be stated that while the more conservative Magyar Építőművészet did not find it important to influence the issue of architectural education, Tér és Forma, representing modern architecture, tried, through published articles, to determine the directions the editorial team thought right. Instead of extremes, they urged students and professors to find a middle ground. The desired balance was achieved at the Department of Architecture of the Technical University: first in the principle of "conservative progress" and then in "meaningful simplicity".

**Keywords**: architectural education, specialized press, Modernism, conservative progress, meaningful simplicity.

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

In the interwar period, the issues of culture, science and education became a priority in Hungary. After the Treaty of Trianon — due to the limitation of armament and territorial losses — essentially these intellectual resources were expected to help the country strengthen and then rise, among the newly created nation states in Central and Eastern Europe (Romsics, 2010, pp. 174–75). In addition to the development of primary and secondary education, the leaders of the Ministry of Culture also supported higher education, for example, the country's only technical college, the Királyi József Műegyetem (Royal Joseph Technical University), which was considered a fundamental pillar of culture (Zelovich, 1930, p. 94).

Only this institution provided university degree in architecture at that time, which means that the designers of public construction projects had graduated at the Technical University. Although, some students gained their diploma abroad and later these were nostrified by the Hungarian university. In the 1920s, the conservative government preferred the historicizing or vernacular-rooted designs for the major developments in the capital (Ferkai, 1998). For this reason, the conservative approach of architectural education at the Technical University was not objected to; in fact, the institutionalization of a more modern approach was hindered.<sup>1</sup> However, in parallel with the appearance of modern architecture in Hungary in the late 1920s, the issue of the current state of architectural education became increasingly important. Architect-editors of the Hungarian specialized press began to react to the visible signs of the transformation in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This was manifested, for example, in the fact that the financial and organizational situation of the general Department of Planning, established in 1923 and being at the forefront of innovation, was not resolved until 1928 (Héberger, 1979, pp. 599–601).

education happening under the influence of the Modern Movement, and at the same time they tried to set principles and directions for professors and students to follow.

Three dates from the period 1928–48 are worth highlighting, when the topic of new generations in architecture came to the fore in the Hungarian specialized press. The first date is year 1930, in connection with the XII International Congress of Architects held in Budapest (Anon. 3, 1930). By this time, the influence of the Bauhaus and the Modern Movement had gained ground in Hungary. New architecture did not only influence the work of designers and professors, but it fundamentally changed architectural education as well (Fehér and Krähling, 2019). The second date is 1935, when some Hungarian magazines were even more determined to advocate for the new architecture and corresponding education. In connection with this, these journals gave then a review on the most progressive student designs created between 1930 and 1935. It is true, however, that the "menace" of the Modern Movement — and above all Formalism — were also brought to the focus of attention. The third important milestone is the period around 1948, when a completely new socio-political environment was developing in Hungary: the Communist takeover took place and the reorganization of the entire education system was also on the agenda.

This study examines the topic of exactly which magazines, representing what kind of values responded to the changing architectural education at Budapest University of Technology. Did they play a role in promoting or hindering education reforms? What were the expectations of Hungary's only architectural training institution at the time? And what examples of good practice were set to follow in the articles published?

#### 2 SPECIALIZED MAGAZINES AND ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION: FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES

During the period under review, there were two main forums for architectural writing in Hungary: the more conservative journal *Magyar Építőművészet* (Hungarian Architecture, existed from 1908 to 1944, re-launched in 1952), and the progressive *Tér és Forma* (1928–1948, from 1926 to 1927 published as an attachment to *Vállalkozók Lapja* (Journal of Contractors), which promoted modern architecture. The predecessor of *Magyar Építőművészet* was *Magyar Pályázatok* (Hungarian Competitions, 1903–07), which, as its name implies, was primarily concerned with the presentation of state-announced design competitions. From 1908, building contractor Miklós Führer took over the editorial tasks of the renewed journal, which, however, continued to publish works of

historical or vernacular architectural origin, putting major state and capital constructions at the forefront. From 1928, *Tér és Forma* (Space and Form) was edited by architects Virgil Bierbauer (between 1928–42) and János Komor (until 1931), who fought for the acceptance of modern architecture (Virág and Ritoók, 2003, pp. 35–36), however, slavish copying of the new architectural forms was rejected from the beginning.

The two publications featured significant differences in the matter of architectural education as well. While the former magazine regularly presented works designed by architect professors, *Tér és Forma* only published the teachers' buildings that were modern enough. On one hand, this filtering or selection can be explained by the view of *Tér és Forma*, and on the other hand by the fact that editors expected the designers involved in architectural education to not only be open towards the new architecture in the field of education, but also in their private practice. Marcell Komor's article, written in 1929, set out these expectations most vividly, and at the same time he was the first to welcome the professors' latest works that moved out of the influence of historical architecture (Komor, 1929).

Another significant difference is that while *Tér és Forma* dealt with the current state of architectural education quite rarely but in a regular way, the more conservative journal did not devote a single article to the issue during the period under review. However, peer magazines (*Építő Ipar – Építő Művészet, Magyar Mérnök és Építész Egylet Közlönye*)<sup>2</sup> filled this gap to some extent, especially in years of major changes (around 1930), although it was done mainly in defense of the historicizing, conservative view.<sup>3</sup>

From 1929 to 1948, student plans made at the University of Technology were constantly reported in the journals published by the Mérnöki Továbbképző Intézet (Institute of Postgraduate Engineering),<sup>4</sup> although here only designs were presented without assessment or criticism. The series was edited by Iván Kotsis, a university professor who

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The Építő Ipar – Építő Művészet finished publishing in 1932, and the Magyar Mérnök és Építész Egylet Közlönye in 1945.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> For example, the *Épitő Ipar – Épitő Művészet* published the inaugural speech of architect professor Dezső Hültl in 1930, which, at first reading, can be interpreted as protecting Historicism over Modern architecture. However, the architect professor did not actually reject the new architecture in its entirety; just didn't consider it applicable to all types of buildings, e.g., a church. In this connection, he referred, for example, to the international design competition of the Palace of Nations in Geneva, when, despite the numerous Modern plans submitted, a plan based on elements of historical architecture was selected (Hültl, 1930).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> *Technikus* (1919–22), later *Technika* (1923–46), and finally the trilingual *Műegyetemi Közlemények* (1947–49).

did a great deal for the changes in Hungarian architectural education at the end of the 1920s and early 1930s. In fact, as Kotsis was appointed the head of the General Design Department in 1928, the reform of academic architectural education began, influenced by the modern aspirations coming from Western Europe, but initiated within the University of Technology.

#### **3 CHANGES IN ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION: MAIN STAGES**

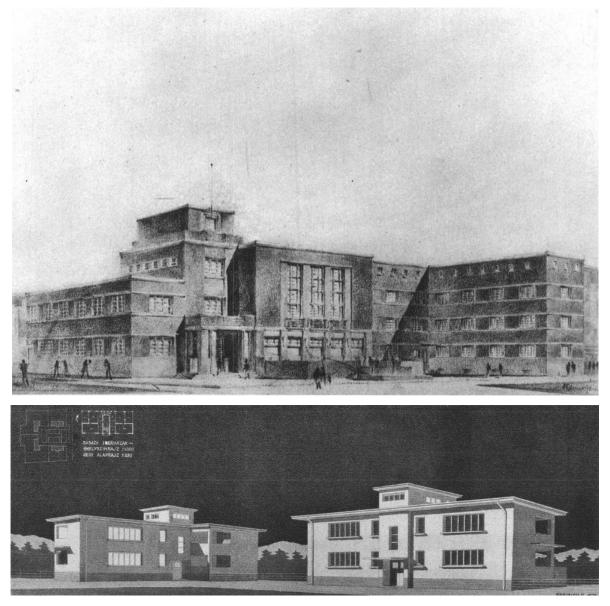
#### 3.1 The Student Exhibition in 1930

The general public also witnessed a transformation, not only from the aforementioned student plans published in the journals, but also on the occasion of student exhibitions; visitors could get acquainted with the design tasks assigned at the Technical University. The most significant exhibition took place in 1930 in the assembly hall of the Technical University, in connection with the XII International Congress of Architects. During the congress, visitors from abroad could have a mixed picture of both Hungarian architecture and architectural education. The reason for this was that at the international exhibition held at the Műcsarnok (Kunsthalle), the Hungarian displays included works created in the spirit of Historicism as well as photographs of buildings with very modern concepts (Anon. 3, 1930, pp. 58–93). At the same time, student plans showcased at the university represented a kind of transition between Historicism and modern design.

Nevertheless, this university student exhibition can be considered a milestone in the history of modern architectural education in Hungary. In fact, changes already started in 1928, when student plans began to break away from historical architectural forms. However, it is true that, despite the clarity of the exterior, these designs were still based on symmetry, both in terms of floor plans and façades. Large, solemn compositions can also be found in the material of the 1930 exhibition, but the number of less articulated wall surfaces increased (Anon. 4, 1930). *Tér és Forma* responded briefly to the exhibition, encouraging professors and students:

"The university students' exhibition introduced immediately after the main exhibition could be matched by the impression of the latter, giving a brilliant testimony to the truly modern spirit that dominates technology. The soundness of the works already suggests strong competitors for the near future!" (Bierbauer, 1930).

This time the report was not illustrated with pictures, as *Technika* published all the plans (Anon. 4, 1930; Figs. 1–2).



Figures 1-2: Student designs, J. Wanner, G. Preisich (Anon. 4, 1930, appendix).

The exhibition was organized by Professor Kotsis, who, according to his own admission, tried to select the material in a way to give the best possible picture of Hungarian architectural education to the international public, but he was aware that university education was still far from progressive Modernism (Kotsis, 2010, p. 200). However,

reaching it was not the goal. In 1930, Kotsis called the process taking place in the Department of Architecture at the University of Technology a "conservative progress", which approach he considered to be appropriate. This point of view did not reject the progressive modern architecture in every aspects, but tried to keep the students away from fashionable solutions and called increased attention to the role of the past and to local materials as well as structures (Kotsis, 1930).

In fact, with articles published in 1928–29, the editorial staff of *Tér és Forma* already "prepared" this trend to follow, although they seemingly did not take a firm stand. In 1928, the journal introduced three foreign architectural institutes: the school in Stuttgart, the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, and, of course, the most impressive Bauhaus could not be left out either (Robertson, 1928; Padányi, 1928; Kállai, 1928). Against such extremes like the Bauhaus, however, the editors suggested a search for a safe middle-of-the-road position. This was reflected, for example, in their advocacy of the importance of tradition and of studying the architecture of bygone times, which could have been inspiring for practitioners of modern architecture too.

The opinion of the editors was also reflected in the way they responded to the three courses or workshops newly launched in Budapest in 1928 (Anon. 2, 1928). This year Farkas Molnár and Pál Ligeti organized an architectural course inspired by the Bauhaus. It was held in the private school called "Műhely" (the workshop) founded by Sándor Bortnyik painter and graphic artist (Bakos, 2018). As a former Bauhaus student (1921-24), Molnár had a personal insight into the educational methods of the German institution (Ferkai, 2011, pp. 66). After coming home from the Bauhaus, he had to continue his unfinished university studies to get a degree. His university consultants did not really let the principles of the new architecture come into play in Molnár's student plans (Major, 1978, p. 67); however, he was able to present a Bauhaus plan at the exhibition organized by the students in 1927 at the Technical University, which was not ignored by the editors of Tér és Forma. It was highlighted among other historicizing designs as an example of the Modern German School (Anon. 1, 1927). In 1928, Tér és Forma reported on the launch of two other courses: a conservative (historicizing) architecture course at the College of Fine Arts and a training in interior design at the College of Applied Arts, rooted in vernacular architecture, called the "Hungarian Home". Seeing the new courses, the editorial staff evaluated the situation as "our art is moving between extremes" (Anon. 2, 1928). So, even initiatives coming from outside the Technical University intended to

transform architectural education, only these were not fully compatible with the editors' ideas.

The expected synthesis, or can also be called symmetry, was mainly accomplished in the architectural training of the Technical University around 1930, as Professor Iván Kotsis also pointed out in his article *Építésznevelés a Műegyetemen* (Architectural Education at the Technical University) published in 1930 (Kotsis, 1930). Thanks to the educational reform, design was placed at the center of the curriculum, the number of practical and design theory lessons were increased, and three new subjects were introduced in the service of design theory education: *Spatial Art, Urban Design, and the Design of Industrial and Agricultural Buildings*. Students were not restricted in their freedom to choose the consultants and the architectural and design trend they found appropriate to follow. At the same time, professors did not give up the pronounced teaching of architectural history, the design of forms and drawing, for these subjects were all considered the best developers of the sense of proportion, such foundation courses being part of the education in general architectural literacy.

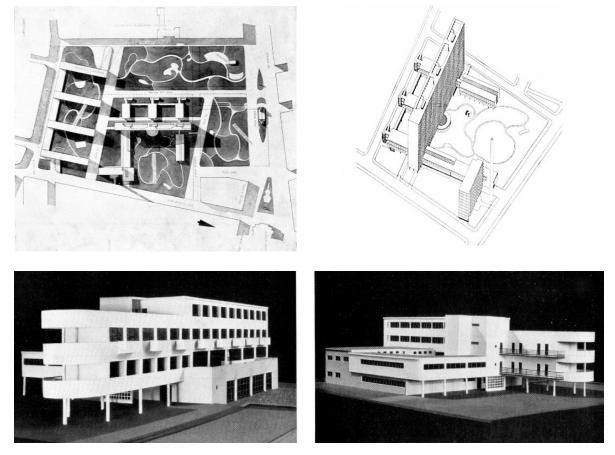
For similar reasons, also monument surveys were attributed an important role, as they help experience the proportions in practice and learn about the use of materials and structures in historical architecture. From time to time, the significance of surveys was emphasized by *Tér és Forma*, too. The journal appreciated the surveys of the Higher School of Civil Engineering in Budapest (Bierbauer, 1929) as much as this kind of work performed by the Department of Medieval Construction of the Technical University (Bierbauer, 1941).

#### 3.2 The mid-1930s

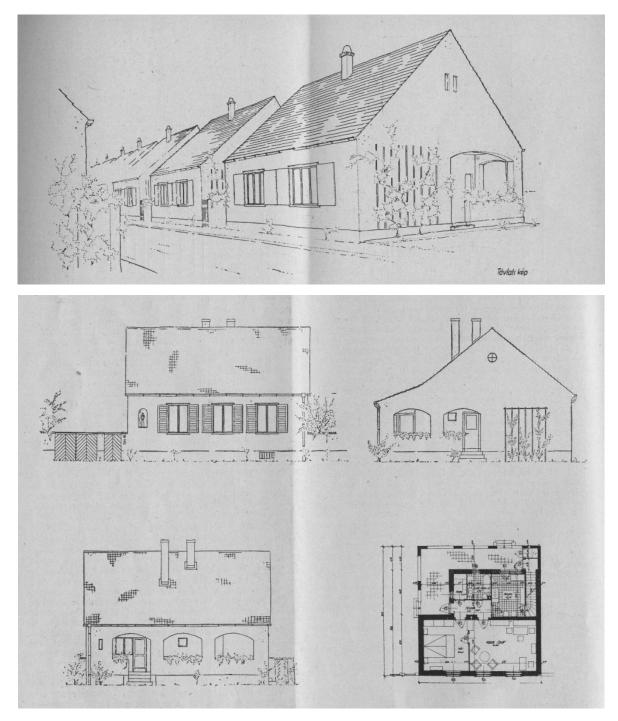
Five years after the large-scale student exhibition held in 1930, *Tér és Forma* began to re-engage in architectural education at the Technical University. The report shows that the initial encouragement came to fruition: fresh, bold plans were made between 1930 and 1935 (Figs. 3–6, cf. Figs. 7–8). Symmetrical compositions largely disappeared, and this time the inner drive led the students to use new solutions. Modern architecture was no longer just about appearance or omitting decoration. In this context, however, some rather unrealistic concepts were also created. Out of the many student works, the journal highlighted these progressive plans as they fitted into the *ars poetica* announced in 1935. That is, the editor no longer wanted to make compromises: in the future, he wanted to publish only works and plans that he could fully identify with. These plans should have

represented the new architecture but be free from the mistake of Formalism (Bierbauer, 1935a). Although it is not clear from the *Tér és Forma* article written on student plans, but the design of rural and countryside buildings and their integration into the environment also played an important role in design education even then, as evidenced by the works presented in *Technika*.

The magazine *Perspektiva* was launched also in 1935, edited by Károly Weichinger, who taught architectural design at the College of Applied Arts and worked as a freelance lecturer at Professor Kotsis'General Design Department at the Technical University. The short-lived journal published only one issue in 1936 and then ceased to exist, but the editorial preface set interesting goals to encourage further research.



Figures 3-6: Student designs, P. Démann, I. Gyöngyösi (Bierbauer, 1935b, p. 95, 97).

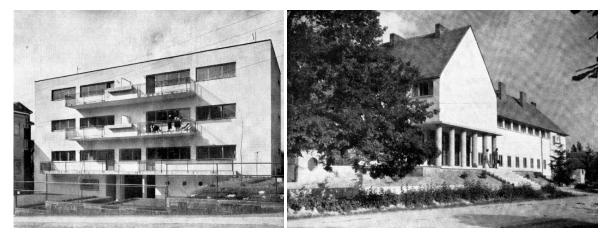


Figures 7-8: Student designs, G. Bene, P. Szoyka (Kotsis, 1937).

For example, the magazine should fight against Formalism and 'fake modernity'. The editors admitted that the Modern Movement's greatest results are the new floor plan and novel structure, which of course had an impact on the façade, but this should not mean a necessary start from the exterior during design. So, a revision of the new architecture was

published in the Hungarian architectural press of the time. *Tér és Forma* also dealt much with the issue, especially after Walter Gropius's lecture in Hungary in 1934, in which the architect raised the idea of fighting the Bauhaus as style (Gropius, 1934).

Looking back from today, conservative progress in the 1930s was headed in the right direction, as it was able to provide architectural students with sound basic training, both during the revolution and the revision of new architecture. There is no better proof of this than the directions in which the graduate architects oriented themselves after their studies: they found their own way in architecture, relying on the knowledge gained at the Technical University. Just like János Wanner or Károly Dávid, who, around 1930, designed at the university in a subdued modern or even historicizing style, then for a short time worked in Le Corbusier's studio. While Dávid tried to go on with modern architecture even in the 1950s, under the Socialist Realist style, Wanner had already returned to the adaptation to local conditions by the end of the 1940s (Figs. 9–10).



Figures 9-10: Buildings designed by János Wanner (Vándor, 1937; Kismarty-Lechner, 1943).

#### 3.3 The 1940s: vernacular architecture and meaningful simplicity

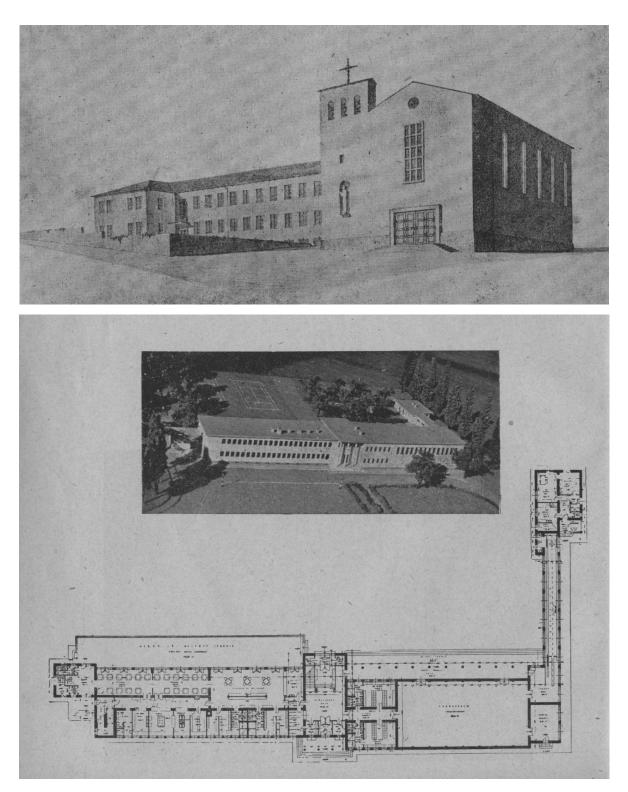
The magazine *Építészet* (Architecture) was published between 1941 and 1944, edited by architect Jenő Padányi Gulyás. The magazine, with some notes, responded to the architectural education at the Technical University as well. Consistent with its spirit, the journal mainly criticized the lack of a profound teaching of vernacular architecture.<sup>5</sup> In

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Padányi's critique must be interpreted in the context of his own individual work as an architect and writer. Even authors of the journal were known for their commitment to folk art. They had been investigating, researching folk art and life with aim to transform the knowledge of vernacular architecture into contemporary constructions (Ferkai, 1989; Ferkai, 1994).

the journalists' opinion, an independent department should have been set up for this purpose at the Technical University. At the same time, the teaching of vernacular architecture was present in the course, in the form of private-teacher lectures given by István Medgyaszay from 1927 onwards.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the design programs always included vernacular architecture topics: rural dwelling, health center or elementary school. These tasks helped the students to get acquainted with local materials and structures and adapt them to the built environment.

In 1935, *Tér és Forma* welcomed fresh, slightly out-of-touch student plans, and the latter attribute was used not as criticism but as a positive feature. They found it a good thing that the university let young people's imagination soar, as it would be attenuated in real life anyway (Bierbauer, 1935b). By contrast, in the 1940s, the Kotsis Department returned more firmly to the concept of conservative progress, as can be seen from the preface of the student plan collection compiled by the professor in 1944 (Kotsis, 1944, pp. 3–4; Figs. 11–12). The specialized press did not respond to the selection, which can be explained by the fact that, due to the war, the publication was kept in storage for a long time. At that time, the professor considered it most important to give students real tasks, and to select specific locations for design. The function was designated by the professors, but the spatial requirement and the exact design program had to be worked out by the students individually. Fitting local conditions remained to be the focus of attention, which itself guided the finding of solutions. Also, in the 1940s, students were free to choose the style, the architectural and design approach, but the instructors' aim was to have designs created in the spirit of "meaningful simplicity".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Minutes of the 20th Session of the Rectors' Council, held on August 31, 1927, 5–6. BME Archives.



Figures 11–12: Student designs, E. Lőke, I. Körmendy (Anon. 5, 1945).

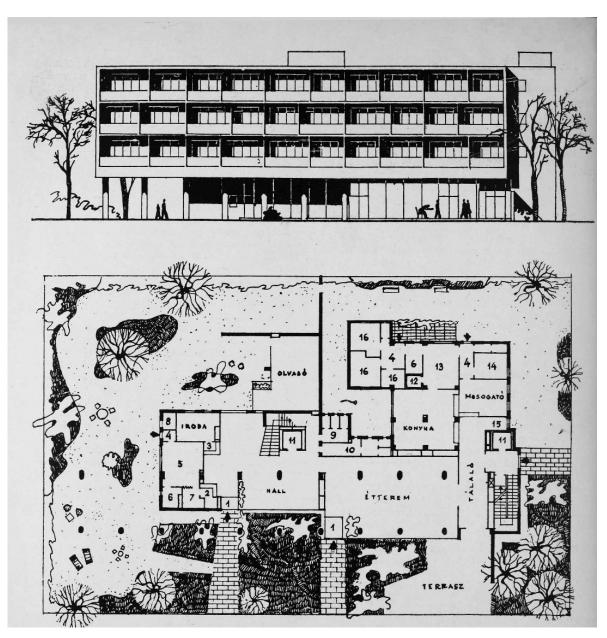


Figure 13: Student designs, T. Mikolás, I. Salamon (D.L., 1948; Anon. 6, 1948).

#### 3.4 A collection of student plans in 1948

After World War II, architectural education received more media coverage again in the years of political transition. In 1948, part of the student plan collection first published by Professor Tibor Kiss, was also published by the soon-to-be-abolished *Tér és Forma* and *Új Építészet* (New Architecture), which was active between 1946 and 1949 (D. L., 1948; Anon. 6, 1948; Figs. 13–14). The latter journal was founded in 1946 by Communist architects-editors leaving *Tér és Forma*. Both magazines agreed that too simple, schoolish

plans were made in the 1940s at the Technical University, and that the free soaring of imagination, typical of the mid-1930s, had vanished. Kotsis' "meaningful simplicity" was thus heavily criticized, especially by the editors of Uj Építészet. Namely, Máté Major called for a complete reform in 1948 (Major, 1948), which would divide the curriculum into two parts: the core and optional subjects. The History of Architecture, together with many other courses that were previously basic subjects, would have been included in the latter group.

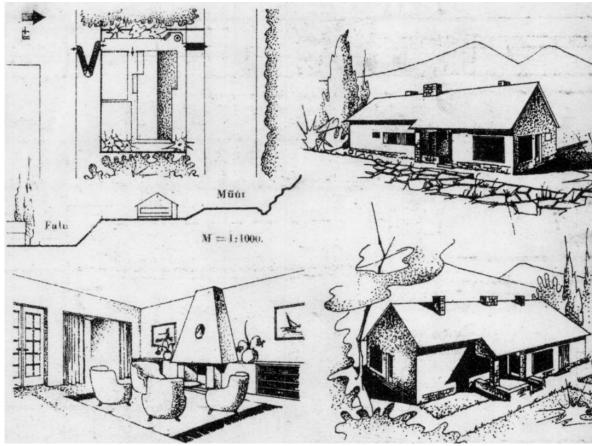


Figure 14: Student designs, T. Mikolás, I. Salamon (D.L., 1948; Anon. 6, 1948).

The need for specialization had already foreseen the architect-engineer training of the State Socialism, in which a new era in Hungarian architectural education began in 1952. A significant difference, however, was that Major still wanted to make the new, modern architecture the basis of architectural education. The reform was implemented a few years later, but instead of Modernism, the Socialist Realist architecture based on Hungarian Neoclassical architecture became the only way to follow. At the same time, the diversity of both the press and student plans disappeared temporarily. Fortunately, it was easier to move from the idea of "meaningful simplicity" to the Socialist Realist Realism required by Stalinist cultural policy both for professors and students. Moreover, thanks to some

professors who remained committed to Modernism, this more conservative trend also made it possible to avoid returning to historicizing architecture under the pressure of the style (Karácsony and Vukoszávlyev, 2019).

#### **4 SUMMARY**

The influence of the Modern Movement in the history of Hungarian architectural education is indisputable. The spread of the new architecture's principles in Hungary coincided in time with the preparation for the XII International Congress of Architects, giving impetus to changes. In the late 1920s, there was a shift towards a more modern approach both in education and in the private practice of professors, which contributed to the need for architectural education reform, being internally formulated at the Technical University. In addition to the professors, some students also took part in adopting a more modern approach at the university. For example, Farkas Molnár, who became acquainted with the Bauhaus and the Modern Movement individually, and soon became the international and Hungarian representative of progressive Modernism. Apart from the professors and the students, the specialized press, and above all the Tér és Forma, also played an important role in the modernization of Hungarian architectural education. The magazine encouraged and somewhat guided the process of change through the articles published. In the late 1920s, at the time of greatest changes, the editors marked out, or at least suggested the right path to follow: instead of the extremes, they saw the key to development in a conservative progress.

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