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## 10

Queering Budapest<sup>1</sup>

Judit Takács

For a few decades now we can be sure that *what queers want is not just sex*<sup>2</sup> – but a lot more, including a critical reorganization of the use of space. Queering, at least in this chapter, refers to examining whether and to what extent the socially constructed non-heteronormative intimacies and desires became constitutive elements in the (social) life of Budapest. It will examine where, when, how and by whom these desires have been recognized, articulated, incited and satisfied, as well explore the regulating attempts deployed mainly to inhibit and not liberate them.

Sexuality, the expression of socially constructed intimacies and desires, is interpreted here as being constructed as one of the 'significant axes of difference',<sup>3</sup> together with gender, age, class and ethnicity, around which struggles have been and are organized in urbanization processes, too. Similar to other social relations through which power is mobilized, social relations organized around sexual difference are made socially perceivable by objects and symbols, including specific uses and codes of space. In the following sections, as far as the – at times sporadic – historical evidence allows, a mosaic will be presented on how non-heteronormative forms of sexuality have positioned gay and lesbian people in Budapest during the last few decades.

## Before state socialism

The area that is referred to as Budapest today has been known for its thermal springs rich in sulphur since at least the Roman times. Within the bathhouse culture that flourished for centuries in Budapest, a distinct bathhouse oriented gay culture emerged. During the twentieth century,

bathhouses were reserved for men only during certain days of the week and became important social spaces especially for gay men, providing a hassle-free environment in which they could meet and physically interact with one another without raising suspicion.

During the late nineteenth century it was also a bathhouse, the Rudas Thermal Bath that provided a home for Károly Kertbeny, who lived there for the last 7 years of his life. Kertbeny Károly Mária, born as Karl Maria Benkert in Vienna in 1824 'as a son of Hungarian parents' coined the terms *heterosexual* and *homosexual* and is regarded as one of the founders of the gay rights movement.<sup>4</sup> While his mother tongue was German, he declared himself Hungarian: 'I was born in Vienna, yet I am not a Viennese, but rightfully Hungarian'.<sup>5</sup> In 1847, he officially changed his name to Kertbeny.<sup>6</sup> In Hungarian literary history, he is recorded as a not very significant translator and writer but in LGBT history he is remembered for his inventiveness in sexual terminology and for the theoretical case he made for homosexual emancipation. In 1868, in a private letter written to Karl Heinrich Ulrichs he presents a surprisingly modern argument for human rights:

To prove innateness . . . is a dangerous double-edged weapon. Let this riddle of nature be very interesting from the anthropological point of view. Legislation is not concerned whether this inclination is innate or not, legislation is only interested in the personal and social dangers associated with it. . . . Therefore we would not win anything by proving innateness beyond a shadow of doubt. Instead we should convince our opponents—with precisely the same legal notions used by them—that they do not have anything at all to do with this inclination, be it innate or intentional, since the state does not have the right to intervene in anything that occurs between two consenting persons older than fourteen, which does not affect the public sphere, nor the rights of a third party.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in line with the efforts to develop tourism as a potential new source of income, a special programme was introduced by the municipality to reinvent Budapest as a 'City of Spas'. For this venture, natural resources like the hot springs that had been the source of enjoyment and recreation for the population for centuries, and the cultural value of baths that had developed especially after the Turks occupied Buda in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries and built Turkish bathhouses, were cited. However, until the 1910s, bathhouses were located only on the Buda side of the city. The first thermal bath built on the Pest side of the city in 1913, the Széchenyi Thermal Bath, with its open air pools and neo-baroque buildings became one of the favourite spa swimming baths of Budapest and a popular venue also for mainly men sharing same-sex desires.

The role of bathhouses was also emphasized in one of the first Hungarian books that was fully devoted to the modern aspects of the 'homosexual

problem'. The book suggested that this problem – recurred suddenly after World War I as a mass phenomenon, and as a 'burning issue of the modern era'<sup>8</sup> – was one that could not be ignored. According to the author's own estimate in the 1920s, the number of *urnings*<sup>9</sup> was over 10,000 in Budapest, where they had several venues to meet and interact, including bathhouses and vapour baths, but also inner city locations, such as the Erzsébet square, the Kálvin square, the Emke corner or the Buda side of the Margit bridge, most of which have remained popular cruising areas for several decades. The author explains that in comparison to villages, Budapest, like other cities, could provide a better environment for homosexuals to 'exit an introverted passive sexuality'<sup>10</sup> and start to become sexually active. In the author's view, the main urban advantage is the 'immense ease of disappearance'<sup>11</sup> that can protect homosexuals from the dangers of blackmail.

In 1929, as a joint effort of journalists and police officers a two-volume work was published on *Modern Criminality* where under the heading 'Crime promoting circumstances' a whole chapter was devoted to homosexuality, or more precisely, its punishment and cure. According to the authors, the proportion of homosexuals used to be half a per cent of the population, but due to the war, and the long terms of internment for prisoners of war which went with it, this rate has recently reached 1 per cent. In modern big cities this rate might be even higher: in Budapest, for example, the male population was 438,456 in 1925, while the number of homosexual men can be estimated at more than 5000,<sup>12</sup> which is more than 1 per cent.

In 1934, a Hungarian neurologist, Zoltán Nemes Nagy devoted a whole chapter of his sexual pathological studies to 'Homosexuals in Budapest'.<sup>13</sup> This chapter starts with the statement that 'Budapest is the first metropolitan city in the whole world where semi-official records are compiled on homosexuals' for about 15 years.<sup>14</sup> The author estimates that 'the real number' of homosexual men in Budapest is about 15,000, most of whom will never be detected as they belong to 'upscale circles, carefully trying to avoid publicity'.<sup>15</sup> There were also well-known homosexual meeting places listed,<sup>16</sup> including bathhouses, public beaches with separate cabins, surroundings of public toilets and steam chambers with limited lighting.

On the basis of historical evidence on elements of homosexual life before World War II, Budapest can be described as a spatially ordered modern city, characterized by specialized public-space use, serving mainly the interest of the higher middle classes.<sup>17</sup> As a uniquely modern kind of social psychological space, the city provided a new dynamic: this was where one could submerge in the world of strangers, and where one could not only be, but might also act as a homosexual. Budapest, before World War II, with its established meeting places and patterns of decodable behaviour seemed to be able to provide this new dynamic for homosexual life; and as it could be seen, it is not too difficult to find empirical evidence for the existence of this semi-secretive homosexual infrastructure, for example, in the form of the surveillance system that was introduced to control it.<sup>18</sup>

Queering Budapest means starting from the first historical recollections of same-sex desire, focusing on the way it guided the use of space. At the same time, it is important to point out that these same recollections were often sporadic and piecemeal, reflecting the desires of men over women, whose same-sex identifications and practices left fewer detectable marks in the public realm. Given that since at least the early 1920s lists of male homosexuals had been compiled in Budapest points to the fact that same-sex desires have been both recognized and misrecognized during the first half of the twentieth century. These gendered processes of visibility and invisibility remained a feature of queer Budapest for the better part of the century.

## During state socialism

As with other *iron-curtained* countries, non-heteronormative representations of same-sex desires during state socialism were not at all widespread in Hungary. In fact, heteronormative representations of same-sex desires were not at all widespread either – however, at least some of these were quite well documented, for example, in secret police and state security files.

The practice of specialized state surveillance on homosexuality continued after World War II, especially during the rise of the Hungarian state socialist political system. Compiling ‘homosexual inventories’ providing potential blackmail victims to be coerced into becoming police informers was part of regular police work in urban areas and especially in Budapest. These practices are reflected in archival documents, including the instructions of the National Police Headquarters of 1958 on how to keep criminal records.<sup>19</sup> According to these instructions, there were 13 types of criminal records, and data on homosexuals had to be kept in at least three of them, including the ‘Preliminary records of persons suspected of crime’; the ‘Record of regular criminals’ and a photo register of convicted homosexuals. Preliminary records of homosexual persons suspected of crime were kept only in the capital city: this was not required in the countryside or in smaller cities and towns. The goal of keeping a register of ‘regular criminals’ was to collect data on people who were criminally active and socially very harmful, people with a criminal record, including homosexuals and prostitutes. During the 1950s, therefore, the Police Chief of Budapest had access to a special data set of people with ‘proved homosexual inclinations’, including information on friends who also participated in perversion against nature, their photos, their nicknames and also their female nicknames, if they had any, as well as the ‘method’ of committing perversion against nature.

Even though homosexual activity between consenting adults, or more precisely between men, was decriminalized in 1961, with reference to medical arguments emphasizing that homosexuality was a biological phenomenon and should not be treated as a crime, there were different ages of consent set for heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Many of these differences

remained in operation until 2002.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the circle of potential perpetrators and victims also changed: gender equality was introduced as the definition of perversion expanded to include men and women’s activities; bestiality, however, fell from the penal code. Additionally, there was a special clause introduced on ‘perversion against nature conducted in a scandalous manner’, for which one could get up to 3 years of imprisonment. Especially the clauses on the different ages of consent and potentially causing public scandal provided good opportunities for state authorities such as the police – as well as blackmails at a local, interpersonal level – to keep (alleged) homosexual women and men under close control.

When the private life of citizens became an object of regular supervision and surveillance, the ‘totalitarian androgyny’<sup>21</sup> of the 1950s was replaced by a milder form of authoritarian control in many Soviet bloc countries, including Hungary, by the 1960s, that left some – at least not directly controlled – space for private life. Nevertheless, state socialist morality celebrated a specifically asexual ‘socialist reproduction’ – that is to say the party-state building/constructing capacities of labour force reproduction – and not pleasure. Sexuality was surrounded by hypocritical silence not only in everyday life but also in academic circles, reflecting a general impassivity in relation to this field.

The first empirical sexual-sociological survey of this period was conducted in Budapest in 1971 focusing on the sexuality related attitudes of young Hungarian workers and university students.<sup>22</sup> When respondents had to form a hierarchy of 11 values, including *physical health, happy marriage, children, living without financial problems, interesting work, professional success, a lot of spare-time, good friends, belief in something, eating-drinking*, having an ‘orderly sexual life’ (whatever that meant exactly for the respondents) was not among the main priorities. The findings of this pioneering research also illustrated that in comparison to university students young workers started sexual life earlier but had less sexual knowledge: their sexual scripts included less foreplay, and less frequent use of contraception. They put more emphasis on virginity and expressed less tolerance towards homosexuality.

It was under state socialism that the first Hungarian sexual-psychological overview of the ‘modern theory of sexuality’ was published, in the early 1970s. In the chapter on the ‘problem of the sexual instinct’ a paragraph was devoted to homosexuality. Here it was simply defined as ‘sexual contact with a same-sex partner’<sup>23</sup> in the context of sexual perversions. This report, while still pathologizing gays, represented a step in the direction of creating more public knowledge on homosexuality.

Intimacy issues were practically silenced in state socialist Budapest, giving it some of its defining features. Budapest was thought to possess ‘a sense of outright uniformity and boredom’.<sup>24</sup> In this way, it was not unlike other state-socialized cities, which scholars have characterized as ‘under-urbanised’ in various ways, with less urban diversity and less urban marginality, as well as different uses of space.<sup>25</sup> Less urban diversity was derived from the limited



capacity of urban services: for example, there were only a few places to go out and socialize, and existing cafés, terraces or restaurants were shut early at night. There were also fewer overt signs of urban marginality such as crime, poverty and homelessness resulting partly from the successful anti-marginalization strategies of the party-state together with strict police control. Unlike the Budapest at the turn of the century, the urban environment of state socialist cities did not encourage people to submerge in the world of strangers by meeting and interacting with each other. Thus, the unique social-psychological space of the public realm was a missing feature.

In a recently published collection of lesbian life histories, Hungarian lesbian women reported on their personal experiences of the 'secret years'<sup>26</sup> during state socialism when the social visibility of lesbian lives was very limited. A 71-year-old woman pointed to isolation as one of the main problems of lesbians in that period: 'those who had a partner were not so awfully miserable. The misery was to find a partner'.<sup>27</sup> A 62-year-old woman described her sexual life as a 'hopeless desert' before the early 1990s: 'I didn't have the slightest idea where I should try to look for them. The women,' she explained.<sup>28</sup>

Given a social environment that deprived women of having individual encounters with like-minded lesbians as well as the social and cultural representations of same-sex desire, the 1982 presentation of *Egymásra nézve* (Another Way),<sup>29</sup> the first mainstream film from Eastern Europe to portray a lesbian relationship, was a great breakthrough. In the words of a now 82-year-old woman: 'I know that a lot of people saw it, and it became a topic of social discussion. It was a very good film, being brave not only concerning this specific topic [of lesbian love], but it was also brave politically . . . and about Galgóczi, the writer, it was quite well known that she was a lesbian'.<sup>30</sup> A 48-year-old woman also reflected on the formative experiences related to this motion picture, which soon became a Hungarian lesbian cult film 'that was seen by everyone [every lesbian] for about 30 times. Then I heard that women gave classified ads with this code word "*egymásra nézve* [another way]" so that it could be recognised [by other lesbians]'.<sup>31</sup>

The screenplay of the film by Erzsébet Galgóczi was based on Galgóczi's 1980 novel, *Törvénytől belül* (Another Love). Kevin Moss, an American expert of Russian and Eastern European gender studies, interpreted the role of the filmmakers in the context of privilege:

Galgóczi was herself a closeted lesbian, so in this case there was at least one lesbian involved in the production. She was at the time the head of the Hungarian Writers' Union. Makk was an established and well-known director at the time, and the film went on to win the FIPRESCI critics award at Cannes. It may have been Galgóczi and Makk's privileged positions that permitted them to tackle two topics – political and sexual dissidence – that were taboo for other writers and filmmakers in Hungary and elsewhere in Eastern Europe at the time.<sup>32</sup>

The film became a topic of extensive discussion especially among Hungarian film reviewers; trying to frame a 'passion that can defy social conventions'.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the novel, on which the screenplay was based, received a lot of attention in Hungarian media, especially in view of the fact that the 50,000 copies of the first edition disappeared from bookstores in Budapest within weeks.<sup>34</sup>

Just as *Another Way* carved a place in public discourse for same-sex desire among women, so too did the 1984 book *Furcsa párok* (Strange couples). This book, based on 'hundreds of interviews' conducted with mainly homosexual men, conveying a very pronounced, 'pro-gay' message that 'homosexuality is not an illness but a [form of] behaviour',<sup>35</sup> also received a lot of media attention. In 1987, a Hungarian writer published a collection of 'homosexuals' confessions'. The book starts with the author's observation regarding the significant increase in the proportion of Hungarian lesbian women and homosexual men since the 1960s–1970s 'due to the dissolution of the traditional family concept'.<sup>36</sup> This observation, which cannot be supported by empirical evidence, most probably reflects the increasing number of public discourses focusing on the manifestations and social consequences of same-sex attractions.

During the 1980s, cultural and media visibility of same-sex attraction started to increase especially as the AIDS epidemic reached Hungary: in this context, the need to control gay sex was paramount. There is evidence that an official report was presented to the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party on AIDS-related international situation and the Hungarian measures as early as 1985.<sup>37</sup> In fact, Homeros-Lambda, the first Hungarian homosexual organization was established in 1988 primarily, or at least pronouncedly, for AIDS prevention-related reasons. According to an excerpt from the articles of the foundation of Homeros-Lambda enhancing 'supervisability' of homosexual activities seemed to be one of the main goals of the association: 'All the epidemiological, social and political evidence shows that this minority, obliged to conceal its identity, is growing more and more remote and less and less supervisable as a result of increasing prejudice and intolerance'.<sup>38</sup>

Later Lajos Romsauer, an acknowledged psychiatrist, founding member and leading representative of Homeros-Lambda, recalled that founding Homeros-Lambda was such an event that even the Council of Ministers – that is, the cabinet of the party-state during state socialism – was summoned. He added that

the police came to collect me several times. They were primarily interested in our political views and our connections. They resented it when I told them that we support the party as there are homosexuals not only among the party members, but also among the party leaders. . . . They also tried to get me involved in investigations of crimes against homosexual victims, and encouraged me to open my ears so perhaps I might hear some information they could use.<sup>39</sup>

In a retrospective interview, conducted after the dissolution of the organization, Romsauer stated two main reasons for organizing Homeros-Lambda. Because of the spread of AIDS 'we wanted to make our membership aware of the methods of protection, and call the country's attention to the presence of homosexuals [in society]'.<sup>40</sup> However, there was another important reason why people with same-sex attraction joined Homeros-Lambda: they simply wanted to meet each other. Romsauer added that the organization had its peak in 1989 when they opened the Lokál in the Kertész street, being 'the first fully gay bar'<sup>41</sup> of Budapest: 'On the first day 46 members joined, and the number of members increased to 400 within a few months. The association functioned really well while we had this central meeting place. When the Lokál closed down, and there was no place to look for a partner there wasn't any real interest in joining [Homeros-Lambda] any longer either'.<sup>42</sup>

In state socialist Budapest, gay men had been inventing and applying various partner-seeking strategies, involving bathhouses, public toilets, cinemas, and personal tricks, to name but a few.<sup>43</sup> A 75-year-old gay man, for example, explained that practically all public toilets were potential meeting places for gay men. However, there were also certain risks involved: 'I had a case once,' he said,

I was caught . . . well, I wasn't caught effectively in the middle of the act but he [a plain-clothes policeman] noticed that I stayed around the toilet, going up and down, and then he came up to me and asked for my ID, where he saw what my job was and where I worked, and then he asked how a person with such qualities can be involved in a thing like this . . . well, tell me a better place in Budapest where I can meet gays, I am telling him, tell me, and then I will start going there. . . . I can meet gays only at toilets and bathhouses.

Another 75-year-old man referred to the old Híradó cinema as an accidental gay meeting venue, functioning a bit like a tame dark room. It was an irregular cinema, with continuous screening of only newsreel programmes: 'People were standing by the rows of seats at the two sides, waiting for a seat to be released . . . and suddenly I noticed that someone approached me and started to paw me in the dark', he said, remembering the first experience he had there.

As was demonstrated by the case of Homeros-Lambda, the first Hungarian homosexual organization, and especially their Lokál bar, after many decades of spatially deprived public existence, there was a tremendous need to have places where – slightly rephrasing Henning Bech's book title – 'men can meet'<sup>44</sup> and women can meet . . . Perhaps Budapest could be referred to as 'the California of Eastern European homosexuals' in a context of 'pink love under the red star',<sup>45</sup> especially if the Hungarian situation was compared with those of the Soviet Union or Romania, where

homosexual acts remained illegal until the 1990s. However, people with same-sex desires might have preferred to have other reference points for Budapest.

## After state socialism

The transition from an authoritarian state socialist regime to a democratic political system combined with consumer capitalism after 1989 increased the potential for personal freedom, contributing to the relaxation of prudishness that formerly characterized sexual values in Hungary. As Long noted 10 years later, a 'capitalist economy's individualist dislocation of old roles (and consumerism's eroticization of absolutely everything) has granted apparent new freedoms to personality and desire'.<sup>46</sup> However, empirical evidence from the early 1990s suggests that in the former state socialist region, including Hungary, democracy was interpreted mainly in political-institutional dimensions, stressing the importance of political freedom, equality of rights and the freshly re-introduced multiparty system much more than that of moral and sexual freedoms.<sup>47</sup>

While in 1988 the establishment of the first Hungarian homosexual organization, the Homeros Lambda, was officially supported by state socialist authorities in the name of struggle against AIDS and as an – indirect – means of defending society at large, in the 1990s it had been more complex to establish formal non-governmental organizations for representing the interest of 'gay people'. In 1994, the Rainbow Association for Gay People (*Szivárvány Társulás a Melegekért*) was refused formal registration as an association partly because the allegedly non-standard Hungarian term 'meleg' (gay) was used in its name, as a form of self-description and opposing the perceptions related to the standard use of the 'homoszexuális' (homosexual) term in sexually charged as well as medically and otherwise oppressive ways. A more substantial argument for refusing the registration by the Metropolitan Court of Budapest was however that persons under 18 should not be allowed to become members of an organization advocating the rights of homosexuals – stress on homosexuals – because, in their view, creating 'an infrastructure necessary for institutionalized homosexual life bore the risk of causing the crime of "unnatural sexual conduct" (same-sex sexual activity with a person under 18) to be committed'.<sup>48</sup> The Szivárvány Association has never been registered but a smaller part of its membership formed the Háttér Support Society for LGBT People at Budapest in 1995.<sup>49</sup> Since then Háttér, the most active, continuously existing organization in this field, has maintained a help line, a legal aid service, and several AIDS prevention and other outreach programmes.

During the 1990s, there were altogether three officially recognized NGOs for lesbians and gays registered in Budapest, including Háttér. The Lambda Budapest Association, publishing the *Mások* gay magazine between 1989



and 2009, was officially formed in 1991, while Labrisz, the only exclusively lesbian Hungarian association was officially established in 1999, but the core of the organization existed from 1996. It was the pioneering work of the Labrisz Lesbian Association that brought LGBT topics into Hungarian schools by introducing the Getting to Know Gays and Lesbians (*Melegség és megismerés*) educational programme for secondary school students and teachers in 2000.<sup>50</sup>

At the beginning there were no other gay and/or lesbian associations registered even in the larger cities of the Hungarian countryside. Budapest seemed to be the only place that could provide relatively tolerant, less directly controlled urban environments, where the sociocultural infrastructure for LGBT people in Hungary could start to develop, including formal and informal meeting places, organizations, and entertainment options. Additionally, the historically developed hydrocephalus character,<sup>51</sup> remaining a main feature of late twentieth-century Budapest, could also have been reflected in this centralized development.

Even though gay gentrification hadn't really been happening in Budapest, during the 1990s there was an increase in commercial and entertainment space especially used by gay men: to a lesser extent but following a similar pattern of white middle-class male market-oriented development,<sup>52</sup> characterizing North American and West European urban gay scenes since the last decades of the twentieth century. Between 1989 and 2011, altogether about 30 gay bars opened in Budapest: most of them serving the needs of gay men and surviving only short periods of time, while a few of them, like the legendary Angel Bar, existed for almost 15 years, though in several consecutive locations. The history of gay bars in Budapest, starting with the Lokál Bar in 1989, illustrates not only how sexuality has been increasingly commodified within the gay bar-oriented subculture, but also how consumer citizenship can create and sustain inequalities<sup>53</sup>: holding economic rights with which one can buy access to certain restricted places, could perhaps guarantee partial tolerance towards the still largely 'immoral' gay citizens – but only a fraction of gay men have enjoyed such economic rights in Hungary, not to mention lesbian women, most of whom have never really been enchanted by the cramped space provided for them in gay bars. According to a leading Hungarian gay activist, submerging oneself in the bar-centred subculture can contribute to the maintenance of 'politically opportunistic' lifestyles:

Gays are no longer locked into the world of cruising areas, bath houses and public toilets. Nowadays they are ALLOWED [emphasis of the interviewee] to visit the gay bars, [typically] situated in the basements of side-streets. A lot of people have peace with this situation: "*At night I can run around the five gay bars, there are gay discos, I can go to a private party organised in the countryside*". But it is still that level very close to practical sexuality, an instinctual level . . . it is like masturbating . . . "*but*

*to live together with another man, to integrate this into my everyday life? That is too much yet.*" . . . This is opportunism, from a radical queer perspective it is sly opportunism. . . . It is still [about] hiding: it is not a real life, not a full one.<sup>54</sup>

However, the achievement of full equality of rights especially regarding the institutionalization of same-sex partnerships, including same-sex marriage or registered partnership, was seen by the majority of Hungarians, including gays and lesbians, as a rather unthinkable arrangement or as a utopian activist project for a long time. Large-scale opinion poll results indicated that rejecting the idea of same-sex marriage remained the dominant opinion of Hungarian respondents between 1988 and 2003.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the topic of same-sex marriage was put on the Hungarian political agenda as early as 1993 when Homeros-Lambda submitted a petition to the Constitutional Court claiming that the lack of same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. By 1995, the Constitutional Court had reached a decision to open up cohabitation for same-sex couples, being a factual legal relationship, coming into existence without official registration. There have been several manifestations of the existence of 'structural stigma'<sup>56</sup> affecting gay and lesbian citizens in Hungary, including the different ages of consent for same-sex and different-sex partners before 2002, and the present lack of legal institutions such as same-sex marriage, and joint adoption by same-sex couples. It was not until 2007 that the legal option of registered partnership for same-sex couples was adopted by the Hungarian Parliament, and same-sex registered partnership legislation has been in operation only since 1 July 2009. Until the end of 2011, there had been altogether 192 same-sex partnerships registered – 134 by male couples and 58 by female couples<sup>57</sup> – in 40 per cent of all cases in Budapest.<sup>58</sup> The introduction of same-sex registered partnership or marriage has special importance because if such legal institutions exist, people are more likely to directly encounter manifestations of gay and lesbian 'modes of existence'<sup>59</sup> as ordinary facts of everyday life, the social contexts of which are usually not secret meeting places but public space. European empirical findings suggest that these personal encounters can contribute to the formation of more realistic and less prejudiced views on the lived realities of same-sex relationships.<sup>60</sup>

However, during 1998–2000, just a few years after cohabitation of same-sex couples was legally recognized in Hungary, empirical research findings on the value orientation of gay men living in Budapest demonstrated that family formation-related issues, seen by many as unrealistic options, were still largely missing from the mental maps of gay respondents. In comparison to other male respondents of Budapest, *family security* and *national security* were much less preferred values by gay respondents, while *inner harmony*, *true friendship*, *true love* and *beauty (in nature and art)* were much more preferred ones.<sup>61</sup> The lower prevalence of *family security* by gay respondents

could reflect that they were aware of the legal and practical difficulties in establishing their own family, especially in a social context dominated by heteronormative definition of family, being formed within heterosexual marriage. This awareness could prevent gay respondents from realistically considering *family security* as a value to be achieved: in this context higher levels of preference of *true friendship* and *true love* can also be seen as substitutes for the often problematic and institutionally denied *family security*.

Narratives of Hungarian gay men reporting on their partnership experiences starting from the early 1990s, when more publicly accessible space became available for homoerotic practices, also reflected a certain temporally and technologically determined evolution of ways to find and meet other gay men. For at least one generation of gay men who became young adults after the political system change of 1989, printed ads were the most effective channel to find gay partners: *At the beginning, there was the [Mások] magazine and the ads, and cruising on the streets. The eye-contact game, you know. . . . Then, there were the bath-houses, of course. And as technology developed, people completely moved to the internet for finding new contacts* (38-year-old gay respondent); while the next generations could start to search for other gays already on the internet: *I started my gay life at the age of 17. I know my friends from internet chat-rooms or via other friends from a gay bar or a party* (27-year-old gay respondent).<sup>62</sup> Like in other countries where LGBT communities became increasingly 'cyberised', in Hungary it was cyberspace that to a large extent provided a 'safe environment to encounter and experiment with queer identities'.<sup>63</sup>

In addition, a conspicuously new tendency characterizing the Hungarian LGBT movement since the last decade of the twentieth century was the gradual extension of public space use by organizing LGBT public events. The first attempts began in 1992 with the organization of the first Pink Picnic, held in a hidden glade of the Buda hills, being a somewhat shy precursor of the Budapest Pride marches that started in 1997, and being organized every year since as a main event of the annual LGBT Festival. Between 1997 and 2007 the Budapest Pride marches passed off peacefully without any violent incidents. 2007 was the first year in the history of LGBT festivals in Budapest when counter demonstrators attacked the Pride march with extreme violence.

The violent attacks during and after the 2007 Budapest Pride, followed by the violent attacks of the 2008 Budapest Pride march, reflected the functioning of systemic violence.<sup>64</sup> These acts were impulsive manifestations of hate for the sole purpose of degrading and humiliating the victims, leaving behind the shared knowledge that anyone can be liable to violation solely on account of their assumed non-heteronormative identities. After these events, many LGBT people felt restricted in their use of public spaces, being aware of potential attacks, abuse and other acts of hostility; in direct response to the 2008 incidents, an amendment containing specific provisions, being

in operation since 2009, to punish violent behaviour aimed at hindering other persons' participation in a public demonstration was adopted in the Criminal Code.

In 2009, a Hungarian opinion poll<sup>65</sup> found that only 20 per cent of the population approved of 'the right of gay people to publicly show their difference', while 68 per cent disapproved because 'it is a private matter that does not belong to the street'. Additionally, 31 per cent of respondents expressed the opinion that the event would be more acceptable if participants would 'respect public taste'. The *public taste* discourse was also echoed in a 2009 police press release, in which participants of the Pride march were warned to abstain from behaviour disrespecting 'public taste', thereby contributing to the perception of the event as being an over-sexualized exposure of sexual activities that should not be brought to the public. In 2010, the police issued a very similar press release; only this time it was 'public morality' that should have been respected. In order to come to a halt in the development of a close association of the annual Pride marches with the disruptions of public morality and public order by the police, in 2012, an LGBT organization requested from the Metropolitan Police an official list of cases related to disrespecting public morality occurring at any LGBT public event in the last 15 years. In their response, the police admitted that there had not been any cause to investigate any such cases during the last 15 years in Budapest.<sup>66</sup> Another recurring topic the Metropolitan Police of Budapest tends to worry about is the disproportionate hindrance to traffic that the annual Pride marches can cause in the capital: each year since 2008 the police tried to ban the marches on this basis but always reversed its decision at the end. The repeated banning attempts and press releases with offensive contents can be seen as quasi-ritualistic elements in a constrained relationship, where at least one of the parties wishes the other would somehow disappear by applying the appropriate magic charms . . .

A series of somewhat less scandalized public events that have become an established part of the annual LGBT festivals, started in 2002, when a new tombstone was erected for Károly Kertbeny, the creator of the words *homosexual* and *heterosexual*, in the Fiumei Street National Cemetery of Budapest, where he was originally buried in 1882. In the same year, near Kertbeny's tombstone a neglected joint grave of a police constable and a teacher, buried in 1940 and in 1945, respectively, was also discovered by accident. Since then the Lambda Budapest Association has had the couple's grave renovated and each year a memorial ceremony is organized at both Kertbeny's and the same-sex couple's gravesites.

These memorial ceremonies can be interpreted as being part of an LGBT collective memory-making project, within which Hungarian LGBT activists attempt to discover and regain their past at the same time. The establishment of the Kertbeny memorial and its ritualized commemoration can be seen as the creation of gay history through the recuperation of not just a gay ancestor

of any kind but an 'ancestor of politicized gays who are engaged in political struggle',<sup>67</sup> being a well-known tactic of sexual-political movements:

By creating a memorial ritual which constructs Kertbeny and the two other men ... as "heroic" ancestral figures for present-day gay Hungarian men, gay activists have developed a technique which grounds them, personally and politically, in national presence and significance. In doing so, these activists are proposing a vision of history that suggests ... that they are equal and legitimate members of the Nation's past, and that they therefore belong in its present as well. Thus, through the Kertbeny ritual, Hungary's gay activists are making a powerful – and revolutionary – argument for inclusion into Hungarian society.<sup>68</sup>

Renkin also adds that the introduction of the Kertbeny ritual is 'much more an act of creation, of the establishment of a memory and history that previously did not exist, than a "recovery"'.<sup>69</sup> The Fiumei Street National Cemetery indeed functions as a National Pantheon, a special *site of memory*,<sup>70</sup> particularly important for Hungarians. Thus the act of finding the place of or creating space for Kertbeny there has equally great importance for present day activism: it is a symbolic act of claiming social acceptance through cultural integration by demonstrating that gay memories are fully and inseparably incorporated into 'real' Hungarian memories.<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused on uses of space by homosexuals, urnings, gays and lesbians, LGBT people and queers, in a socially and historically ordered sequence, starting in the City of Spas and continuing in the 'city of spies'. I have shown how the emergence of the public realm in the spatially ordered modern city offered extra opportunities for queers to submerge into the world of strangers, where one could not only be, but also act as a homosexual – with established meeting places and patterns of decodable behaviour. Same-sex desires have been socially recognized and, at the same time, misrecognized in Hungary since at least the first half of the twentieth century, and these processes continued during the state socialist period, too.

The totalitarian androgyny of the first decade after World War II brought the renaissance of compiling 'homosexual inventories' to recruit police informers, as a regular part of police work. Also as a new achievement of state socialist gender equality policies, men and women could equally be prosecuted on perversion against nature charges for a while. During state socialism, public expressions of sexuality were heavily mediated. After the change in the political system and after many decades of spatially deprived public existence of non-heteronormative desires, Budapest was the place,

where the sociocultural infrastructure for LGBT people in Hungary could start to develop again.

Today Budapest – while its historically determined hydrocephalus feature has definitively started to fade mainly because of the accelerated expansion of queer cyberization – has a fairly well-developed organizational and entertainment landscape that can be readily navigated by LGBTQ groups and individuals. On the other hand, city life in Budapest is far from instantiating 'social relations of difference without exclusion'.<sup>72</sup> It can only be hoped, especially in the present circumstances, that the largely unrealized social ideal of a city life characterized by 'openness to unassimilated otherness'<sup>73</sup> can soon become an ongoing everyday project in Budapest and elsewhere.

## Notes

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- 16 These included the Erzsébet square, where homosexuals gathered in groups on benches around the public toilet; bath houses with steam chambers such as in the Rác, the Király, the Lukács, the Kazinczy and previously the Császár Bath; public toilets at the Kálvin square, the corner of the Teréz boulevard and the Király street, the Emke corner, the little park at the Erzsébet bridge on the Buda side around the fountain and under the bridge, at the Keleti railway station on the departure side; and there used to be the Sasfészek, a homosexual restaurant in Buda, too. Ibid., pp. 75–9.
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## 11

## Two cities of Helsinki? One liberally gay and one practically queer?<sup>1</sup>

*Antu Sorainen*

Helsinki is known today as one of the urban havens for queer people, the capital of a wealthy Nordic country with liberal legislation and an open atmosphere. Finland has recently been ranked as one of the countries with the happiest citizens; it has an extraordinarily stable economy compared to other EU countries and nations worldwide, and the capital, Helsinki, has been called as the world's most livable city, 'rich, happy and good at austerity' as the *Financial Times* put it sardonically in its special report in 2012.<sup>2</sup> Helsinki keeps pulsing with an active queer scene even during the current era, which David M. Halperin recently claimed is marked by 'the decline of the queer public sphere'. In Halperin's view, Western gay culture is dying out on the basis that straight people have bought up the houses of gay people after they died of AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s, and that the numbers of gay bars in major cities are on the decline from the peak years in the 1970s and 1980s. He blames the gentrification of those metropolitan areas that were populated by queer folks until the late 1990s and online hook-ups for the latter problem – which seems quite plausible as lesbians and gay men worldwide can now connect without the aid of commercial bars. In Helsinki, the number of centrally located bars, cafés and late-night clubs has, however, been quite steady since the 1990s – gay men in particular are well catered to. Lesbians and other queer people may be less visible in terms of the commercial bar scene, but they too continue to play an important role in the history of Helsinki's public sexual landscape.<sup>3</sup> Research has shown that it makes sense to lay out a suggestive distinction