

„Dreaming Tomorrow into Concrete”

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The Anatomy
of a Regional Institute of
Planning and Designing:
Győrítér 1948–1995

Doctoral Dissertation

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Theses

1.

My dissertation represents the first comprehensive work focusing on the history of a provincial socialist state planning institute. Within this framework, I could not aim for exhaustive presentation; rather, the goal of my work is to initiate the further research by providing certain fundamentals.

Research on architectural planning between 1945 and 1990, particularly regarding the history of domestic planning firms, remains heavily deficient, despite these entities constituting almost the exclusive framework for professional practice during this period. The two existing significant domestic studies focused on major offices in the capital city (Ferkai 2015b; Haba 2019). Research on institutionalized planning has only recently begun on a more comprehensive scale even at the international level, thus placing my work within the most current developments.

The distinctive character of Győriterv can be grasped from various perspectives along its "rural" nature. For instance, its regional delineation, which, however, was more of an advantage than a disadvantage, as the company held almost a monopolistic position in the North Transdanubian region. Győriterv not only undertook design tasks but also functioned as a kind of local architectural authority. Its responsibilities included organizing smaller county planning offices in the 1950s. In addition to its regional role, the office also developed plans for numerous nationwide construction programs. Among the most significant were plans for bread factories, engineering halls, car service centers, and agricultural and public buildings made of membrane structures. In terms of the quantity and importance of such extensive tasks, Győriterv stood out among other similar design institutes. These were typically industrial commissions

stemming from the region's relatively advanced industrialization and close relationships with local companies. Particularly, Rába MFG played a crucial role in Győriterv's life not only as a client but also as a unique executor background and as the "patron" of Győr city, thus supporting numerous public buildings.

Compared to the capital firms, Győriterv, as a rural office, struggled with labor shortages for decades. However, the "engineer shortage" ultimately allowed for the personnel continuity that was decisive both in the early history and the final hours of the company: the founders were the most renowned local professionals of the interwar period, while around the time of the regime change, significant architectural offices and leaders of the local architectural education emerged from Győriterv.

2.

During the socialist era, working as an architect almost exclusively meant being employed by a state planning institute. In a fundamentally hierarchical and gradually bureaucratizing system, individual creative paths were shaped by various coping strategies. Within the framework of Győriterv, there was indeed room for individual, idiosyncratic initiatives, as long as they aligned with the company's objectives.

In my dissertation, I examine the interplay between corporate structure and personal trajectories, revealing numerous aspects of the relationship between the individual and the institution. Compared to private design practice, employment provided a degree of protection but also came with numerous constraints. Selected architects employed various strategies to unfold their design ambitions while navigating within the organizational framework, often balancing compromise with boundary-pushing "self-will" that ultimately reinforced the existing system. Throughout, the company management actively fostered personal relationships between clients and designers, even embracing works initiated by individuals. These initiatives could stem

from individual aspirations, personal commitments, networking, lobbying, or even local patriotism. However, this openness diminished over time, especially in the 1970s with increasing bureaucratization, eventually disappearing almost entirely. Initiatives that did not align with the prescribed direction set by the leadership or aimed at reforming institutional structure floundered. Radical change, real "rebellion" within the company, was not feasible, and exiting the institution was the only viable alternative.

3.

The question of intergenerational cooperation is crucial in Győriterv's history. The dynamics of relationships evolved over time: the initial peaceful "coexistence" gave way to escalating tensions by the 1970s. The dissatisfaction of the younger generation and the repeated failures of their reform ideas directly led to the company's disintegration.

Lakatos Kálmán and Winkler Oszkár, two successful and locally influential architects assumed the professional leadership of Győriterv, laying down its professional and human foundations. Initially, the office structure did not organize into studios, and although the elders served as role models for the young, there were no explicit master-apprentice relationships or mentor-led closed groups. However, due to the abundance of exciting work, tasks provided opportunities for even the youngest to find their individual voices. This young generation assumed leadership roles after the departure of the "elders" in 1956 and remained in their positions almost until the company's dissolution. The middle generation arriving in the late 1960s and the subsequent younger generation did not receive enough opportunities. Besides the increasingly prominent standard architectural tasks, few unique commissions were left for the younger architects. The failure of attempts to establish a youth studio in 1971 illustrates the ossification of the system. As internal reforms continued to fail, and in the 1980s private entrepreneurship became possible, the most talented, innovative designers became independent. This led to a kind of counter-selection and significantly contributed to the company's process of disintegration.

4.

In my dissertation, alongside major works, I place particular emphasis on examining the tasks of "everyday" and mass commissions. Everyday tasks, while not particularly interesting as individual creations, better characterize the era in many ways due to their quantity and "average" nature than highlighted projects. These works most clearly demonstrate Győriterv's increasingly contradictory entanglement with local industry and contractor background.

Only a fraction of Győriterv's work consisted of prominent, unique commissions. This also meant that the "masterpieces" were rare exceptions even in the portfolios of distinguished creators. In fact, certain architects found their own paths, their creative identities, in specific standard design tasks. For instance, Kálmán Lakatos and József Cserhalmy worked on standard designs for bread factories nationwide at the beginning of the 1950s, Lang János on Győrváz educational complexes, Andor Horváth on AFIT service centers with satisfaction for decades, and Gábor Majoros became the professional of membrane structures. Even for prominent designers like József Lőrincz, the tasks related to Rába MVG's steel halls and industrial complexes provided the "livelihood" of their professional work, leading to numerous unique commissions. Solving these types of tasks posed more of a construction and coordination challenge rather than architectural creativity. Architectural and engineering collaborations also presupposed locally available manufacturing and contracting backgrounds, or more precisely, were based on these industrial backgrounds. Engineering halls were developed in collaboration with Rába MVG, membrane structures with Graboplast, while Győrváz-style and other prefabricated buildings using house factory products were developed in close collaboration with GYÁÉV, resembling contemporary

"research and development" projects. From the 1970s onward, these assignments made up 70-90% of Győriterv's tasks.

Moreover, this also highlights the significant role played by technical engineers alongside architects in Győriterv: the company was characterized by a kind of engineering interdisciplinarity. The "engineering perspective" gradually gained ground at the expense of architecture, ultimately becoming decisive not only within tasks but also in corporate management. This did not bring the desired result – financial stability – but led to the complete collapse of the architectural design sector.

5.

The examination of unrealized plans and architectural visions reveals an "alternative world" that diverged from Western architecture primarily not due to ideological reasons but because of the state-socialist path of modernization and the resulting economic, financial, and technical constraints.

In my research, I placed particular emphasis on presenting unrealized building plans or alternative versions of completed works. The exploration of design histories reveals the limitations, compromises that architects had to contend with in different periods, which directly shaped the form, volume, and structure of a building. The journey leading to the creation of the Győr National Theater exemplifies this process most vividly. Other unrealized works, especially the chapter on high-rise buildings, also draw attention to the fact that the ideas left on paper, with their freshness and formal, structural, or urban planning characteristics, are closer to Western "mainstream" architecture than their realized counterparts.

6.

The widespread rejection of architectural achievements from the period under discussion is regrettable. Over the past decade and a half, my scientific and popularizing activities have aimed to facilitate the easier understanding of these creations and to showcase their positive aspects.

The rejection of buildings from this era stems from both the often genuinely challenging acceptability and the lack of willingness to understand, undoubtedly reinforced by the ideological neglect of architecture at the time. I have attempted to change this situation by presenting the circumstances and results of the period, providing analytical tools for understanding. My goal has been served by my publications over the past fifteen years, ranging from the widely popular Modern Győr blog to popularizing articles, urban walks, numerous exhibitions I organized, scientific publications, and lectures.