Tulips and Prefab: Hungarian Architects in the Bind of State Socialist Modernization in the 1970s

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Introduction

The paper examines the so-called “Tulip Debate”, an important episode in the post-war history of architectural discourse in Hungary. Architecture in Hungary has always been more than just a technological and artistic undertaking. It has been a site where competing social visions, utopian ideals, national and cultural identities clashed and hoped to gain material expression. Architects’ debates thus highlight how worldviews, political power, historical consciousness and cultural traditions imprint professional discourse. In state socialist societies professional discourses can inform quite acutely about the state of intellectuals and society through disclosing professionals’ cognitive awareness, political attitudes, legitimacy beliefs and readiness to grant loyalty to the regime (Meuschel 1992:28). Also, the oppressive presence of the state over professions is often postulated in these societies without examining the ways in which this predominance was legitimated or challenged by professionals, and without mapping the specific intellectual, institutional, and political constellations that guided professional conduct.

Architects present an interesting case study as they make up a profession that is largely heteronomous and caught in a complex institutional arrangement while trying to reconcile art and technology within a single professional activity. The cultural and institutional locus of architecture offers excellent insight into changing systems of domination and legitimacy claims that have characterized post-war Hungary. For instance, the discursive shift in architecture from socialist realism\(^1\) to modernism in the mid-1950s signals the move from a charismatic form of system legitimation to a rational-legal form (linked to value rationality) (Weber 1964, Fehér et al 1983). The paradigm shift also reveals the impact of changing legitimacy claims on the conceived social role and self-image of the profession. Architecture in the period of socialist realism is considered primarily as art, an important tool of representation and means of solidifying the legitimacy of the Stalinist regime. In sharp contrast, the return of architectural modernism is

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\(^1\) Socialist realism in Hungary lasted from 1951 to roughly 1956 and was dictated by developments in the Soviet Union. It called for a new architecture that was socialist in content and *national* in form. Practically this meant reviving the monumentality and architectural language of classicist architecture (drawing on specific national traditions) complemented with themes extolling the every-day lives of workers and peasants.
combined with the portrayal of architects as engineers put in charge of the industrialization of building and the rationalized mass production of housing. The paradigm change is closely intertwined with the new legitimacy claims of the regime: the promise of material prosperity and the incorporation of the right to housing among the basic rights of citizens.

The “Tulip Debate” (1975-1976) is a decisive moment in post-war architectural discourse in Hungary because it reinstates issues of regional and national identity in relation to modernism and Europeaness as the key organizing themes of the intellectual field in architecture. While these themes were responsible for the intellectual segmentation of the profession until the Second World War, their force fades in the following decades, but only to reappear in the 1970s. The paper examines how the “Tulip Debate” revives these old divisions in the social context of a forced state socialist modernization project. The debate, the biggest architectural debate of the post-war period, is sparked off by an attempt of a group of architects in Southern Hungary to build a prefabricated housing complex with a “human face” by employing surface decorations to break the monotony of modernist aesthetics. Such experimentation was in fact not unprecedented in this region. The regional prefab factory produced houses with façades resembling striped pajamas, oval TV screens or the logo of a coffee brand (Omnia) only sold in Hungary. This time, however, architects used motifs from Hungarian folk culture (e.g. ‘tulips’) to decorate the façade of prefabricated blocks in a large housing complex. It is due to the nature of the decorating motif, its association with national folklore and with the use of such motifs in secessionist architecture, that the experiment launches a fierce debate. The puzzle of whether tulips are in ideological harmony with prefabricated blocks or simply an act of “tasteless camouflage” prompts questions about the status of national culture and identity in architecture, striking at the heart of modernist architectural doctrine with its emphasis on abstract internationalism. As a consequence of the debate that dragged on for nearly two years on the pages of a prestigious literary weekly and the official journal of the Architectural Association, the experiment was stopped, the housing complex was left incomplete and the studio of the architects was dissolved.

I argue that the significance, the logic and the outcome of the “Tulip Debate” was derived from a broader social controversy between “urbanists” and “populists” that has busied Hungarian intellectuals since the late 19th century. The “urbanist-populist” discourse (“népi-urbánus vita”) has been waged as a kind of Kulturkampf between cosmopolitan intellectuals who turn toward the West for bourgeois and civic values, and populist intellectuals, who emphasize the uniqueness and importance of national cultural heritage. “Populists” advocate a Sonderweg approach to social modernization that goes beyond the uncritical emulation of Western societies.
The urbanist-populist discourse constitutes an important normative frame that structures, polarizes and politicizes discussions of cultural professionals in Hungary. By linking or associating views in a discussion to the “urbanist” or the “populist” position, one can assign an essentialist character and a political content to these views. Consequently the entire debate assumes a rigidly bipolar structure. The urbanist-populist discourse functions as a powerful symbolic resource: its activation can be effectively used to include or exclude certain political, cultural, and professional views.

On the one hand, the boundaries of legitimate architecture in the 1970s were defined by the formal rationality of the economic system that prescribed cost effectiveness, the use of industrial building technology and mass production of housing as the underlying criteria of socialist architecture. On the other hand, as the “Tulip Debate” shows, the architectural profession also had some autonomy in defining legitimate architecture, even if this autonomy often prevailed as negative autonomy. By activating the “urbanist-populist” discourse the profession decided to sanction the architectural view advocated by the architects of the experimental project. It did so not because these views were anti-socialist or fundamentally questioned the subjection of architecture to the overriding principle of economic rationality, but because it found that the architectural program of the architects promoted anti-modernism. It is interesting to note that English and German accounts of the “Tulip Debate” (Cook 1996, Eifert-Körnig 1994) find no sufficient explanation for why this seemingly harmless reformist attempt was reprimanded so harshly. But if one is aware of the intimate link of the discussion to the “urbanist-populist” controversy, the outcome of the debate is no surprise at all.

The analysis of the “Tulip Debate” illustrates the power of the “urbanist-populist” discourse in structuring political, intellectual and professional discourse in Hungary and in determining the contours of political and cultural legitimacy. While the urbanist-populist discourse is commonly thought to have returned to the center stage of Hungarian political and intellectual discourse following the collapse of state socialism, the “Tulip Debate” shows that it never really disappeared and continued to exert a significant influence in the state socialist era as well.

The paper proceeds by introducing the institutional context in which the debate took place, the impact of prefabrication and industrialization on architectural discourse in the post-war period, and the architectural program of the Pécs Group, the architectural studio that was commissioned to build the experimental project. This background material is followed by the analysis of the debate and its relationship to the “urbanist-populist” discourse.
The First Socialist Housing Campaign: One Million Flats in 15 years

The “Tulip-Debate” marked, quite symbolically, the last year of the ambitious 15-year-long housing construction program that targeted the building of one million dwellings between 1960 and 1975. The program was launched with the intention of putting an end to the housing shortage and fulfilling the socialist promise of providing each citizen with adequate dwelling. The targets of the 15-year-program were met and even slightly surpassed. From the 1 million 50,000 flats built in this period (Figure 1) 354,000 were in state and 696,000 in private ownership. 1975 was also the year in which housing construction reached its peak with 99,588 flats. In fact never before or after were there so many flats built in Hungary in the course of a single year. Between 1960 and 1975 30% of the population moved into a new flat and, as Table 1 shows, the comfort level and size of these flats gradually increased throughout the period.

At the onset of the program there was general political consensus that this volume of construction could not be realized without the large-scale introduction of industrialized building techniques. In 1964 the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued a decree about the construction industry in which it decided the adoption of construction systems using large prefabricated blocks. (Antal 1995:48). In 1966 the first housing complex was erected in Budapest using large prefabricated panel technology, called the “house-factory technology” in Hungarian. The technological know-how was bought from the Soviet Union (which itself was modeled on a French construction system) and was modified to meet Hungarian needs. Later Hungary also bought the license of the Danish Larsen-Nielsen construction system. From the beginning of the 1970s the large panel technology gained widespread application (Table 2) and radically changed the character of public housing. Housing complexes were more frequently planned as green field investments in the outskirts of cities. They also became increasingly larger and the apartment blocks in the complexes gradually higher.

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2 The original targets in the government decree issued in 1960 projected a reverse ownership distribution: they estimated the construction of 600,000 state-owned and 400,000 privately owned flats (Ballai 1983:84, Antal 1995:48). In the same 15-year-period there were 250,000 old flats torn down or declared inhabitable. In the 1970s investment in housing construction made up 20% of all investment and 5-6% of the annual national income (Ballai 1983:84-85).

3 In 1970-1975 29%, in 1976-1980 36% of all the newly built dwellings were constructed with large panel technology. This figure was lower than in most other state socialist countries. The share of large panel flats reached 75% in the Soviet Union, 60% in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, 40% in Bulgaria and Poland, and 35% in Romania in the same period. The 1970s showed the gradual retreat of this technology in Western
The 15-year-long housing construction program, however, did not only bring about an unprecedented expansion of the housing stock and large-scale industrialization in construction, but it also built up a great deal of tension and dissatisfaction, which came to light in the “Tulip-Debate”. Despite the enormous effort the program was unable to fulfill its claim of solving the housing shortage and providing adequate living conditions for all. As a result of the fetishization of quantitative expansion, the “housing factories” churned out prefabricated apartment blocks and housing complexes that were often alienating in their monotony and uniformity, casting doubt on the promise of an improved quality of life in this environment.

 Architects and Prefabrication

The massive housing construction program was also coupled with ongoing debates among architects about prefabrication, standardization and the mass production of housing units. Discussions revolved around various aspects of standardizing designs for mass production and the impact of radical standardization on the architectural profession as well as on the built environment. The process of standardization involved drafting uniform designs, so called “type-designs”, for housing, hospitals, nurseries, schools, vacation houses, cinemas etc. and determining the optimal size, floor plan or ceiling height for apartments.\(^4\) The standardization of flats into mass products implicitly relied on the assumption that the needs of citizens are largely uniform and therefore standardizable, or that they can be made uniform. In this sense, the case of mass housing illustrates particularly poignantly the functioning of state socialist society as a “dictatorship over needs”.

On the one hand, architects viewed prefabrication as potentially leading to extreme homogenization of the built environment (and concomitantly of the dwellers) and as a tool that can be effectively used (by the state) to degrade the architectural profession into engineering. On the other hand, many architects acknowledged the enormous possibilities of prefabrication in responding to housing shortages and in even promoting diversity, as the combination of well-designed prefabricated building blocks could entail almost unlimited variability. The discussions about standardization and prefabrication also signaled that after the relatively short period of socialist realism in the 1950s, by the 1960s modernist architecture was fully rehabilitated in Hungary. Architects looked back

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Europe. The share of large panel flats peaked at 25.7% in Great Britain in 1966 and at 40-45% in Sweden on the eve of the 1970s (Hegedus-Tosics 1994:66-67).

\(^4\) In 1962 the Housing Committee of the UN visited Hungary. In the report they compiled on the housing situation they noted that the ceiling height of 2.70 meters was an unnecessary luxury and a waste of resources and suggested that ceiling height be reduced. Le Corbusier stipulated the ideal ceiling height in 2.20m.
on socialist realism as a fatal mistake, an unfortunate detour, imposed on architecture by totalitarian politics. They blamed socialist realism for diverting Hungarian architecture from its ‘natural’ path of development and traced the reasons for lagging behind international, i.e. primarily Western European, developments to it. Hungarian architects therefore embraced all the more vehemently the modernist discourse and sanctioned all attempts that cast the smallest doubt on the uncritical emulation of Western European modernism, as the “Tulip Debate” illustrates.

The real turning point for architects arrives with the introduction of the large panel technology in Hungary in the mid-1960s. This construction system represented a technological breakthrough by enabling the prefabrication of room-sized blocks. As mentioned above, the construction system in Hungarian is called the “house-factory technology” and its product “the flat made in the house-factory” -- truly in the spirit of Le Corbusier’s conception of the flat as “the machine for living” (la machine à habiter). The spread of the new technology in practice did rapidly escalate into homogenization: Only a limited selection of prefabricated blocks was produced, which were combined into a small number of multi-story buildings, usually into 5 or 10 stories high point or row houses. Council officials received the budget estimates and the directives from the Central Planning Office for the number of flats to be built in their constituency and then picked from a catalogue the type of blocks that would enable them to fulfill the plan. Architecture and architects gradually fell victim to the rationalized mass production of housing, which remained the highest priority in construction and social policy in this period.

Architects’ attempts to creatively rethink the construction process with prefabricated materials were doomed to fail. This was most poignantly illustrated by the controversy about the “strip house”, a superblock idea of the mid-1960s. A fanatic architect tried to break out of the vicious circle of prefabricated housing production by proposing technological innovations that would have accommodated more flexible and customized designs. But as he was facing categorical rejection from the Patent Office and building authorities, his plans gradually grew into a caricature of state socialist building practices. They culminated in a design of a 3km long, 40 stories high superblock that would have contained 20 000 flats, housed 70 000 dwellers and would have been built on the most picturesque spot on the Danube bank in Budapest (Major and Osskó 1981).

In the uninspiring atmosphere of “routinized modernism” (Janáky 1985) and in the bind of a rigid institutional structure with large state-owned, highly bureaucratized architectural offices (“design factories”) and oversized

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5 Similar experimental projects that entertained quasi utopist ideas about the potential of prefabrication could be found in some other state socialist countries such as Czechoslovakia and Poland (Ferkai 1990:80).
construction companies, architects had limited playing field. Yet there crystallized a range of strategies through which they hoped to compensate for growing de-professionalization and de-skilling. Many tried to escape housing construction and large panel technology by searching for employment in offices for industrial architecture or public buildings. Others gravitated to the margins of the profession: they accepted jobs in smaller architectural offices in the countryside, went into historic building preservation, stage-set design (theatre architecture) or “model architecture”. But there was also still a sizable group that has not completely given up on prefabrication and believed that its humanization was possible and worthwhile. The young architects of the Paks Experiment also belonged to this camp.

The Pécs Group and the Experimental Housing Complex in Paks

The Young Studio, which later evolved into the Pécs Group, was set up within the large state planning and architectural office, the Pécs Planning and Architectural Office (Pécsi Tervezovállalat), in the Southern Hungarian city of Pécs in the late 1960s. The office hoped to revitalize its planning and design practice by employing talented young architects who did not shy away from experimentation. The region was also known for its more liberal cultural and political atmosphere. The regional housing factory was unique in producing a specific series of large panel blocks that were adopted to suit regional tastes and peculiarities. Several members of the Young Studio studied together at the university and lobbied effectively at the administration to hire one of their former instructors, the architect György Csete, to head the studio. The group embarked on articulating a conceptual program and a unified approach to architecture. After a number of small commissions, the studio was assigned to build the housing complex in Paks. The small village by the Danube in Southern Hungary became the site of Hungary’s first and only nuclear power plant with a sudden population explosion and an urgent need for housing. The commission presented a perfect opportunity for putting into action the architectural program of the Pécs Group on a relatively large project.

6 The competencies of state-run architectural and planning offices were derived from the logic of the centrally planned economy and reflected a quite mechanic division of labor. There was, for instance, an office in charge of designing public housing, industrial buildings, public buildings, urban planning etc.

7 The city of Pécs, for instance, has a renowned ceramic factory whose tiles were widely used to decorate eclectic and secessionist buildings at the turn of the century. This tradition was revived by applying these ceramic tiles to the pre-cast panel to be used in apartment blocks (e.g.: in the case of the so-called pajama houses) and public buildings from the 1960s on.
The architectural credo of the group can be summarized in three tenets. They wanted to create a vernacular architecture that harmoniously combines traditional with modern architectural language. They wanted to design buildings that are both national and international in character. They wanted to integrate “progressive” traditions of folk culture into modern (socialist) culture, as they believed folk culture had the power to make and maintain social communities.

They upheld the example of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály who successfully integrated folk music into modern classical music as evidence for a possible synthesis between modern and traditional culture. Their program was also inspired by such Secessionist forerunners as the architect, Ödön Lechner, and the architectural group named “Youth”. The architects of the Pécs Group appropriated selected aspects of the architectural concept of these architects. They, first of all, included in their program the search for a characteristically Hungarian architectural language that preoccupied Secessionist architects. They argued that under the unifying umbrella of modern architecture each nation should have the opportunity to speak its own (native) language. In addition to internationalism, architects should strive to discover, integrate and uphold local traditions in architecture (Csete 1977:26, 30, Csete et al 1981). These traditions could embody the “value added” element of Hungarian architecture saving us from being merely hopeless imitators of Western culture. They took from Lechner the idea that local architectural traditions should be incorporated and transposed into a modern, urban, cosmopolitan context and that the lessons of tradition should be applied with the latest (modern) building technologies (Eifert-Körnig 1994, Moravánszky 1985). They adopted from the ‘Youth’ group (and particularly from Károly Kós) the careful attention to folk traditions that involved their systematic cataloguing and analysis. They emphasized the rational, practical, economical and ecological features of peasant architecture and applied design, which could guide building practices under conditions of industrialized building, and particularly under the enormous economic pressures of mass housing construction. They believed that the powerful symbolism of folk culture could restore the meaningfulness and historical consciousness of contemporary architecture for all (Csete 1977).

In this spirit, they embarked on the project within the technological and economic confines of modern industrial building methods of the times. They used the large panel construction system but expanded the supply of prefabricated elements (included cup or shell-shaped elements for the balconies and the entrances) in order to break the monotony and “mechanic geometric order” of the apartment blocks. The façade of the buildings were decorated with

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8 In fact classical music remains until this day the only cultural field in Hungary, where the synthesis of popular (folk) and modern musical traditions is not called into question and continues to be considered a legitimate form of high culture.
expressive ornaments (labeled tulips in the ensuing discussion) blown up to building-sized dimensions. They also introduced changes to the floor plan based on the internal functional structure of traditional peasant homes. Instead of the standardized floor plan that connected parts of the flat through a dark and narrow hallway, they made a multifunctional space into the center of the flat. This room could be used in various ways as a dining and living room and provided the connection to other parts of the flat.

As a consequence of the public controversy that ensued with the “Tulip Debate” in 1975-1976 the experiment was stopped and the Pécs Group was administratively dissolved. The architects, however, continued to follow the same principles, now with different means and forced into intellectual opposition. The “Tulip Debate”, nevertheless, became integral part of the genesis of organic architecture, which grew into a powerful and unique architectural school by the mid-1980s (Cook 1996, Eifert-Körnig 1994).

The Debate

Following the logic of the urbanist-populist debate, the views articulated in the discussion on the “Paks-Experiment” were polarized into two camps embodying progressive, modernist and retrograde, anti-modernist forces. This entailed that the architectural experiment and program of the Pécs Group was not judged on its own merits but on the basis of its (loose) association with the “populist” side of the “urbanist-populist” discourse. The overwhelming majority of the contributors therefore condemned the experiment of the architects. They did so not in the name of enforcing the criteria of state sponsored modernism. The architects in fact all agreed that the industrially mass-produced architecture of the post-war period epitomized by the vast housing complexes was gruesomely monotonous and insipid. They condemned the experiment because it revoked a professional discourse about the status of national identity in architecture that had been dormant since the end of the war but that had been responsible for the internal segmentation of the architectural profession since the late 19th century. In this context architectural modernism meant much more than just the legitimate architectural language of state socialism. Architectural modernism in the eyes of most architects was their last link to international, particularly to European, architectural trends and thereby to a European cultural tradition that had its origins before the Second World War. Until this day architects often refer to the inter-war period as the last period in architectural history when Hungarian architecture did not lag behind but kept apace with the latest international developments, thanks to a small group of modernist architects. It was the European cultural identity of the profession that was at stake and had to be vehemently protected in the Tulip Debate. The critique crystallized around four
points that served to unmask the false and reactionary nature of the architectural experiment in Paks.

The first argument took under scrutiny the various architectural movements since the 19th century that set out to define and codify a national architectural style to show that they were all doomed to fail for advocating some form of anti-modernism (Major 1981: 394). The repeated failures should have warned the architects of the Pécs group that such ideas have eventually always proved inviable. Earlier (Secessionist) attempts failed because they were decadent and naively romanticized folk culture in a time of rapid technological change and social modernization. The last two waves, in the inter-war period and in the 1950s, failed because they embraced authoritarian political intents. Nationalist architects of the inter-war era upheld the architecture of the Hungarian village as an ideal while uncritically served an increasingly reactionary and fascist political regime and denounced left-wing modernist architects (Major 1981:394). The socialist realist architectural program of the 1950s promoted an architecture that was national in form and socialist in content. This national program was, however, dictated by the Soviet Union and was imposed on Hungarian architects in order to provide backing to a Stalinist regime (Major 1981: 396, Preisich 1976:63, Horler 1976:61). From these examples the architect, Máté Major, concludes that architectural movements that turned to folk and national culture for inspiration had a hidden political content and rejected a modern, cosmopolitan, progressive worldview. At the same time, Major cites Walter Gropius to highlight the only legitimate way for architecture to attain a national character. Modern architecture can have a national flavor as long as this is derived from functionality, from architects’ attempts to adapt their building designs to local needs: to climatic, technological and social peculiarities (Major 1981:389). In this sense a good architect does not have to make a special effort to add a national touch to his buildings by applying various decorative motifs.

The second argument follows in a similar vein by claiming an intrinsic contradiction between the industrially produced structure and the decorated facade, the inside and the outside of the experimental buildings, namely between their form and content. Critics argue that in this respect the effort of the young architects to humanize apartment blocks built with a large pre-cast panel technology is worse than no effort at all. They seemingly offered a solution that is actually a little more than an ersatz, a “camouflage”, the construction of a “Disney Land”, which only masks but does not resolve the shortcomings of industrial building (Weichinger 1976:60). The mechanic juxtaposition of the material, the structure and technology of ‘international’, industrially prefabricated blocks and the stylized, ‘national’, secessionist tulips can never be harmoniously reconciled and stand for cutting edge contemporary Hungarian architecture (Major 1981: 389). Tulips, i.e. the propagation of a kind of roughcast architecture (“vakolatarchitektúra”), cannot compensate for the inadequacies of
mass produced buildings. The tulip-shaped balcony of a shoe-box-shaped building remains architecturally just as insipid as the apartment block where the constructor spared surface decorations out of economic considerations (Hoffmann 1981: 408). Others emphasize that the contradiction prevails because the structure is produced with industrialized building techniques while the decoration evokes handworker techniques and traditions. In this sense the decorating motif questions the legitimacy of modern building methods. It promotes techniques that have long been surpassed in architecture as a result of the industrialization of building (Bonta 1976: 58). This contradiction has to be tackled also because the experiment implies that modern (socialist) and traditional (peasant) lifestyles could coexist in a modern society. A view most architects found unacceptable. The critique thereby struck at one of the central aspirations of the Pécs Group: the attainment of a synthesis between modern architecture and popular (folk, national, local) traditions.

The third argument suggests that the architects of the Pécs Group made a mistake in diagnosing the ills of industrialized building and large pre-cast panel technology. This is why the solution they offered is also misleading. The critics argue that the monotony, uniformity and insipidity of mass-produced architecture have to be traced to the imperfection of the technology and to the economic and technological backwardness of the Hungarian construction industry. “Not prefabrication and the large pre-cast panel construction system per se but its current state and poor application present the greatest shortcomings of the construction of mass housing” (Major and Osskó 1981: 421, Cserba 1976: 62). The corollary challenge comes from the tremendous pressure of rapid social modernization (industrialization, urbanization) and the ensuing housing shortage, which subject architecture to purely economic constraints (cost effectiveness), to a “crane ideology”9. Architects are, nevertheless, convinced that with the development of the construction industry and the perfection of prefabrication and panel construction, they will be able to erect housing complexes that are not alienating and manufacture apartments that are variable and hospitable. But the “masking” of the industrially prefabricated structures in the Paks-Experiment erroneously calls into question the inevitability of the industrialization of building and the value of technological progress for architecture.

The fourth argument revolves around a conviction that equates cultural modernism with social modernity. This premise leads architects to disapprove of the experiment because it suggests that the promotion of cultural traditionalism is

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9 The term “crane ideology” refers to the economic voluntarism that made cost-effectiveness the highest priority in housing construction. It dictated that the crane which transported the prefabricated panel blocks should be moved as few times as possible. The fixing of the crane position greatly limited the flexibility and variability of the panel construction system.
identical with the rejection of social modernity and social modernization. By romanticizing the architecture of the traditional Hungarian village, the “young ideologues” (Major 1981:388) of the Pécs Group ignore that peasant architecture is the product of astounding material scarcity. Behind the aesthetically appealing façade of peasant homes lurked poverty and disease, overcrowding and appalling hygienic conditions. Several architects refer to the example of Brasilia, the new modernist capital city of Brazil. They point out that in Brasilia there emerged an extraordinary, modern, and completely tradition-free architecture. While if we were to search for a characteristically national Brazilian architecture, we would find it in the recycled oil barrel, tin, and cardboard architecture of the shantytowns (Szabó 1981:417, Major and Osskó 1981: 423). So the choice between modernism and tradition is ours. By offering this analogy the critics want to draw attention to the moral danger that lies in idealizing an architecture whose social content is more than questionable. The argument, however, also implies that cultural modernism is a necessary requisite of social modernity and may be used as a tool of promoting social modernization.

The supporters made up the minority of the contributors although some of them, like the poet László Nagy, were very prominent. He, however, was commonly considered a “populist” writer and therefore his support only reinforced the association between the position of the Pécs Group and the “populist” position. The defenders either identified with the conceptual program of the young architects or simply saluted the effort to do something about the endless monotony and inhumanity of prefabricated housing complexes. They also emphasized that the experiment of the Pécs Group was not limited to the decoration of the façade but involved changes to the floor plan and organization of the flats as well. They advocated the position that a synthesis of tradition and modernism is possible and desirable (Nagy 1981:392) referring to the example of modern Finish and Japanese architecture. They all stressed that at least the innovative spirit of the architects should be appreciated.

The logic of the “urbanist-populist” discourse is illustrated particularly well by the first argument against the experiment: It lumps together very different positions, trends and schools on the basis of their presumed similarities such as (primordial and political) nationalism and anti-modernism, thereby essentializing them into a “populist” position. It becomes clear how reductionist this strategy is if we take a closer look at architectural movements in Hungary that defined the articulation of a national architectural language as central to their agenda. What is in fact so striking and ironic about these architectural movements is that they were all deeply international and not necessarily anti-modern. Proponents of

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10 It is hard to tell whether only a small number of the supportive contributions were published, or that the absolute number of supportive contributions was also very low. In the journal of the Architectural Association no supportive article was published.
these movements eventually found authentically Hungarian architectural expressions in foreign forms and ideas, and they were often pioneers in adopting modern building technologies.

Hungarian secessionism with its search for a vernacular architecture was integral part of the national romanticism that spread all over late 19th century Europe. On of the most outstanding secessionist architects, Ödön Lechner (see also p.8.), was deeply influenced by Indian colonial architecture and discovered authentic Hungarian architectural forms in Oriental, Indian (Sassanid) ornaments. This was in fact a very liberal interpretation of the oriental origins of Hungarian folk culture. At the same time, Lechner and his later followers such as Béla Lajta and István Medgyaszay played a crucial role in introducing modern building technologies in Hungary in an effort to create a modern metropolitan architecture. They were the first to use reinforced concrete, the latest technological innovation of the times. Another secessionist school, the ‘Youth’ group, (see also p.8.) turned to the English Arts and Crafts movement and Finish national romanticism for inspiration. They molded English and Scandinavian forms with the architectural heritage of Transylvania (a truly multicultural region) into a regional contextual architecture (Moravánszky 1985).  

In addition to György Csete and the Pécs Group, the most important figure of Hungarian organic architecture, is Imre Makovecz. His architectural agenda also builds on folklore but on a universal folklore that does not stop at the Hungarian border (Moravánszky 1985). He also draws on the international organic tradition (Frank Lloyd Wright, Anton Gaudi, Reima Pietilä, Bruce Goff etc.) and finds its main ideological inspiration in the anthropomorphism of Rudolf Steiner12 (Makovecz 1985). Others primarily embrace Hungarian folk (peasant) architecture for its functionalism, rationalism and ecological consciousness, i.e. for qualities that have less to do with the Hungarianness of this group than with its social and economic position. Finally, socialist realism, while an exceptional episode in the history of national architectural movements by virtue of its involuntary character, was also part of an international trend, of the international academism of the 1950s, which was imposed on all state socialist countries by the Soviet Union.

While later movements always built on their forerunners as we saw in the case of the Pécs Group (see pp.8-9.), they did so by appropriating selected aspects of the architectural program of these forerunners. National architectural movements thereby offer a perfect example for how the notion of tradition is constructed, and how these schools invent their own genealogy (Wessely 1989). But it is exactly

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11 Scandinavian architecture has also been upheld in Hungary as an example of a successful synthesis between modern and traditional, vernacular architecture (Lane 2000).
12 The architect of the Goetheanum and the founder of the Waldorf School.
this constructed character of the vernacular architectural traditions that is rejected in the “Tulip Debate” and is petrified into a dangerous nationalism and anti-modernism.

**Conclusion**

The analysis of the “Tulip Debate” demonstrates how the “urbanist-populist” discourse functions as a discursive trap in Hungarian society, as a symbolic frame that the architectural profession could effectively use as a resource to police the boundaries of legitimate architecture. The structuring force of the discourse also prevails in its labeling effect. The dissolution of the Pécs Group pushed organic architecture to the margins of the profession, from the mainstream of industrialized building to the periphery of traditional building methods and small-scale commissions. The incident and the reprisal also forced organic architects to join the intellectual and political opposition. Hence, the association of organic architecture in Hungary with political opposition until 1989. What the profession claimed was a preventive and cautionary measure to reorient the young architects in fact became a self-fulfilling prophecy. All in all, the “urbanist-populist” discourse continues to be responsible for the strong politicization of Hungarian architectural discourse until this very day.

The debate also sheds light on the relationship between cultural modernism and social modernity, and the meaning of cultural modernism in state socialism. Architects viewed cultural modernism as a precondition of social modernity, a possible tool of social modernization and an integral element of a European identity. Architects considered socialism an alternative route to social modernity and this was an essential part of their legitimacy beliefs. In setting up capitalist modernity (and the promise of economic prosperity) as the yardstick against which the mature state socialist state measured itself, this state also enabled and legitimated the emulation of Western developments in architecture from the 1960s. Consequently, the questioning of cultural modernism undermined the belief in social progress and the claim to a European identity.

In many respects the “urbanist-populist” discourse belongs to the symbolic repertoire of architects to deal with cultural globalization. While globalization today is widely conceived as a characteristically contemporary phenomenon, in the case of architecture it is evident that this issue has deeply divided the profession since the late 19th century. Or to put it another way: in so far as the contemporary discourse on globalization is just a new edition of the modernization discourse of the 19th and 20th century, it comes as no surprise that the “urbanist-populist” discourse has not lost its relevance for Hungarian society.

Through the case study of “Tulip Debate” the paper also hoped to show that professional discourses in general are closely linked to master narratives about the meaning of state, market, democracy, social mobility and modernization.
Professionals’ narratives in fact continue to be central in delineating the very discursive and institutional framework of society.
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Appendix

Figure 1: Volume of annual housing construction, 1949, 1955, 1960-1975

1955, 1960-1975

Table 1: Annual Housing Construction

| Year | Number of housing units | Per 1000 persons | Average number of rooms | Share of housing units with
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<tr>
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<td>13,251</td>
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<td>1,6</td>
<td>40,8</td>
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<td>1955</td>
<td>31,526</td>
<td>3,2</td>
<td>1,6</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>58,059</td>
<td>5,8</td>
<td>1,7</td>
<td>52,9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>67,527</td>
<td>6,7</td>
<td>1,7</td>
<td>49,6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>54,099</td>
<td>5,4</td>
<td>1,8</td>
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<td>1963</td>
<td>52,728</td>
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<td>----------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
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<td>1973</td>
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<td>1974</td>
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<td>1975</td>
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Table 2: Share of Prefabricated Housing in Total Housing Construction (%)


Source: Hegedus József-Tosics Iván: A magyar lakásrendszer szociológia és közgazdasági elemzése