THE PHYSICAL TOPOGRAPHY OF THE SQUARE

In its first approximation the square is a physical-topographical concept. It is a wide public space surrounded by buildings.

Thus, to be able to describe the square we have to take its physical determinants as the base. The reason for this is that for all the other dimensions of the square, symbolic, spiritual, and sacred, only the physical concept can serve as a base. Every other content sketch must, or must not, be derived from this.

In order to describe the large public square surrounded by buildings it is not necessary to discuss the history of every building. If we were to do that, we would not write the history of the square but we would write, and practice, architectural history. In my view, and because of the topic I have chosen, there is no need for this. The history of the square is not the history of the buildings surrounding it.

Yet, albeit briefly, reference must be made to what constitutes the boundaries of the square. It must be done by rendering the functionality of the physical dimensions but not with any artistic, architectural or urban history details.

This is true for the building, namely the Parliament, which has given the square a supra-physical dimension right from the beginning. If the Parliament were not there, the history of the square would have been quite different and there would not have been a symbolic or a spiritual history. This does not mean, however, that the entire history and inner structure of the building has to be discussed. For us, and for me, the important matters are only those which affected the history of the square.
THE NAME

The official name of the square today is Lajos Kossuth Square. For the sake of simplicity I will call it the Kossuth Square all throughout its history. The history of how the name was given suggests that the physical-topographic field had undergone a change and that the name of the square moved from the concrete to the realm of symbolism and spirituality.

The square, or more accurately, the area which is largely today’s square was known after 1853 as the Stadt Schopper Platz, meaning the City Calking Square.1 The name reflected the use to which the square was put at the time. Prior to that, ever since the 1820s, the area was known as a river port and shipyard area. The German names of the times, Städtischer Auswind Platz (City Port) and Schiffauswindsamst Platz (Ship Unloading Office Square) reflect this. It was also known as Flotillen Platz (Flotilla Square). The port also had a shipyard attached to it and this led to the Schopper Platz, i.e. Calking Square designation which became widely accepted in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Schopper was the shipwright who calked the planks in the sides and bottom of the vessels. Acceptance of the calking (filling) name was promoted by the fact that the uneven area was originally used as a

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dump, but that the depressions were increasingly filled, i.e. caked. The square retained this name until 1898 even though the caking of ships had decreased markedly.

In 1896 the Parliament was being built and the entire square was named Országház Tér, i.e. Parliament Square. For the previous thirty years one part of the square had been known as the Vízmű tér (Waterworks Square) because such a structure did occupy this area.

The emotional motivation for the name of the square was the fact that it was here that the Parliament building was being erected. This, however, does not explain the date. The construction of the Parliament began substantially earlier, namely in 1885. By 1896 the central dome was already almost complete.

The date of 1898 was not chosen due to the stage of completion but by the fact that it was the fiftieth anniversary of the 1848 revolution. It was at this time that April 11, the anniversary date of the April Laws of 1848, was sanctified as a national holiday (Act V of 1898). The enactment occurred within the framework of seventeen years during which the Parliament was erected and the naming of the square emphasized the government action, which otherwise had little if any impact on public interest.²

Assigning this name also indicates that the decision makers of the day took it for granted that the area in front of and around the Parliament building would be known as the Parliament Square. They insisted that buildings enclosing the square on one side provide the topographic designation. In this they followed an old tradition which always favored physical-topographic characteristics in assigning names.

The Parliament was being built during the years when the slow dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was taking place and after the defeat of Hungary in World War I, the republic was proclaimed in November 1918. Just prior to this, still in November, the other two losers, Germany and Austria, underwent a constitutional change and became republics. To emphasize the change, Parliament Square was

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renamed Köztársaság tér (Republic Square). This suggests that the square had earned the right to be elevated into a symbolic-spiritual dimension. It was no longer simply an area where a particular building could be found, but it could now be used to indicate a particular concept. It was the first time in its history that at the level of its name it rises above itself.

The new name was still in use in 1919 for a while, but public usage never accepted it because the previous name was already twenty years old and fitted in perfectly with the obvious characteristic of the square. After the short-lived 1919 Soviet Republic the counterrevolutionary system reestablished the Parliament Square designation. One of the principal reasons for so doing was that it defined itself intellectually as opposition to the revolution. It was, therefore, opposed to the concept of a republic and Hungary again became a kingdom, albeit without a king. Consequently there was no need for a Republic Square.

The rechristening was not long-lived. It lasted only for eight years. The counterrevolutionary system considered itself to be national, Christian, and conservative. Thus, in principle, it had no use for the traditions which diverged from this triad of values. On the other hand, following World War I, Hungary lost much of its territory and a significant percentage of its population, including more than three million Hungarians. In the politics of the counterrevolutionary system the revision of the peace treaty of Trianon, ending the war for Hungary, became a matter of primary importance. In order to accomplish this revision it was necessary to mobilize all those traditions that were nationalistic or could be so interpreted, even if their relative values differed from the values of the counterrevolutionary system.

The eightieth anniversary of the 1848 revolution offered the opportunity to make the day of the revolution, March 15, a national holiday and to establish a nationally sanctified memorial to Lajos Kossuth, who personified the revolution and who had been a cult figure in Hungarian society. To be sure, in 1848–49 Kossuth was a liberal and a democrat, but he also represented the case for the territorial unity of Hungary.

In November 1927 two laws were enacted. Act XXXI of 1927 made March 15 a national holiday and Act XXXII of 1927 recognized the lasting merits and memory of Lajos Kossuth. At the northern end of the square in front of the Parliament a memorial statue of Kossuth
was dedicated on November 6, 1927. This made it possible to again
rename Parliament Square which henceforth was known as Lajos Kos-
suth Square.

Since it has been so named several political systems have ruled
Hungary. None of them, however, wanted to change the name which
suggests at least two issues. It seems that Kossuth is the shining star of
Hungarian national consciousness and was thus important for every
political system. To a different degree and with different content it
became not only important but inevitable.3

It is equally important that a symbolically significant designation
could culturally define the topographic content. This is often generally
true, but in Kossuth’s case it can be incontrovertibly demonstrated.
Simply because over the years the square became increasingly the site
for events and features the contents of which had no relationship to the
Parliament building even though without it they would not have taken
place there. The existence of the Parliament gives a varying context to
the events, which elsewhere would not be the same. They gain sym-
bolism and spirituality from the presence of the Parliament building
without which they would have a different symbolism and a different
spiritual content.

The symbolic name designates a physical space, even though this
given space is not simply a wide public area surrounded by buildings.

**DIMENSION AND AWARENESS**

In shaping the Kossuth Square everything was sub-
ject to the fact that the Parliament building was being erected here. In
this respect it did not matter that some other buildings were completed
earlier, they were all remodeled to preserve the desired structure of the
square and the proposed system of streets.

The law about the building of the Parliament (Act LVIII of 1889)
was signed by Francis Joseph on December 14, 1880. Even prior to its
enactment Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza asked the Capital Public

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3 For the Kossuth cult, see ibid., pp. 37–60.
Works Council to take a position concerning the site. It recommended the Calking Square and justified the choice by the following statement:

This 4,410 square fathom group of parcels is owned by the state, it faces the Danube and is surrounded on four sides by relatively quiet streets. In front there are two parks which provide recreation and fresh air and which look out over the Danube. It meets all requirements for comfort and health and is particularly well suited for peaceful activities. In the overall city plan this area had been selected for the Parliament. It is in a quiet and elegant district of the city and its surroundings will develop at the same time as the Parliament is being erected and will provide space for magnificent palace-like structures all the way to the Margit híd [Margaret Bridge]. It is substantially less expensive than any other area and, at fifty forints the square fathom it comes only to barely 300,000 forints. The other areas would be one and a half or two million forints which sum would represent a substantial part of the entire expense of erecting the Parliament. The wide area along the Danube is of particular advantage and so are the two parks which will form an integral part of it.4

The potential square was mentioned here already, at least in a way which represented the two parks as an advantage. Yet this served only to argue in favor of the area and not to discuss the environment to be created for the Parliament. About this issue a position was taken in 1881:

The grandiose building demands to stand by itself and that a suitable environment be created around it. Its majestic front should face the regal Danube and the other three sides shall be girded by a wide square. The outer segment of the square shall be divided so that beautiful palatial buildings might be erected there, keeping in mind the erection of public buildings. The principal entry into the square will be along the Alkotmány utca [Constitution Street] and

the Parliament building will be positioned so that the axis of its eastern projection will parallel the axis of the Alkotmány utca.\textsuperscript{5}

Further comments addressed the other streets leading into the square but for us this is less important. We are interested in the square and not in the network of streets.\textsuperscript{6}

According to the original concept, therefore, a plan was evolved which saw a square around the Parliament and which would have found it desirable to see it lined with public buildings.

The proposed design of the square was accomplished, but, as we will see, the plan to line it with public buildings was only partly successful. For this reason, in 1927 when plans were made to enclose the northern and southern end of the square with new buildings, the Public Works Council added the following to Paragraph 129/a of the Building Regulations concerning the buildings to be erected:

On the northern end of Lajos Kossuth Square, the entire area between the extension of Falk Miksa utca [Miksa Falk Street] and Személynők utca [Court President Street] and on the southern end of the square between the extensions of Nádor utca [Lord Lieutenant Street] and Akadémia utca [Academy Street], regardless of whether there are one or more parcels of land, the buildings have

\textsuperscript{5} Quoted in ibid., pp. 283–284.

\textsuperscript{6} The planning of the system of streets around the square is linked to the name of Ferenc Devecis Delvecchio. For us the final arrangement of the streets is of importance only as a point of reference. Therefore, I list the names from north to south on the basis of the Complete Encyclopedia of Street Names of Budapest. The present names are followed in parenthesis by the names used prior to 1914.

Széchenyi Embankment (Rudolf Embankment)
Balassi Bálint Street (Személynők Street)
Szalay Street (Szalay Street)
Báthory Street (Báthory Street)
Nádor Street (Nádor Street)
Akadémia Street (Akadémia Street)

It is not my goal to deal with street names at this point and I just mention that the present names usually agree with the names used at the beginning of the twentieth century. This was not always the case and it was only after 1990 that a number of streets were given back their old name.
to be erected so that they constitute a single, continuous and homogenous front. Furthermore, on the entire width of both the northern and southern ends of the square, the buildings facing each other along the entire lengths, must have identical frontages, the same architecture, the same height and the same roof construction.

The frontage of the buildings must be designed forcefully and monumentally, with serene, horizontal, corbelled cornices and without crenellations. The frontage has to be of natural or artificial stone and the flat wall surfaces may be covered with weather-resistant mortar. No strong colors may be used. There may be no open courtyard toward the street. In addition to the ground floor the buildings must consist of five stories. The trussed rafter roofs must be constructed so that at the juncture of the buildings no free-standing firewall needs be created. The attic spaces toward the street may not be used for any purpose. On the street level no mercantile spaces are allowed and this area may be used only for coffee houses, restaurants or offices. There may be no retail doorways, and no billboards or electric advertisements on any of the buildings.7

The architectural unity of the square leaves much to be desired, even in retrospect. This is mostly due to the fact that part of the area is occupied by buildings other than public ones.

The original concept, however, remained intact and around the Parliament a wide, symmetrical, tripartite square was created. The total symmetry of the square is vitiated by the central portion of the Parliament being across the Constitution Street and not at right angles with it. Similarly, the streets entering the square on the eastern side are not parallel to the long axis of the Parliament. Thus the square is somewhat irregular but may still be considered as a reasonably symmetrical structure.

The present surface of the square is 65,000 square meters which can be considered as permanent. The surface changed over time

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because in the middle of the 1880s a surface area of 95,000 square meters was still being discussed. While preserving the concept of the three-part structure of the square, this area was reduced by changing the entrance arrangements of the streets, doing away with the original funnel-shaped entrances, and also by increasing the ratio of buildings to open space.8 The original concepts about the park-like arrangement of the open spaces was preserved unchanged. It was also preserved that the owner of the square is neither the fifth district (Leopoldville), nor the state, but the capital city.

THE BUILDINGS ON THE SQUARE

As we have already seen, the perspectives of the planned and future Parliament envisaged as the House of the Nation to be surrounded by public buildings.

Ministries having had a brief period of existence in 1848 after the revolution made their first significant appearance after 1867. But it was in 1867 that, for the second time, a responsible government was established which surrounded itself with the structures of government administration and power. The ministries were integral parts of these structures.

The responsible government and the ministerial systems were political and administrative in nature and did not represent the evolution of a sound infrastructure. The creation of a responsible and effective infrastructure for the ministries became a task to be confronted during the years after 1867.9

Immediately after the Compromise the problems were managed by enlarging existing older buildings and renting space in privately owned apartment buildings. Clearly these approaches were considered to be temporary and inadequate expedients. Considering Kossuth Square as a

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8 The exact area is important for estimating the demonstrating crowds on the square. It is figured that for every square meter one could count four persons.

suitable area for public buildings it was natural to assume that one or more ministries would be established there.

According to a government decision, the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce was chosen. The decision was buttressed by two considerations. The Ministry of Defense, important symbolically for Hungarian statehood, but of very limited importance under the political structure of the Compromise, had been placed in the Castle Hill area ever since 1881. The second, symbolically and factually important ministry was the one mentioned above. Its sphere of activity covered the principal economic sectors of a basically agricultural country. Another important consideration was that the ministry, up to that time, was located in highly unsatisfactory conditions. Its main office was at 5 Ferenc József tér (Francis Joseph Square, now Roosevelt Square) in the Nákó building, which had been mentioned as a potential site for the Parliament. A number of the offices of the ministry were scattered around town and located in rental spaces in apartment buildings. The latter factor was the strongest motive for building a special building for the ministry. The importance of its economic role justified the proposal that the building be located in the vicinity of the Parliament.

In 1881 the government bought the lot and in March 1885 the law authorizing the building and financing of the ministry was passed (Act IV of 1885). The design of the building was entrusted to Gyula Bukovics. The corner stone was laid on January 2, 1886, and by August of that year the framework was up. In view of the fact that the building cost more than anticipated the original act had to be amended (Act IV of 1887) and August 1, 1887, was designated as the day of completion and occupation. In fact, this took place on July 17. The building was modernized and partially rebuilt starting with 1906, but this process was completed only between the two wars when a fifth and sixth floor were added. Starting in the 1970s, the arcades of the building facing the

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10 For the plans of the never carried out reconstruction, see “A földművelésügyi mnisztérium tervpályázata” [The architectural bids for the Ministry of Agriculture], Epítőipar [Construction Industry], April 7, 1907, 135–137; “A földművelési minisztériumi palota pályatervei” [The competitive designs for the palace of the Agricultural Ministry], Magyar Pályázatok 5, no. 6 (1907): 1–13; and Eszter Gábor and Mária Verő, eds., Schickedanz Albert (1846–1915). Ezredévi emlékművek a múltnak és jövőnek [Millennial Monuments for the Past and Future] (Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum, 1996), pp. 230–231.
Kossuth Square were being used for the placement of statues honoring the outstanding scientists and practitioners of Hungarian agriculture.\footnote{For the statues on the square, see chapter two.}

The building was erected in classical style and it has preserved this character in spite of all modernization and rebuilding. Since it was built, the name and sphere of authority of the ministry has undergone numerous changes but, to this day, it is the home of the government agency responsible for agriculture and the agrarian activities. Its formal address is 11 Kossuth Square.

The second building designed as a public building and functioning in this capacity ever since, albeit in a variety of roles, is located at 12 Kossuth Square. This building was erected before the Parliament was finished, but with the understanding that there would be a square here dominated by the Parliament. It was originally built as the Palace of Justice. When completed it housed the Hungarian Royal Supreme Court, the Budapest Royal Court of Appeals, and the offices of the Royal Prosecutor and of the Crown Prosecutor. Common parlance did not use the term Palace of Justice, did not list the various offices the building contained and always referred to it simply as the Curia.

Need for such a building became evident immediately after the Compromise. The ideas originated with Boldizsár Horvát, the minister of justice, but the final resolution of the matter was not reached for several decades. It was not until 1892 that Dezső Szilágyi, the minister of justice asked the most prominent architect of the day, Alajos Hauszmann, to prepare a design for the Curia building.

The proposed site was the lot directly across from the Parliament. The space was originally occupied by a military cart depot. There were three reasons for selecting this space. Firstly, it seemed to be a generally good idea, secondly it would strengthen the symbolism of the square and thirdly that the highest judicial organizations should be located in the vicinity of the legislative body. An office of the executive branch, the Ministry of Agriculture was also in that area. The ideas seemed to make economic sense as well because the Ministry of Justice had to acquire the lot from the state. Finally, the great representative event of the Hungarian nation and of the country, the millennial celebration, the hypothetical one thousandth anniversary of the conquest of the country
was approaching. It seemed appropriate that the building representing constitutionality be completed by the anniversary and that it be located in the vicinity of the Parliament building under construction.

The legislation authorizing the building and its financing was passed in 1893 (Act XIII of 1893). Construction began in that same year and the completed edifice was turned over to the state at the beginning of the millennial year, on May 1, 1896. The building shows both neoclassicist and neorenaissance components, which Hauszmann called Roman style. The building has four floors: a lower and upper mezzanine and a second and third floor. The principal façade, facing the square, is 125 meter long. The principal entrance consists of three sections. The statuary on the façade was prepared by György Zala. Above the statues a victory chariot can be seen, which is the work of Károly Sengei. The chariot is driven by the Genius of Enlightenment. On both sides of the chariot there are statues representing legislators carved by János Fadrusz. Between the ionic columns of the façade there are twelve statues representing art, science, and commerce and which are the work of students of the Strobl school. There are two statues each at the ends of the building. On one side a convicted and liberated captive, the work of József Róna, and on the other side, a defendant and his attorney by Gyula Donáth.

The building was officially dedicated by Emperor Francis Joseph on October 20, 1896. Three years after its completion another law was passed authorizing the pay-off of the expenses (Act XXVI of 1899). The building was severely damaged during World War II and was repaired on the basis of the plans of Elemér Csánk. After the repairs were made the function of the building changed and after 1950 the Munkásmozgalmi Intézet (Labor Movement Institute) took over. From 1957 to 1973 much of the building was taken up by the Hungarian National Gallery. The Párttörténeti Intézet (Party History Institute), which replaced the Labor Movement Institute, was limited to the upper stories of the building on the Alkotmány Street side. In 1973 the National Gallery was replaced by the Ethnographic Museum. After the change of regime, the Party History Institute became the Institute for Political History. The name changed but the location did not.

The ornamental chambers of the Palace of Justice can be leased for ceremonial occasions.