SOME TOWN PLANS STRIVING TO URBAN CONTINUITY

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(Received December 15, 1979)

Hungarian town plans of the '50-s and '60-s included almost exclusively governmental housing projects. Downtown area reconstruction could not be realized else — mainly from economical reasoning — than with multistorey development, also encouraged — besides of program deficiencies and building systems based on technologies requiring open spaces, — by the strive to create huge complexes, often leading to irrealistic projects. Designs requiring minor creativeness were refrained from, all these preventing us from finding town planning ideas likely to forward natural town evolution. At the same time, areas reserved for multi-storey development were under ban on building, generally paralyzing development of the town and creativity of its population. As a matter of fact, town dwellers would be desirous to improve living conditions with own means, willing to develop environment, the entire town, to enlarge, update buildings, e.g. by building in the attic space, or parting the lot, increasing the housing density with the concomitant possibility of raising the niveau of public utilities. All these are prevented by the ban on building as token of "reconstruction" at a far perspective.

In many Hungarian towns, as a consequence of ban on building, representative public institutions in town cores are surrounded by degraded housing areas, blocks of flats. The actual capacity of the state building enterprises is, however, not coping with a building activity in downtown areas as envisaged in the plans. Delay causes the building stock to further deteriorate, though motivating demolition but also impairing social conditions: only the least demanding people remain in, or move by flat exchange to, downtown areas. This is a known process, characteristic of countries rich in historical town cores but poor in funds to keep them. Several Hungarian urban housing areas are in the same situation, at a perfect uncertainty of when and how they will be rebuilt.

This approach to the general plans made both the life of town dwellers and the work of councils more difficult. Building authorities had to occupy a kind of defensive position in favour of plans that often were outdated as soon as ready.

Alongside with the emergence of these problems, the trend of economy policy stressed the importance of the building with private means and of the so-called housing by small-group investment, as seen from the 60 percent of housing with private means against the 40 percent of state housing during the 15-year housing plan from 1961 to 1975. Nevertheless, in subsequent periods, this proportion has to be shifted towards state housing on the level of national economy, to become the inverse in the period from 1985 to 2000. "Improvement" of state housing over a perspective of 20 or 30 years could seemingly justify reservation of further, large areas. Practically, however, prohibitions cannot be kept up, life stopped for another 30 years, but real decisions have to be made and construction and reconstruction must be launched in obsolete districts.

During the first 15-year housing plan, the contradiction between the booming private housing and the general plans in virtue resulted in great many family houses built with private means in outskirts, unbuilt areas, large plots, based on plot division plans. This phenomenon is undesirable and even harmful for town development, namely to supply old-type housing blocks with population densities of 30 to 40 persons/hectare with public services is inhibitively costly, expansion is uneconomical because of excessive plot sizes, use of agricultural areas, increase of the road network, need of extra public transport means, decentralization of the supply with public services. It has also to be kept in mind that the excessive expansion alters the spatial order of Hungarian towns, generally of harmonic morphology and adequate scale, without speaking of the "up-to-date", high-rise developments on the confines of the town.

Correct solutions to the problem of the relation between extended, differentiated housing and urban development can only be found by planning and experimenting. Experiments of this type are involved in some plans made recently at the *Department of Town Planning, Technical University, Budapest*, containing suggestions and methods to be quoted below:

Reconstruction plan of *Békéscsaba* town core (Dénes Ihrig, Gábor Locsmándi); general plan of *Balassagyarmat* (directed by Dénes Ihrig; physical planning: Dénes Ihrig, Gábor Locsmándi; detailed physical plan of *Balassagyarmat* town core: Dénes Ihrig, Gábor Locsmándi).

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Now, what are housing aspects and goals to be kept in mind in making town development and reconstruction plans, and what methods and approach have to be found to this aim?

First of all, one must be clear that general plans have to start from meeting the needs of the population. Maybe ideal but very long-range con-

ceptions would be erroneous to maintain if they are against the interests of the population. Means have to be found for the differentiated accommodation, restructuration of population, improvement of the way of living, coping with needs, taking also financial possibilities into consideration. Adequate means of realization, construction and reconstruction have to be found to this aim.

One of the major goals is the *development of the town as a whole*, keeping the population needs in mind. The plan tending to the "ideal town model" seeks economical and aesthetical solutions to engineering problems of the complex, overall urban functions, in the frames of a "flexible plan" that is open enough to adapt itself to consecutively varying circumstances and needs, involving motivated decisions, and having features automatically raising the supply standard.

Possibility of *realization and scheduling* is of paramount importance in planning. The plan has to create and control processes of reconstruction maximally safeguarding the state of permanence in the frames of the continuously developing town organisms. The projects have to concern areas of a size permitting reasonable realization in time and space.

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The actual Hungarian practice applies different realizations of housing. Their importance for the urban development and reconstruction will be understood from a short description and categorization.

a) Council-owned i.e., *state housing* involves no further differentiation. It is realized on the basis of a uniform, multistorey lay-out plan referring to an extended area. Distinction could be made according to the site (whether cleared or developed) and the housing pattern. The problem of multi-storey building-up is more difficult if the complex contains dwellings in private ownership (Savings Bank, cooperative).

b) The most extended form of *housing with private means* is detached or sometimes semi-detached family houses. There is important housing in outskirts, on large plots (600 to 1000 sq.m), according to individual designs, usually "home-made". The usually spacious, well-equipped, properly oriented buildings are significant contributions to the housing stock. Their architectural appearance is, however, inferior to that of the traditional Hungarian settlements, due to the economically favourable one-pitch-roofs. Since among the possibilities of housing with private means, family housing in outskirts has its town planning inconvenients from the aspect of preparation, town plans should direct the demands to building with private means towards inner areas to make them share *gradual reconstruction*.

c) In the actual housing practice, *small-group societies* have a growing share in building investment in the form of cooperatives, building associations, Savings Bank, building societies, or upon social initiative but their buildings

are usually not constructed by private enterprises. These involve single or two-storey houses with gardens, in collective ownership, atrium houses, terrace houses or the like, of uniform design. A form of small-group housing is — by the time, mostly in Budapest — the so-called *apartment house*, actually, buildings of six to ten privately owned flats created by an "organized society" and constructed by craftsmen, co-operatives or state building enterprises. This form of housing is promising for the reconstruction of inner areas of small or medium-size towns, since the individual designs, meeting demands of the societies and individually realized, are able to adopt plot configurations, orientation and access possibilities, in addition to preventing our variegated townscapes from growing monotonous.

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Regular downtown streets are lined with single and two-storey buildings of different substances. Often, centrally sited blocks of flats are the oldest, the most obsolete, to be urgently replaced. In these districts, some areas of a peculiar siting or other features have to be exempted from those designated to gradual reconstruction, containing rather sound buildings, homogeneous inside the belt. Here the building demands of the population may be satisfied in conformity with regulations including additions, renewal, updating; of course, new constructions need financial support, advisably bound to certain conditions (e.g. lot subdivision).

The reconstruction problem is more complex in the case of development in unbroken rows. Hungarian small-town built-up of an organic atmosphere and structure, many typical, pleasant features, characteristics of streetscapes cannot be exactly conserved; transition is here more disturbing than in the former case. Upkeep of the built-up in unbroken rows is by any means recommended in order to safeguard the traditional urban character, reasonable land use, to spare one or two building façades, and last but not least, to keep continuity, in fact, to solve the problem of the townscape in the transition period.

A possibility of development with family houses, more economical and up-to-date than plot-wise development, is by building in low-rise "margins" surrounding extended, wide blocks. By expropriating inner parts of the lots, continuous free areas result, permitting developments detached from the outer row of houses. These may be state-built, multistorey complexes, but it is preferable to develop in heights equal to the outer row. Measures include expropriation and subdivision, or development in family housing estates.

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Significance of development forms in town development and reconstruction can be appreciated by having a closer look at siting possibilities and requirements.

The most suitable sites for multistorey developments realized mostly with state funds are those actually occupied by uniformly obsolete building stock or accessible at a minimum of slum clearance. Though, to be economical, the action requires areas with as much of infrastructure as possible. In their absence, also areas may be acquired where there is no ground for the maintenance of the entire system of streets and blocks. It is advisable to develop prominent areas of townscape and town fabric importance according to uniform conceptions. Also reconstruction of some areas of importance for the whole town, involving large area requirements from traffic aspects (e.g. road widening, junctions) is advisably realized with state means. Traffic establishments built as central investments are preferably coupled with housing: again of state funds, let alone to belong to one and the same project.

In connection with the problems of urban renewal, it has first to be decided whether proprietorship conditions have to be maintained or a more radical form of reconstruction is aimed at, accompanied by expropriation. Consecutive reconstruction respecting proprietorship is to be recommended where the built-up character of the given area has already been established, to be maintained at long term at that place within the town fabric (if e.g. no high-rise development is planned) or if the development character will but slightly be altered.

One form of successive reconstruction is detached family housing, subject to specifications concerning front garden, side garden, lot depth. In this case, there is no discontinuity in the townscape of garden suburbs during decades of reconstruction, even in the case of multistorey development: the simple process of reconstruction is the same as that of the lot subdivision and family housing development.

An appreciable design problem is to update conventional development in unbroken rows, that is, however, undesirable to be reproduced in single-storey form, mainly because then the living storey would almost be level with the street. Better land use and supply with public utilities argue for two-storey reconstruction where the ground floor accommodates subordinate premises — garage, workshop, — living area being on the first floor. With the actually designed lower headrooms, building heights of 6.50 m are possible, little overtopping the old single-storey buildings 4.50 to 5.00 m high.

As a function — or sometimes independent — of the increase of building heights, streets need widening. Streets in Hungarian small towns are usually wide enough to accommodate 6.00 m roadways, footpaths, as well as alleys replacing former ditches. Widenings generally affect only the front gardens, though "disrupting" but not destructing the streetscape (if not more than 3.00 m front gardens are specified).

Traditional large plot housing areas may be densified, besides of higher development, by subdividing the lots. In the case of unbroken row develop-

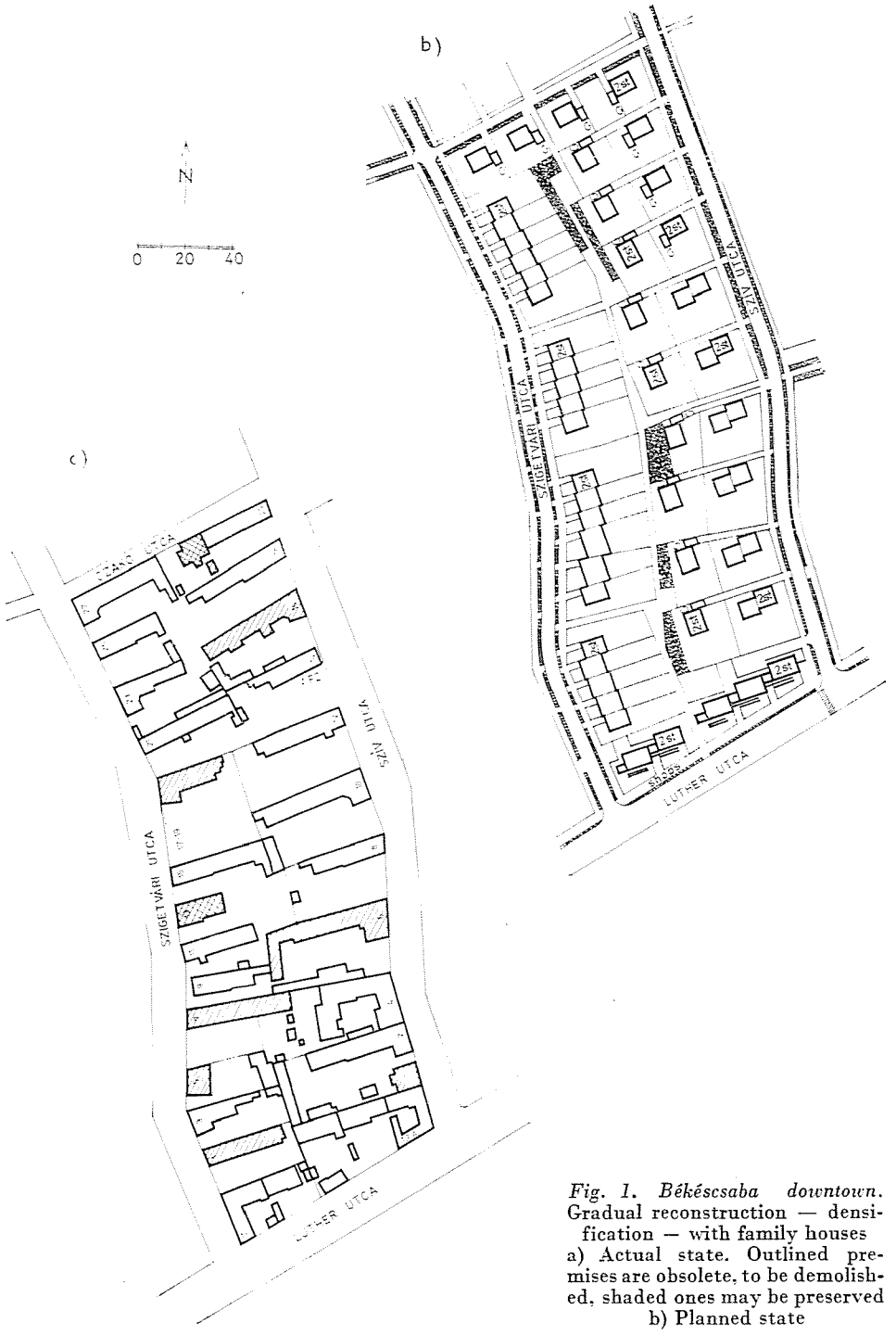

Fig. 1. Békéscsaba downtown. Gradual reconstruction — densification — with family houses
a) Actual state. Outlined premises are obsolete, to be demolished, shaded ones may be preserved
b) Planned state

ment, lot subdivisions normal to the street line are advisable; the 8.00 m minimum lot width specified by the National Building Codes permits convenient floor plans. The building may contain a single dwelling, but on wider lots, also houses with two or more dwellings are possible, maybe as partnership houses or other small-group organizations.

Siting of this form of successive reconstruction is coherent with the problem or supply with public services. The areas to be reconstructed are without canalization as a rule, and sewage treatment will be confined for a while to cesspools substituting public services, requiring min. 35.00 m lot depths in actual plans. Accordingly, successive reconstruction fits blocks 70 to 80 m wide or wider to be accessible for a different development.

There are two possibilities for utilizing block interiors. One is *lot-wise, resulting in gradual, slow densification* (Fig. 1). In this case, the lot subdivision may be a condition to granting the building licence to the owner of the deep lot by prescribing to sell the innermost part of the lot. This procedure obviously suits blocks of medium width (100 to 120 m). Still wider blocks lend themselves to the other way of lot use, classic in a sense, namely unified purchase and use of the protruding parts of deep lots. Continuous, extended areas are prone to unified, estate-like development, also from land use aspects. These areas lend themselves to council investments, too, but the low-rise houses lining the streets argue for development in family housing estates, maybe in the form of atrium houses, terrace houses or group houses.

Partnership housing development is advisably sited in areas suiting higher rise development than the above, where the supply with public services is safeguarded, nevertheless realization is conditioned by a certain successiveness, either because of the non-uniform building stock or development, hence to be changed, without being sacrificial. Voluminous blocks of flats contribute to the "urban character" of town cores, to densify the structure, to keep or integrate the morphology. "Morphology integration" is understood here as equalizing the — rather frequent — disproportion between the multistorey blocks of flats proliferating in town cores by the second half of the past century, and their single-storey surroundings. Besides of being useful tools to this aim, partnership housing groups facilitate both successive reconstruction and filling in of gaps within house rows. Partnership houses require bigger plots than the available ones, or at least, wider street fronts, imposing to fuse plots. It is advisable to specify combination of two or three adjacent plots with houses of similar degree of obsolescence. Rather wide plots about 50 m deep lend themselves to partnership housing where a common green area may be created between two rows of plots (Fig. 2). Of course, success of the development in partnership housing depends on an adequate framework of sophisticated general plan and control by building specifications.

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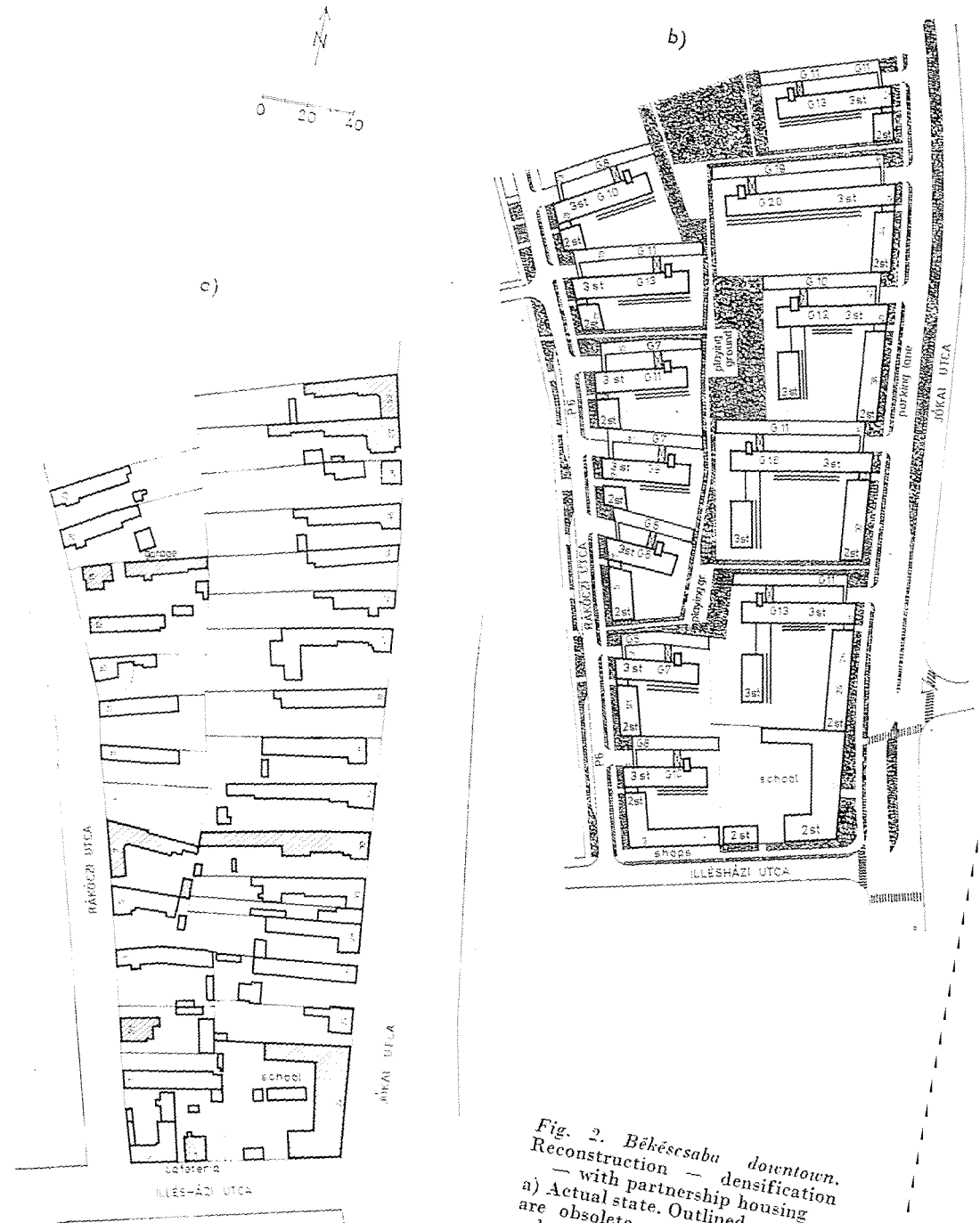


Fig. 2. Békéscsaba downtown. Reconstruction — densification — with partnership housing
a) Actual state. Outlined premises are obsolete, to be demolished, shaded ones may be preserved
b) Planned state

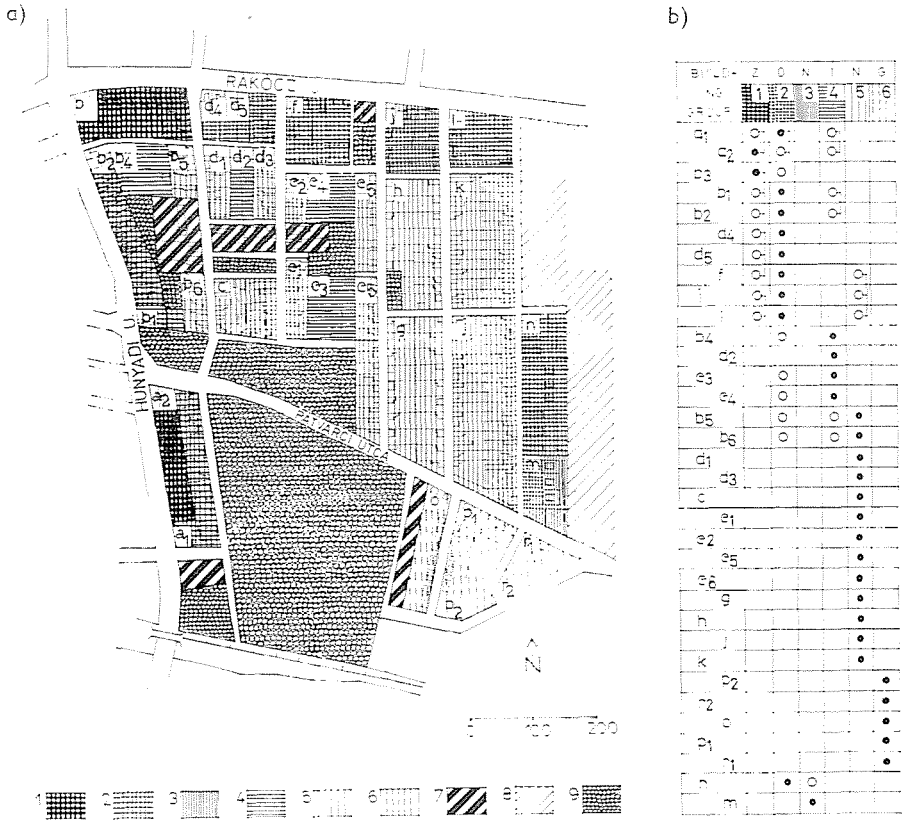
Thereupon the problem of *correct proportions between these forms of housing development arises, together with that of correctly scheduling the reconstruction* to meet population needs and to forward the dynamic urban development. No safe prognostics are possible, the plans cannot rely but on assumptions and on actual proportions. Adequate proportioning between forms of development in planning will be illustrated on the example of the proposed reconstruction of *Balassagyarmat* town centre, where planning started from the recent numerical proportion of different housing forms. In fact, the ratio between state and private constructions in different systems was the same as in the 15-year housing plan, that is, 40% were state constructions and 60% utilized private means. Further decomposing the 60% according to realizations yielded useful data for the proportions between building forms to be specified in the plan.

A drawback of general plans is to control a lengthy procedure rather than to be valid for single investment operations like designs of engineering structures. While these latter are "made" according to designs laid down, analyzed and traced by the engineer, a settlement — else than a new town created in a single operation — develops to a degree at random, or least ways affected by unpredictable factors, at most susceptible to influence, never fully according to, the plan. Development plans for existing towns, hence master plans can only settle a unique possibility elaborated according to the usual methodology, by representing a hypothesis referring to the development of the settlement as a "living organism" for the case where everything happens as projected by program data taken from actual circumstances. On the contrary, town development depends on an infinity of unforeseen factors, it will be an integration of hypotheses. A plan valid for a longer period has to be an open one, containing variable, exchangeable details. Distinction has to be made between invariable elements of town development, present "forever" in the town fabric, and those likely to change as a function of later events, hence, being so to say "accessories". The former are linear as a rule, to be tracked with a great circumspection; the latter are spatial referring, first of all, to residential areas, maybe to be assigned later a different function. Thus, exchangeability of uses of different area parts, blocks or block parts has to be provided for, possible by keeping alternatives, different hypotheses in mind, and by planning accordingly.

Planning with alternatives is felt to rely on making a plan best coping with actually known facts, the most realistic according to available prognostics. Besides, a different function is assigned to each element of area such as not to impair plan fundamentals, hence to maintain serviceability of the same networks of traffic, public services and public institutions — besides of proposals concerning the town fabric and town morphology — in case of a different zoning or development of residential areas.

The idea and implementation of exchangeability may be realized in different ways. In addition to the suggested optimum land use plan, alternative "designs" representing extreme solutions may be given, pointing to shifts in either direction of building with state funds or with private means. Rather than a few (one or two) traced alternatives, however, it is much more sensible to make a tabulated processing of great many hypotheses, illustrated by the tentative of the general plan for *Balassagyarmat*. Parts of the plan concerned with "general land use" and "general regulation" have been made as usual in Hungary in the recent years showing long-term conditions in drawing, "stiffened to a picture" how the settlement is desired to look by 2000, most likely never to be realized (Fig. 3).

The general master plan for *Balassagyarmat* considers possible alternatives in connection with each element of the residential area excluding some development possibilities for certain elements, conceding others in addition to the primary one. The solution has been tabulated, indicating for each area element the basic suggestion and the possible alternatives, together with the modifications on other elements to be entrained by the former ones.



The *Balassagyarmat* plan is a methodology experiment by handling the exchangeability problem for housing alone, but obviously by a more detailed, farsighted processing, alternatives of design and dimension could be made for other groups of institutions within the settlement such as public institutions, green areas, public services.

Town planning requires a special methodology, involving hypotheses, in contrast to any other engineering design work. The outlined deductions would not eliminate graphic representation of the master plan. Even if of lesser importance, it has to be maintained partly because of our innervated visuality, but the drawing has to be completed by additions containing expected changes, with their consequences, and graphic representation of the given realization has to be completed by a collection of other, tabulated possibilities. Thereby later changed demands will not require new master plans or modifications but simply, a decision by the council or other authority concerning the alternative to be chosen — as plan modification conceded in the original plan — to comply with demands arising from the life.

The problem of exchangeability involves the concept of "areal element". *The notion of exchangeability is bound to the consciously developed system of exchangeability subjects*, understood as elements of land use; their detection, definition, delimitation is an important item in the plan. Land use elements may be blocks but not absolutely identical to them, they may also be block parts or plot groups. They are naturally coherent "homogeneous" elements related by features of identical importance within the town fabric, possibly similar by actual built-up, plot subdivision, condition of maintenance, building height to suit erection in one operation i.e. one — or several but similar — expropriations, site managements, constructions (e.g. timely protracted but uniform construction events of successive reconstruction). Correct designation of the order of magnitude of these "operation areas" or building entities is a function of exchangeability and scheduling. "Detached" entities have to be selected so as to be independently designable, constructible, and suiting by magnitude single realization periods of municipal investment operations. Such building entities have to harmonize with the settlement fabric.

Fig. 3. Variability — interchangeability of zones in a general plan (Detail of the *Balassagyarmat* general plan). a) Zoning plan — detail: 1. multistorey development on blocks of lots; 2. multistorey development on garden lots; 3. two-storey development on garden lots; 4. single- or two-storey development on blocks of lots; 5. single- or two-storey development on garden lots; 6. single-storey development on garden lots (newly subdivided area); 7. area for public offices; 8. hospital area; 9. common green belt. b) Variability of zoning. Connected unit groups require unified development plans. Full circles mean "major plan proposals", empty circles indicate possible re-zoning

Decomposition to minor entities permits the same housing form to be present in several places of the town. Building in several sites may be a tool of proportional, uniform development between town parts. Small-scale operations keep the possibility of continuity. Division into possibly small entities finding naturally detached elements leads to entities offering opportunities of individual architectural creation.

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Housing from state funds aims obviously at increasing the number of dwelling units in cleared areas, at as little demolition as possible. In projects of this kind — even if built according to "reasonable general plans" — town fabric, street network, evolved town morphology, built-up, land use division, and similar other values considered as characteristic of that town — get lost. Conservation of historic buildings affects at most the building stock. The former values considered somehow as "museal" remnants of the past of our town building culture are also "environmental values", frames — often pleasant and customary frames — of the life of a population layer. Change of this frame, exchange to a stiffer one, is harmful both socially and psychologically.

Multistorey development with standard buildings little suits to keep or enhance the actual features of the townscape, characteristics of the town fabric, permitting little to be safeguarded. Successive reconstruction, small group construction forms and building entities as small as possible may be more rewarding.

Namely, successive reconstruction and scheduling according to small entities anyhow keeps main urban lines: minor corrections — essentially, respect — of streets, alleys, squares, building fronts, building heights preserve continuity.

Reconstruction of central residential areas has to increasingly rely on small-group investments and on housing with private means. The fate of our small towns will pass the dead points only if decisions will synthesize population demands, building stock condition and aesthetics.

Summary

Some town plans are presented, reflecting the strive to make agree the population demands for building with own means, the purposeful development of the integer town, and the possibilities of realization and scheduling, maintaining, at the same time, the peculiarities of the given town. Private construction (of family houses and apartment houses) is expected to contribute to the reconstruction of downtown areas — usually the most characteristic areas of the town fabric. Reconstruction plans decomposed into small areas of action favour realistic town building (adopting changing demands) and salvation of urban character values hence continuity.

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