

# The Aspects of Urban Character in József Kerényi's Works in the Great Hungarian Plain

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## Abstract

József Kerényi's work at the Bács-Kiskun County Planning Company (BÁCSSTERV) between 1964 and 1984 is significant both for the built heritage of the county and its centre, Kecskemét and for the history of Hungarian architecture and urban planning.

While several aspects of Kerényi's architectural legacy have been studied, a focus on the urban scale aspects of his oeuvre has been lacking. This study examines his oeuvre from the perspective of urban context and urban character. Additionally, beyond individual buildings, this study incorporates his urban-scale projects into the analysis. The research focuses on Kerényi's interpretation of heritage and his responses to urban character. The study addresses the relationship between historical urban fabric and new developments, the interpretation and evaluation of historical urban fabric, the concept of rehabilitation, and the relationship between architecture and urban planning. The research aims to uncover the planning processes and theoretical approaches that help to understand and contextualise Kerényi's activities in the Great Hungarian Plain. The investigation targets the cityscape and urban structure dilemmas and how city character influenced the answers to these questions. Furthermore, the study seeks to examine how Kerényi's ideas relate to both Hungarian and international trends of the period.

## Keywords

urban character, urban heritage, rehabilitation, József Kerényi, Bács-Kiskun County Planning Company

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Foreword

After World War II, the restoration of urban areas with significant historical value began; here, principles of city-scale monument protection were applied. Besides these urban reconstructions, in areas lacking such a substantial architectural heritage, new urban districts were often created by demolishing the existing building stock (Jankó, 2011). However, in the late 1960s, there was an expansion of areas that were treated as historical heritage due to changes in heritage perception. Planning and design approaches previously associated primarily with monument areas were gradually extended to the renewal of the historic urban fabric in non-protected areas. The crisis of modern architecture has also resulted in a change of attitude in both the international and Hungarian discourse. This has led to a new appreciation of the values of the urban fabric, such as the historical street networks, urban structures or the traditional cityscape (Lukovich, 2005). Into this process fits József Kerényi's work from 1964 to 1984 at the

Bács-Kiskun County Planning Company (BÁCSSTERV). His two decades of activity in Kecskemét is not only of local significance but also crucial from the perspective of national architectural history.

### 1.2 Biography

József Kerényi was born in 1939 and grew up in the Wekerle Estate in Kispest, which significantly shaped his later perspective. Based on his reminiscences, his love for high-pitched roofs and tree-lined streets came from these early experiences. He graduated as an architect from the Technical University of Budapest (BME). Among his teachers, Frigyes Pogány had the greatest influence on him. After earning his degree in 1963, he joined the National Monument Inspectorate (OMF). This position allowed him to work in various parts of the country, opening his eyes to historical values. However, driven by a sense of adventure, he moved to Kecskemét in 1964 to join the Bács-Kiskun County Planning Company (BÁCSSTERV), where he climbed

the ranks to become office manager and later the company's chief architect (Kriskó, 2014). In 1980, he became a member of the National Assembly, where he participated in the activities of the construction committee. In 1984, he won a competition for the position of office manager at the Town-Planning and Scientific Institute (VÁTI). Thus, he left Kecskemét and moved back to Budapest. From 1988, he worked at the Department of Residential Building Design at BME; he was among the founders of the BME Doctoral School of Architecture. Throughout his life, he received numerous awards, including the Ybl Miklós Prize (1975), the Sir Robert Matthew Diploma (1985), the Kossuth Prize (1992), and the International Architectural Design Award (1992) (Kerényi, 1998). He passed away in 2016.

## 2 Methodology

The study mainly examines Kerényi's theoretical approaches. Therefore, published studies, project descriptions, and his later reminiscences and interviews with him play an important role among the sources. Additionally, the study builds on the critical analysis of his plans, completed buildings, and urban-scale works. Using the tools of historiography, it attempts to reconstruct the design and planning approaches of Kerényi. To reconstruct architectural and urban planning professional viewpoints, theoretical writings, critiques, debate articles, and project descriptions published in professional journals (such as *Magyar Építőművészet*, *Műemlékvédelem*, *Művészet*, *Városépítés*, etc.) serve as primary sources. The research aims to place the design principles appearing in Kerényi's oeuvre in the context of domestic and international professional discourse. The study emphasises the joint interpretation of architectural and urban planning areas.

## 3 Heritage approach in Kerényi's architectural and urban-scale work

### 3.1 Defining local character through heritage

Local identity tied to heritage became increasingly important in the architectural and urban planning discourse from the 1960s onwards, both in Hungary and internationally. Approaches, such as Aldo Rossi's writings on collective memory and urban identity, contributed to this. According to him, these memories form architectural archetypes, and architecture must evoke these to integrate into the city (Rossi, 1966). Kevin Lynch's research also highlighted the value of place and the relationship of locals to their environment (Lynch, 1960). Furthermore, Jane Jacobs emphasised bottom-up, community-based urban planning complemented by sustainable development (Jacobs, 1969).

Focusing on the Hungarian context, the urban design theorist Pál Granasztói's writings frequently addressed the identity-forming and usage-derived functions of historical city centres in the 1960s. Beyond their institutional functions, these centres also served as forums, promenades, and spaces for the community (Granasztói, 1962). He emphasised that historical cities should not be understood merely as accumulations of monuments but as cohesive morphological units perceived in the collective consciousness. In this context, historical cityscape plays a more significant role than monotonous planned neighbourhoods (Granasztói, 1967). The architectural historian and monument protection expert László Gerő also noted that certain values, such as local historical significance, become increasingly important to society (Gerő, 1972).

Kerényi's approach also fits into this responsiveness to the local community's needs. One of his first significant projects reflected his relationship with the city's historical past. The synagogue in Kecskemét, designed by János Zitterbach and built in 1868, was considered for demolition in the 1970s. Through the intervention of Kerényi, who drew up plans for its reuse, the city eventually bought it and turned it into a House of Technics. Preservation here was crucial not primarily from the architectural and historical standpoint but was derived from the city's past. The uniqueness of the city's main square is that churches of all the religions present in the city appear next to each other (Kerényi, 1975a). With this, universal value was replaced by local value, an essential element from the point of view of regional identity.

The building research carried out with the excavation of the former Franciscan monastery in Kecskemét and its reconstruction into the Kodály Institute perhaps impressed Kerényi the most about the city's historicity. The research revealed that the monastery was much older than previously thought. It showed that there are medieval parts of the monastery, dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, instead of the previously assumed Baroque origins (Kerényi, 1976a). This was contrary to the perception of the time that there were no real monuments in the Great Hungarian Plain. This formed the thinking of Kerényi, that we live with our history, even if it is often unconscious (Kerényi, 1975c).

Unearthing the former Franciscan monastery in Kecskemét was an important step for local identity. With the demolition of the bazaar, the ruins of the St Michael's Chapel and the monastery building became visible (Fig. 1), revealing the town's historical past. The same principles were behind the demolition of the bazaar row in front of the Lutheran church designed by Miklós Ybl, which resulted in

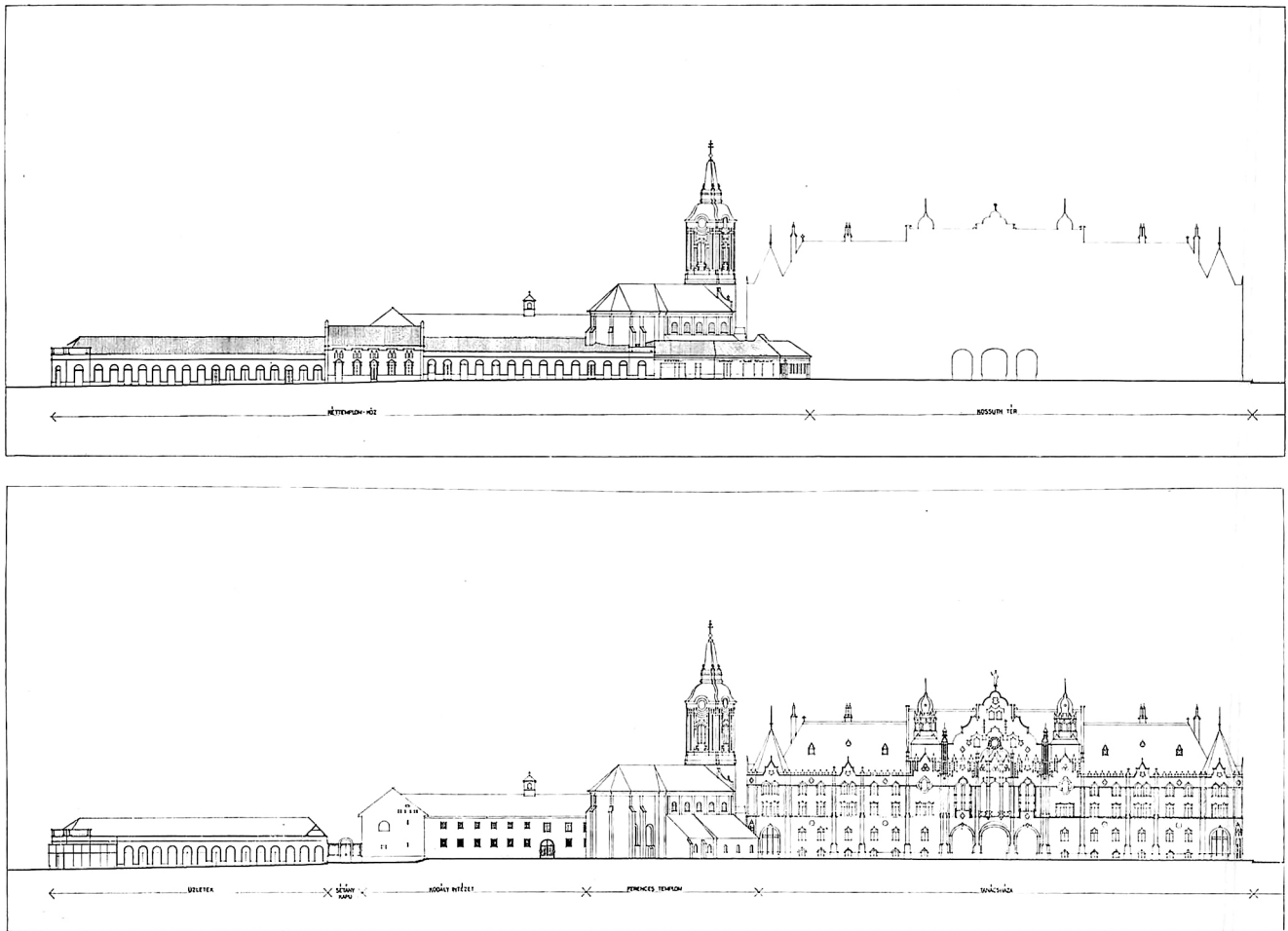


Fig. 1 Kéttemplom Street before and after the demolition of the bazaar buildings (Kerényi, 1976a:p.22)

a significant confrontation with the monument preservation authorities (Kriskó, 2012). This kind of purist approach, which distinguishes between the historical layers of different periods, can be understood from Kerényi's design thinking. The aim was to help locals develop a stronger connection with the city's historical roots. Kerényi's choice of values is therefore clear: by removing some historical layers, a piece of the past has been lost, but instead, more relevant elements from the perspective of local identity have been made visible. Thus, local heritage and identity considerations appeared to be more important than universal architectural and historical values, and they became truly remarkable from a complex urban perspective.

### 3.2 Rehabilitation as a heritage preservation strategy

The growing economic and energy crisis in the 1970s, combined with the rise of heritage protection movements, has led to the emergence of the concepts of reduce, reuse, and recycle in the architectural and urban planning discourse. These principles were merged into the adaptive reuse approach,

which was also a response to earlier modernist ideas (Lanz and Pendlebury, 2022). Kerényi welcomed and used the concepts of rehabilitation, reuse and recycling in his work and approach, delighted that what he had previously achieved had become an international trend. He believed that the reuse of buildings was not primarily an economic issue but a way of ensuring the historical continuity of collective memory (Kerényi, 1981b). The continuation of old houses with new functions is a crucial factor for historical continuity. In Kerényi's view, unnecessary demolitions falsify history. For him, rehabilitation meant preserving and renewing existing buildings and ensuring that new ones are characteristic of their location (Kriskó, 2014). The previously mentioned rehabilitation of the synagogue or Franciscan monastery in Kecskemét, the transformation of the Great Seminary in Kalocsa into the Municipal Cultural and Youth Centre, or the renovation of the Bánó House in Kecskemét and opening of the Museum of Hungarian Naive Artists in it, have all played a role in showing the historical roots of the city. Finding a contemporary function for these old

houses was an important step not only in terms of sustainability and heritage protection, but also in preserving the distinctive local character.

Looking at the urban scale, from the 1970s, as mass housing constructions receded in Western urban development, urban rehabilitation projects focusing on more traditional urban structures began to emerge. This approach opposed the renewal of cities through demolition. It aligned with the interests of local communities, who valued their environment based on regional rather than universal values. Consequently, districts condemned to demolition were saved in several Western European cities, such as the Marolles district in Brussels, Covent Garden in London and Nieuwmarkt in Amsterdam, and these examples also appeared in Hungarian urban design theory writing (Meggyesi, 1985).

The roots of urban renewal movements in Hungary can primarily be found in the emergence of monument protection on an urban scale. It was a significant step in this process that in many countryside towns, historical and urban surveys were prepared in the 1950s (Entz, 2014). Partly based on these surveys, several city monographs were published between 1953 and 1964 in the Hungarian national monuments (*Magyar műemlékek*) book series, which can be considered important references in Hungarian urban research<sup>1</sup>. These studies have contributed to the process that has led to the restoration and protection of several towns and cities from the 1960s onwards. The reconstruction of the Buda castle and the city centre of Sopron served as a model for such urban-level monument restorations (Jankó, 2005). Frigyes Pogány, considered a vital expert by Kerényi, frequently discussed the compatibility of historic districts and modern urban planning methods (Pogány, 1976). It was also an important milestone in this approach that Gábor Winkler developed a methodology for rehabilitating historic towns based on his experience in Pápa (Winkler, 2007).

In Hungary, mass housing developments and the rehabilitation of historic city centres developed concurrently. The latter was possible because enough replacement housing was already available (Jankó, 2005). In Kecskemét, the Bánó House, a piece of the market town's past on the

edge of the new city centre, was saved by Kerényi only a few years later as the construction of the Szalagház<sup>2</sup> and the Party House<sup>3</sup> finished (Kriskó, 2012). In 1981, a new master plan was completed, protecting almost the entire historic city centre, somewhat responding to the extensive destruction caused by the inner-city housing estate (Ághné Korompay and Korbonits, 1979). Kerényi's heritage preservation work thus ran parallel to constructing large-scale housing estates.

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognise that Kerényi's toolkit fundamentally involved the preservation and renewal of buildings. These buildings were located at critical points in the urban fabric or held significant roles in the identity of city residents, ultimately having a city-wide impact. These well-chosen interventions show how Kerényi continuously engaged with the city.

According to his view, the cities represent human history and culture in continuous change. However, he believed preserving the city's character was necessary while rejecting a nostalgic, backward-looking approach. Instead of demolition, he advocated finding new functions for buildings. In the case of new buildings, those must be built with respect to the patterns of the surroundings. He considered this organic urban development desirable (Kerényi, 2000).

## 4 Architectural context and character

### 4.1 Regional and vernacular architecture

The roots of exploring and incorporating vernacular architectural elements into architectural design in Hungary date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the search for a national architectural tradition, the Secessionist and Early Modern movements gave different responses. For Kerényi, all of these served as a kind of pre-model but mainly shaped his outlook through some direct influences. It is worth mentioning the Wekerle estate, which is linked to Károly Kós, where folk elements can also be detected, and which had a significant influence on Kerényi in his childhood (Kriskó, 2014). Later, as a practising architect, he had the opportunity to exchange letters with Kós, whom he highly respected and who shaped his principles about "true" modernism and architecture (Kerényi, 1988).

<sup>1</sup> As part of the book series, monographs of the following cities were prepared: Eger (Gerő, 1954), Sopron (Csatka, 1954), Esztergom (Dercsényi and Zolnay, 1956), Székesfehérvár (Fitz, 1957), Debrecen (Balogh, 1958), Szeged (Bálint, 1959), Kőszeg (Lelkes, 1960), Szombathely (Kádár, 1961), Keszthely (Koppány et al., 1962), Győr (Jenei and Koppány, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> Kecskemét, City centre residential building "A" (Városmagterület "A" jelű lakóháza), architect: Alfréd Peschka (LAKÓTERV), built in 1967–1970.

<sup>3</sup> Kecskemét Party and County Council Headquarters (Kecskeméti Párt és Megyei Tanács Székház), architect: István Kerekes (ÁÉTV), built in 1968–1972.

From the 1960s and 1970s, the growing crisis of modernism and globalisation in many European countries led to an increasing emphasis on regional patterns. However, some views saw it as a formal tool where symbolic ornamental elements were emphasised. As a response, Kenneth Frampton's essay about critical regionalism, published in 1983, discusses the compatibility of modern technical achievements and local traditions (Frampton, 1983). Meanwhile, Christian Norberg-Schulz pointed to the importance of local character, the *genius loci*, in the search for authentic architecture, in which the synthesis of the natural and the built environment is desirable (Norberg-Schulz, 1979).

In the Central and Eastern European region, the response to the crisis of modernism and the search for vernacular patterns has been limited and delayed due to the centralized influence of the state authorities. In Poland, postmodernist trends emerged as a protest position against state power, which is particularly visible in sacral architecture (Urban, 2020). In Czechoslovakia, cautious experimentation led to a blend of modern and postmodern architectural qualities (Vorlík, 2019). While in Romania, under strong state control, alternative approaches were only marginally possible (Sabău, 2019). By contrast, Yugoslavian governance allowed for a wider spectrum of experimentation, including regionalist approaches (Kulić, 2012).

In Hungary, among the responses to the crisis of modernism, organic architecture emerged in the 1970s–80s. Imre Makovecz and his group, or in a slightly different approach, György Csete and the Pécs Group, began to look for the elements of vernacular architecture as a basis for local architecture (Simon, 2004). Csete later explicitly drew a parallel between Makovecz, Kerényi and his own pursuits for Hungarian architecture (Kerényi, 1998). In the Hungarian exhibition at the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 1991, Kerényi and his works were presented alongside the organic architects in a parallel direction (Dvorszky, 1991). All of this shows that the Hungarian architectural discourse of that period associated Kerényi's work with the organic architectural movements.

Other regionalist approaches emerged in Hungary only from the 1990s and often became more like formal features. However, Ákos Moravánszky had already published some writings on non-ideological, authentic architecture defined in contrast to the national roots of organic architecture since the late 1980s (Moravánszky, 1989). The interpretations that eventually appeared in the Hungarian architectural discourse from the late 1990s tended to distance itself from sentimental approaches and focus on rational approaches to place (Simon, 2004).

Meanwhile, Kerényi was critical of postmodern trends, viewing most of them as mere formal experiments, from which he sought to distance himself. He primarily sought the continuity of content, not formal traits (Kriskó, 2014). While he viewed the approaches of Rossi and the Krier brothers more positively, he did not find them efficient enough for preserving the vanishing European traditions (Kerényi, 1986). Instead, he identified more with classical modern movements such as Gropius or Wright. He often referred to Gropius' phrase, "architecture is not a style, but a method based on impartiality". Kerényi complemented this with the idea that impartiality must be accompanied by a commitment to the landscape, environment, people, and society (Kerényi, 1975c).

Kerényi's approach seems to be an attempt to understand how local characteristics shape the urban environment. He found one of the traditional patterns of the place in the general building type of the Great Hungarian Plain, especially in the region of Kiskunság, in the farmstead. In Kerényi's approach, the farmstead is closely intertwined with the way of life and has been developed to be in harmony with nature. This is reflected not only in its formal characteristics but also in its functional design and placement, responding to environmental influences (Fábián, 1984). In the case of Kerényi, the architecture of the Great Hungarian Plain is to be found in the Puritan and practical design. These influences also impacted his buildings in urban contexts (Juhász, 2017).

#### 4.2 Vernacular patterns in Kerényi's works

Among Kerényi's completed works, the atelier houses in the vernacular heritage area of Kecskemét reflect urban and folk architectural tradition. The studios and their adjoining courtyards, the comb-like plots and the high, masonry fences following local traditions are such examples (Fig. 2). The whitewashed walls, skylights designed like hayloft openings, and simple, single-tract spatial

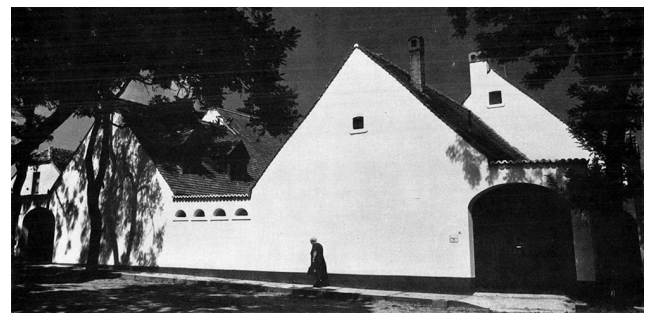


Fig. 2 Ceramist's atelier and studio house, Losonczy Street, Kecskemét (Kerényi, 1978:p.32)

structures derive from the formal and practical traditions of Great Hungarian Plain vernacular architecture. These elements are primarily based on practical considerations of folk architecture rather than formal ones. In Kerényi's interpretation, the new houses were not meant to adapt to the existing buildings but to continue the patterns characteristic of the area (Kerényi, 1978).

The gallery and library building in Szank continues the additive building formation logic of Great Hungarian Plain vernacular architecture. The elements of the exhibition space, following each other playfully, recall the patterns of outbuildings attached to the house. Kerényi also uses the formal elements previously seen here (Kerényi, 1998).

It is necessary to briefly mention the archetype that appears several times in Kerényi's works: the central spaces. The typical dry mills of the area, the haystacks in the plains, and the shepherds' shelters served as models for him. These buildings were once an integral part of the landscape of the Great Hungarian Plain and the settlements here. One of the first of these buildings, the Shepherd's Museum in Bugac, not only follows the form of a dry mill but its location is based on the logic of vernacular construction. The building was placed on a high point at the foot of a group of trees, providing good drainage and shelter from the wind (Fig. 3). Kerényi aimed for his building not to be a prominent new element in the landscape but rather a well-integrated, familiar motif (Kerényi, 1975b).

This model inspired not only the Shepherd's Museum but also the funeral chapel in Kiskunmajsa, the planned but never built funeral chapel in Bácsalmás, and the corner design of the "Szórákaténusz" Toy Museum. These houses respond to the broader context within the landscape of the Kiskunság and the Great Hungarian Plain. In the case of the "Szórákaténusz" Toy Museum built next to the Bánó House, the central space follows the patterns of mills, a once-common building type in the city. At the same time, the truncated gable end reflects the

neighbouring Bánó House (Juhász, 2018). Whitewashed walls and roof structures reminiscent of hayloft openings can also be noticed here (Kerényi, 1992). Among sacred buildings, perhaps the chapel in Cegléd best embodies the central form (Kerényi, 1998). On this building, Kerényi attempted to combine folk and ecclesiastical architectural traditions, which were clearly derived from the spirit of the place and the village environment.

Kerényi's work consistently reflects a deep engagement with vernacular traditions and regional characteristics. Through careful integration and continuation of local architectural patterns, his projects preserve and enhance the cultural continuity and identity of the regions they inhabit. This approach goes beyond mere stylistic considerations, embedding practical and historical values into modern architectural practice.

From all this, parallels can be found to Kerényi's work with both organic and later regional trends. In a broader international context, a similar approach can be seen in the case of Oton Jugovec's Floating Roof in Dobrava, Slovenia (Cresci, 2022), which is comparable to Kerényi's Shepherd's Museum in Bugac in its sensitive response to local traditions and landscape. In Hungary, parallels with organic architecture emerged in the architectural discourse at this time. However, Kerényi and Makovecz or Csete came from different perspectives. Direct comparison with Hungarian regionalism, which took a unique path from the 1990s, is not straightforward. However, Kerényi's thinking parallels Frampton and Norberg-Schulz's interpretations of critical regionalism. While Kerényi also employed recurring formal elements, such as traditional forms and whitewashed walls, which became the hallmark of his architecture in this region, these were often grounded in practical considerations. He frequently criticised formalism in his writings and instead sought to reinterpret traditions.

## 5 Urban morphology and character

### 5.1 The value of the street

From the 1960s onward, the value of traditional urban structures, such as street networks, became an increasingly central theme in international architecture and urban planning discourse. Shane (1976) explored the relationship between streets and squares within contextualism, emphasising the inseparability of these spaces from the buildings and proportions that define them. Among architects like Aldo Rossi, Mario Botta, Maurice Culot, and the Krier brothers, the urban fabric gained central attention. While Krier and Rowe (1979) focused on morphological



Fig. 3 Shepherd's Museum, Bugac (Kerényi, 1975b:p.24)

typology, Rossi (1966) approached this through the unique characteristics of each place, emphasising the relationship between city and architecture, where a building gains significance through the urban fabric. Alexander et al. (1977) studied urban situations and identified typical patterns that are archetypes of the environment. This shows that values are not in the forms but in the structures.

In the Hungarian context, Pál Granasztói's writings from the 1960s onwards repeatedly emphasise that Hungary's historical development requires that historicity be interpreted in a broader concept. Among his categories of urban design values, he particularly highlighted indirect historical values of cities such as urban structure, street network, and plot layout (Granasztói, 1967). From the 1970s onward, there has been a growing emphasis in Hungarian urban architectural discourse on non-monumental cities. Kaposvár and Szekszárd emerged as good examples of harmonising historical and contemporary developments in non-monumental city centres. Settlements of the Great Plain have also become relevant in discussions on historicity, focusing clearly on the value of street networks and plot layouts rather than the preservation of building stock (Dercsényi, 1975).

Besides all this, the question of a wider urban and landscape character gained importance in the 1970s and 1980s. Their roots date back to the inter-war period with the appearance of landscape unit architectural studies, which period began to be covered in thematic issues of the *Magyar Építőművészet* journal in the 1980s. In the 1930s, under the leadership of the architect Kálmán Tóth, a survey of the architectural traditions of the landscape began in the Balaton highlands, and the *Magyar Ház Barátai* (Friends of the Hungarian House) movement later examined other landscape units as well (Tóth, 1987). The impact of this research is shown by the typified house design competitions of the time and the development of the so-called ONCSA<sup>4</sup> Settlements in the 1940s, which sought to reinterpret folk architectural traditions and use them in an urban context (Timon, 1983). Among Kerényi's contemporaries, Tamás Meggyesi is notable, whose research looked for patterns and typologies not only at the architectural but also at the urban scale. The typology sought to understand the social, cultural and economic aspects of

the evolution of the urban and rural context while considering regional differences. (Meggyesi, 1987). Urban-scale impacts of the regionalist trends can be interpreted in the preparation of the Budapest Character Plan Methodology in the early 1990s, in which Ferenc Cságoly and his colleagues searched for local patterns and characteristics in the metropolitan context (Cságoly and Szathmáry, 1992).

Kerényi instinctively began searching for local patterns in the early 1970s. His perspective was greatly influenced by the urban historical research on Kecskemét's downtown conducted by Katalin Ághné Korompay and Dezsőné Korbonits (Kerényi, 1983). Their research emphasised the historicity of street networks and folk architecture values, uncovering more profound layers of the city's history and challenging the idea that towns on the Great Hungarian Plain, like Kecskemét, lacked historical value (Ághné Korompay and Korbonits, 1979). This research was the basis for the 1981 Kecskemét regulation plan<sup>5</sup>. The plan included additional value categories to preserve the characteristic building forms, street network, streetscape, and city silhouette of the historical city core. These urban structural approaches aimed to protect the existing non-monumental but historically significant urban fabric, allowing for certain redevelopments while maintaining its character. A folk monument area was also designated to protect the remaining traditional building patterns of the town (Kerényi, 1983). This formed Kerényi's view of the settlement as a monument, encompassing its street network, urban structure, trees, and houses (Trencsényi, 1982).

Kerényi's design approach was greatly influenced by traditional urban planning activities, where the city was continuously rebuilt, adding new elements while preserving the street network (Kriskó, 2014). Meanwhile, he sharply criticised the construction of the inner-city housing estate. According to him, the large number of modern housing units did not compensate for the abandonment of traditional street layouts and building methods. Such redevelopments sacrificed the continuity of the settlement (Kerényi, 1983). He saw the crisis of modernism in the separation of economic and artistic aspects of architecture. Architecture, he argued, reflects and shapes society. The complexity of our built environment and settlements is therefore most evident in this approach. This does not imply housing estates, but residential neighbourhoods that organically integrate with the settlements (Kerényi, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> National People and Family Protection Fund (Országos Nép- és Családvédelmi Alap), a state social organisation set up in 1940–1944 to support the most destitute rural people with large families, to increase the number of births and for child protection purposes.

<sup>5</sup> Planned by Katalin Ághné Korompay and Dezsőné Korbonits (VÁTI).

## 5.2 Urban scale approach in Kerényi's works

In Kerényi's work, a significant role was given to the historical value of the urban fabric. In the case of the Bánó House, the goal was not only to preserve a distinctive traditional house type but also the historical plot structure. The axe-shaped plot reflects the specific plot layouts of the market towns. Preserving the unity of the building and the plot as a key consideration. Kerényi explicitly rejected the demolition of the house and its reconstruction elsewhere as a "display". It was also essential to preserve the high brick fence, a traditional and typical element of the streetscape in Kecskemét. (Kerényi, 1977). This shows that in Kerényi's view, the house and its surroundings are inseparable.

In 1976, Kecskemét was one of the first Hungarian cities to eliminate the main road through the city centre, which allowed the reintegration of the traditional, multi-sectioned square structure. The irregular pattern of squares that once served as markets now became accessible to locals and pedestrians (Román, 1980). Nevertheless, Kerényi criticised the creation of a new section of the main square through the construction of the cultural house, party headquarters, and "Alföld" department store. He argued that it did not integrate well and failed to understand the principle of a multi-sectioned main square (Kerényi, 1976b).

In contrast, in the environmental redevelopment of the Kodály Institute and Kéttemplom Street, Kerényi placed great emphasis on continuing this local pattern. The small square in front of the institute is enhanced by the paving stones, the placement of the fountain and the roof above the street. This development included a promenade from the theatre to the building of Ókollégium, perpendicular to Kéttemplom Street, which was also planned but only partially constructed. A part of this promenade is the flower-windowed house, the gate next to the monastery building, as well as the planned but ultimately unrealised gallery building (Fig. 4). By expanding the space in front of the institute and creating a promenade, it aimed to continue the city's structured, multi-sectioned main square by establishing a new part of the main square (Kerényi, 1976a).

However, urban-scale thinking did not only manifest itself in such architectural plans. Especially at the beginning of his career, as a young architect at BÁCSTERV, Kerényi was involved in the town planning of several settlements<sup>6</sup>. In these relatively early plans, the aim of preserving the street network, even within a strict framework, is already visible. For example, in the planning of the town

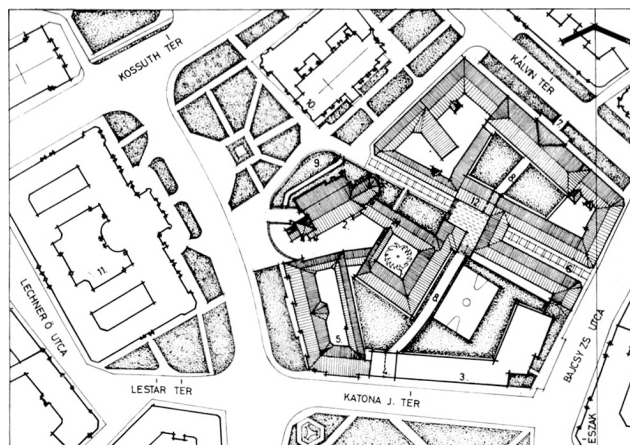


Fig. 4 Kodály Institute and Kéttemplom Street, site plan  
(Kerényi, 1976a:p.23)

centre of Dunaegyháza, an attempt to preserve the irregular street network can be noticed. In a later work, in the case of the greenfield development of the holiday village in Lajosmizse, he consciously addressed the plannability of an organic settlement structure. Eventually, he prepared a development plan using the existing country lanes while adapting it to the morphological characteristics of the place (Fig. 5). In addition, he designed a set of type buildings for the village, using elements of vernacular architecture and even more functional principles. From all these, he attempted to create a varied streetscape (Kerényi, 1998). Although this plan was not ultimately realised, it shows Kerényi's complex approach, in which urban and architectural aspects are harmonised with the environment.

## 6 Conclusion

The research attempted to contextualise József Kerényi's approach from the point of view of the urban scale. In his work in the Great Hungarian Plain, Kerényi placed significant emphasis on preserving locally important values. His efforts were informed by studies and investigations that revealed deeper layers of local heritage. Thus, showcasing and preserving the heritage that plays an essential role in urban structure and local identity became a focal point in his projects. His approach, rooted in local urban traditions, strengthened the perspective of historical continuity in urban development. The preservation and emphasis of urban fabric values such as street networks, building types and the cityscape played a central role, which is also evident in his urban-scale projects.

However, in rehabilitation efforts, there was also a notable emphasis on building-scale interventions that had broader urban-scale impacts. An important aspect of his heritage approach is the reuse of old buildings and

<sup>6</sup> e.g., Dunaegyháza, Dunavecse, Izsák, Kalocsa-Meszési Dunapart, Kömpöc, Tiszakécske-Kerekdomb.

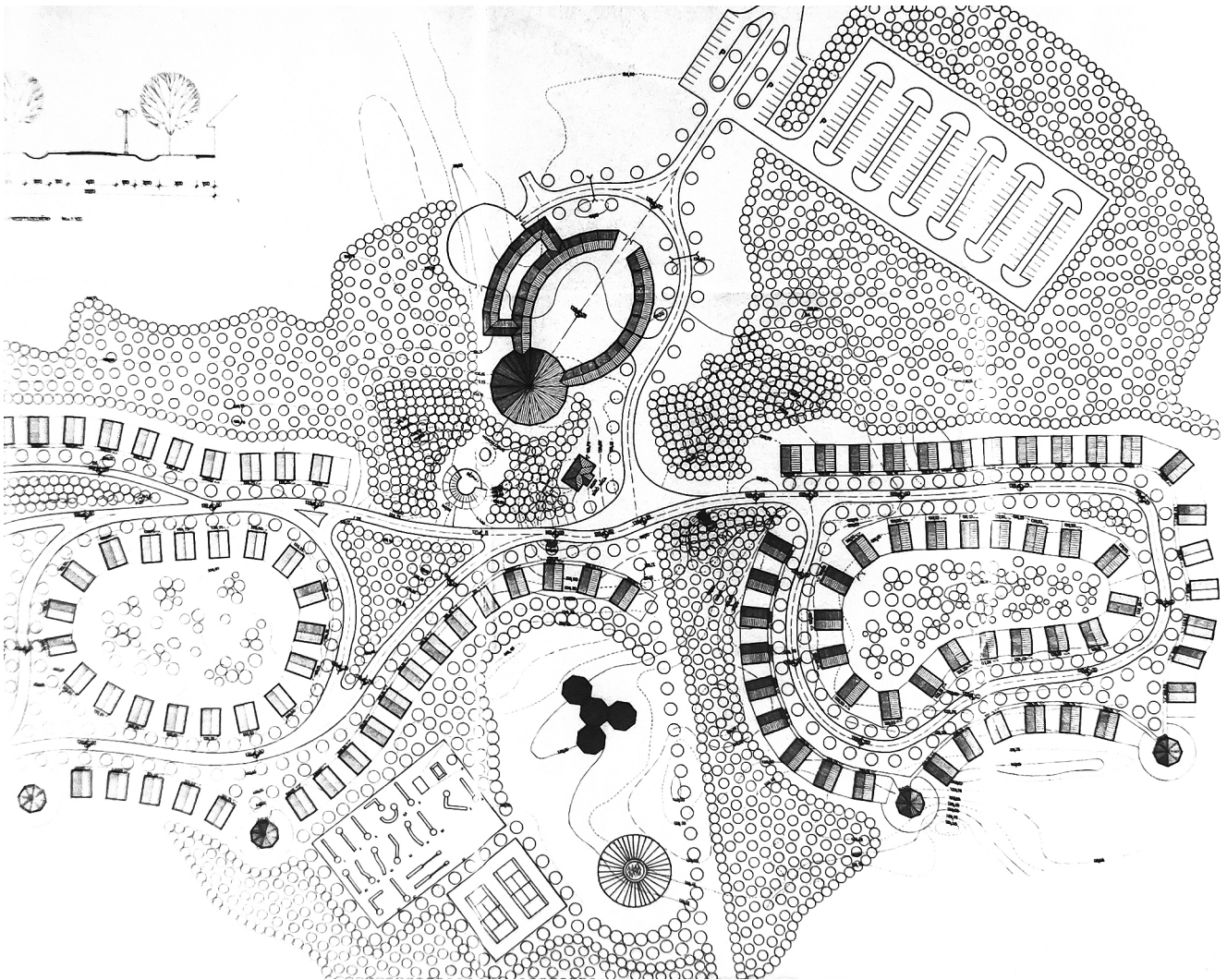


Fig. 5 Master plan of Lajosmizse holiday village (Kerényi, 1981a)

the infilling of new contemporary functions to ensure the continuity of the urban heritage. The aim was to preserve urban character and strengthen the relationship of locals with their heritage. Whether in preserving and renovating existing buildings or placing new ones, this perspective was observed throughout the design process.

Adapting to local conditions, the vernacular architecture and landscape elements were crucial influences. The simplicity and practicality of folk architecture influenced his urban buildings, complementing the specific characteristics of market-town developments, street layouts, and plot characteristics.

Comparing his work in an international context reveals some parallels between Kerényi's processes and international trends. According to his autobiographical and retrospective writings, his thinking was fundamentally shaped by reactions to local traditions rather than following foreign models. Moreover, he was critical of most international processes but welcomed rehabilitation and

recycling efforts, seeing them as aligned with his own ideals. However, while international rehabilitation projects approached the issue from the perspective of sustainability, Kerényi saw the essence of this practice primarily in the preservation of vanishing traditional values.

From the perspective of Hungarian planning history, Kerényi's work can be situated between earlier city-scale monument protection efforts and the later initiated urban rehabilitation processes. Kerényi's building-scale interventions at strategic points in the urban fabric had a significant impact on the wider urban character as well. This was achieved through an approach explicitly urban in scale but rooted in architectural thinking.

Analysing József Kerényi's work in the region of the Great Hungarian Plain extends beyond architectural history, addressing contemporary architectural, urban planning, and heritage conservation dilemmas. His approach remains significant for understanding how local heritage can inform sustainable architectural and urban development practices.

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