

A Monument and a Blindspot – On the Precarious State of Modernist Architecture in Bratislava

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The architectural and urban structures of Bratislava, capital of Slovakia, which were constructed under the discourse of monumental post-war modernism, are turning into urban blind-spots as their spatial structure is fragmented and their former spatial program is mostly no longer understood by contemporary society. To better comprehend this phenomenon, it is in our view necessary to look at the history of these spaces in a long perspective. In this case study, we look into the history of modern architecture and urban planning practices which shaped the *Námestie slobody* Square in Bratislava, and which were significantly influenced by the cultural programs of authoritarian political regimes of the 20th century. Even though only some of them were executed, they subsequently added to the production of the Square in the sense of its physical environment as well as an imaginary place, and so they play instrumental roles in contemporary perceptions and usages of the Square's landscape. Regarding this investigation, it is useful to look at the practices of architectural and urban planning as intellectual activities producing representations of space, understood in the sense of the theory of the production of space developed by Henri Lefebvre who interprets the space as 'spatial triad'. From this perspective, the spaces of architectural plans are not scrutinized as the results of isolated processes of intellectual work, but rather they are theorized as a crucial players in negotiating the relations between various facets of space – perceived, conceived and lived space – which together constitute urban environments as a complex socio-spatial phenomena.

The Object and Method of Inquiry

The urban landscape of Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, is characterised by its architectural and urban structures constructed under the discourse of post-war monumental modernism.¹ These structures are now turning into blind-spots because of various factors, such as the fact that the construction of their spatial structure remained uncompleted. Moreover, because their originally envisaged program is generally no longer understood by contemporary society, they are being further fragmented by contemporary development. One of Bratislava's most symptomatic public spaces in this regard can be found not far from its old town centre. A four hectare rectangular space, demarcated by the post-war modernist edifices of the Slovak University of Technology and the Ministry of Transport, and by the Governmental office, which is housed in the historical structure of the former Archbishop's baroque palace, extended by several modern annexes, is called 'Námestie slobody' – the 'Freedom Square'. The 'Square' could easily be mistaken for an urban park, as its landscape features extensive areas of greenery and the whole place is crowned by a steel colossus of a flower-shaped fountain. The place seems to have been forgotten and left unmaintained by the city authorities, and the fact that the fountain has not seen water for years adds to its peculiar atmosphere of melancholy and decay.

The Square is typologically related with other central spaces of political representation, which were constructed in other South Eastern European cities during the same time-period and in analogous processes of nation building. These processes coincided with the period of various authoritarian political regimes and were significantly influenced by logic of their cultural programs. The case-study set out here attempts an inquiry and interpretation of the history of modern architecture and urban planning practices which shaped the Námestie slobody during the 20th century.² Even though only some of the elaborated designs were actually executed, realised, as well as imagined architectural spaces linked to various ideologies added to the production of the Square as a complex socio-spatial phenomena, and can be understood to play instrumental roles in its contemporary perception and usages. Regarding the investigation that follows, it thus seems useful to look at the practices of architectural and urban planning as intellectual activities producing representations of space, understood in the sense of the theory of the production of space developed by Henri Lefebvre, who interprets the space as 'spatial triad'.³ According to Lefebvre, space is produced by three types of practice: by physical transformations of the environment (producing 'physical space'), practices of representation of space (producing 'conceived space') and practices of appropriation of space, living in space (producing 'representational space', or 'space of representation'). From this perspective, the spaces of architectural plans are not scrutinized as a result of an isolated process of intellectual work. While they are primarily

¹ Compare Henrieta Moravčíková, 'Monumentality in Slovak Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s: Authoritarian, National, Great and Abstract', *The Journal of Architecture*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2009). Available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13602360802705205> [accessed at 04.01.15].

² For more detailed history of architecture of Námestie slobody and its analytical comparison with other analogical cases in regional context see also Marián Potočár, 'The Square: "Námestie slobody" in Bratislava: Continuity and Change in Architectonic Strategies' in: H. Moravčíková, P. Szalay, M. Dulla, M. Topolčanská, M. Potočár. & K. Haberlandová (Eds.), *Modern and/or Totalitarian in the Architecture of the 20th Century in Slovakia*. (Bratislava: Slovart, 2013), pp. 156 – 167 and Marián Potočár, 'Námestie slobody v Bratislave', Diss. Thesis (Bratislava: Fakulta architektúry STU, 2014).

² Lefebvre's theory has proved to be a useful tool in case of research concerning the phenomenology of specific urban spaces constructed in the context of real socialist regimes. See for example the case study of Nowa Huta in Poland by Łukasz Stanek, 'Die Produktion Des Städtischen Raums Durch Massenmediale Erzählpraktiken: Der Fall Nowa Huta', *Sozialistische Städte Zwischen Herrschaft Und Selbstbehauptung. Kommunalpolitik, Stadtplanung Und Alltag in Der DDR* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2009) and the Thesis by Matej Blažek dealing with housing estate Petržalka built in Bratislava under real-socialist regime, 'Thirdspace and Sub-culture: Spatialities and Identities of Hip-hop Youth in Post-socialist Housing Estate.' (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 2007).

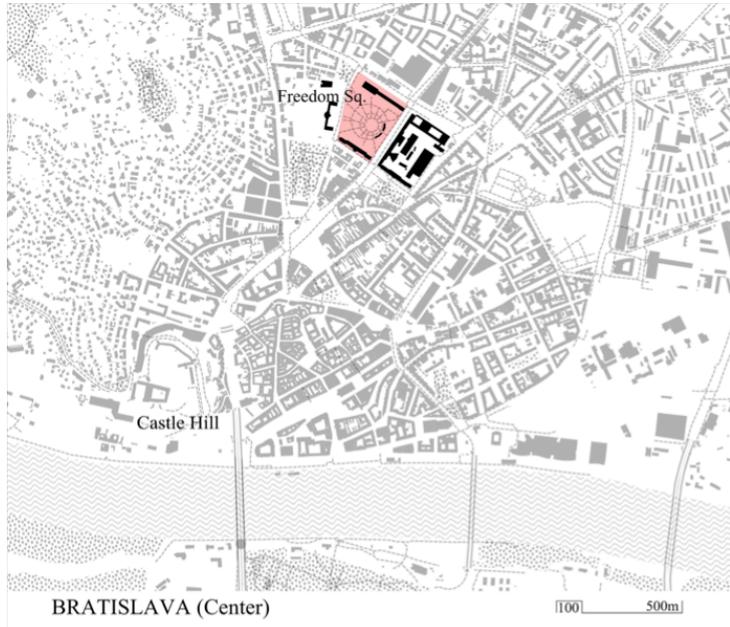


Fig. 1: Location of the Freedom Square on the map of Bratislava centre. Source of map data: openstreetmap.org.



Fig. 2: Fountain 'Družba' on Námestie slobody today. Photo by author, 2012.

seen as an attempt to assert certain strategies of governing an urban environment, they are also becoming a crucial player in negotiating the relations between various forms of space – perceived, conceived and lived space.⁴

4 Regarding architectural plans and interventions in the terms of strategic / tactical moves owes to the specific context of authoritarian regime seeking the construction of dominated spaces, thus reinforcing own hegemony. As Lefebvre points out '... ideologies relate to space in a most significant way, because they intervene in space in the form of strategies.' Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 105.

5 Original city's name used to be 'Pressburg' (in German), respectively 'Pozsony' (in Hungarian) or 'Prešporok' (in Slovak). City was given the new name 'Bratislava' after World War I. and establishing of Czechoslovak republic.

1918 – 1945: The Emergence of a Monumental Urban Space in Bratislava

The production of what today is Námestie slobody was a sub-process within the overall dynamic development of Bratislava during the last century. After the World War I and the fall of Austro-Hungarian Empire, the city became a rapidly growing urban centre of the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia. Its metamorphosis from the town of 'Pressburg' into the city of 'Bratislava'⁵ was driven by ideological motives that sought the building of a 'modern', 'industrial' and 'Slavic' city. The site of former archbishop's garden, which was renamed Námestie slobody [the Freedom Square] at this time, soon started to attract the attention of the new Czechoslovak authorities which anticipated this to be a potential site for constituting a space of political representation. Back then, in its vicinity there was a picturesque mixture of low suburban dwellings, wine taverns and the gardens of former baroque palaces. The Square itself was a spacious and dusty area in the neighbourhood of military barracks and an old municipal gas-station; an empty and amorphous, yet distinct urban place, a representational space of urban heterogeneity. Apart from an open-air marketplace and military exercises, it also hosted festivals and

- ⁶ The quasi-federal political system of the inter-war Czechoslovakia recognized four major “Lands” - Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and Ruthenian Russia. Bratislava was the regional capital city of Slovakia.
- ⁷ From more than 30 participating teams, 4 were rewarded the highest prize *ex aequo*; among them also notable inter-war architects Josef Gočár or Emil Belluš.

circus attractions, giving it some degree of exotic flair to which it also owed its colloquial nickname ‘Sahara’. Notably, the Square was also reported as a poorly controllable area and the scene of various ‘inappropriate’ behaviours and obscenities.

In 1929 an open architectural competition was held, aimed at designing a building for the Zemský úrad [Land Authority]⁶ on the Square, which should have become a new political centre of the city. It resulted in several designs, which were applications of functionalist planning methods (the administrative complex itself was seen as a ‘factory for production of documents’), preferred by progressive Czech and Slovak architects at that time.⁷ None of the proposals was effectively implemented however, mainly due to the slowdown of city development during the economic crisis in the 1930s.

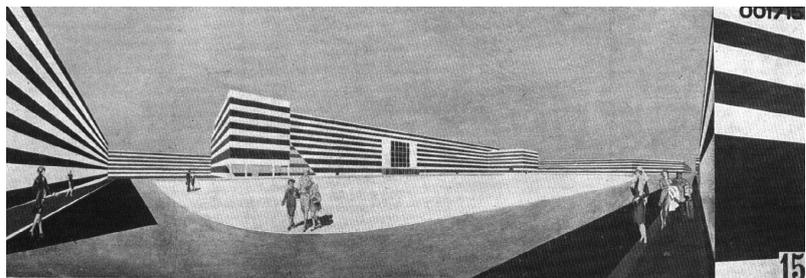


Fig. 3: The edifice of the ‘Land Authority’ on Námestie slobody, as designed by team of architects Bucháček – Míšek – Strnad in 1929. Source: Architekt SIA, Vol. 29 (1930), pp. 53 – 66.

- ⁸ The split of Slovak Republic from Czechoslovakia was arranged by Hitler and Jozef Tiso – leader of clerical-fascist ‘Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana’ [Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party] (HSĽS) – in march 1938 and lasted under the patronage of Germany until the end of the World War II. The ruling party was named after the founder of the movement – pater Andrej Hlinka

Development gained new dynamics only after the rise of the Slovak nationalist movement crowned by establishment of the ‘Slovak State’ at the end of 1930s.⁸ By organising frequent rallies and mass rituals, the ideology of the emerging totalitarian regime immediately projected itself into various public spaces, among which Námestie slobody had a prominent role. From perspective of the state, the Square was transformed into a space of lived ‘national unity’ for obvious technical reasons (being a large area suitable for mass public events). But its heterogeneity and its immanent subversive potential made it all the more necessary to turn it into a dominated space. According to Lefebvre:

spatial code is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a means of living in that space, of understanding it, and of producing it. As such it brings together verbal signs ... and non-verbal signs (music, sounds, evocations, architectural constructions).⁹

- ⁹ Lefebvre, op.cit, p. 47.

And so Námestie slobody became the stage for military parades, ceremonial assemblies, stylized folklorist festivals and even church masses – a heterotopic collage of events organized by the ruling regime.¹⁰

¹⁰ Compare Dušan Kováč, *Bratislava 1939-1945* (Albert Marenčin Vydavateľstvo PT, 2006).



Fig. 4: Catholic mass on the Námestie slobody in 1941. Courtesy of the Slovak national archive / Archive of Slovak press agency (STK)

Fig. 6: Official ceremonial assembly on the Námestie slobody in 1940s. Courtesy of the Slovak national archive / Archive of Slovak press agency (STK)



Fig. 5: Military parade on the Námestie slobody in 1941. Courtesy of the Slovak national archive / Archive of Slovak press agency (STK)

Fig. 7: Photo of a model of the design proposal for the competition for 'Governmental District' in 1942 (arrow marking the Archbishop's Palace). Author: Josef Gočár. Proposal was awarded the 1st prize. Courtesy of Archive Institute of Construction and Architecture of Slovak Academy of Sciences.



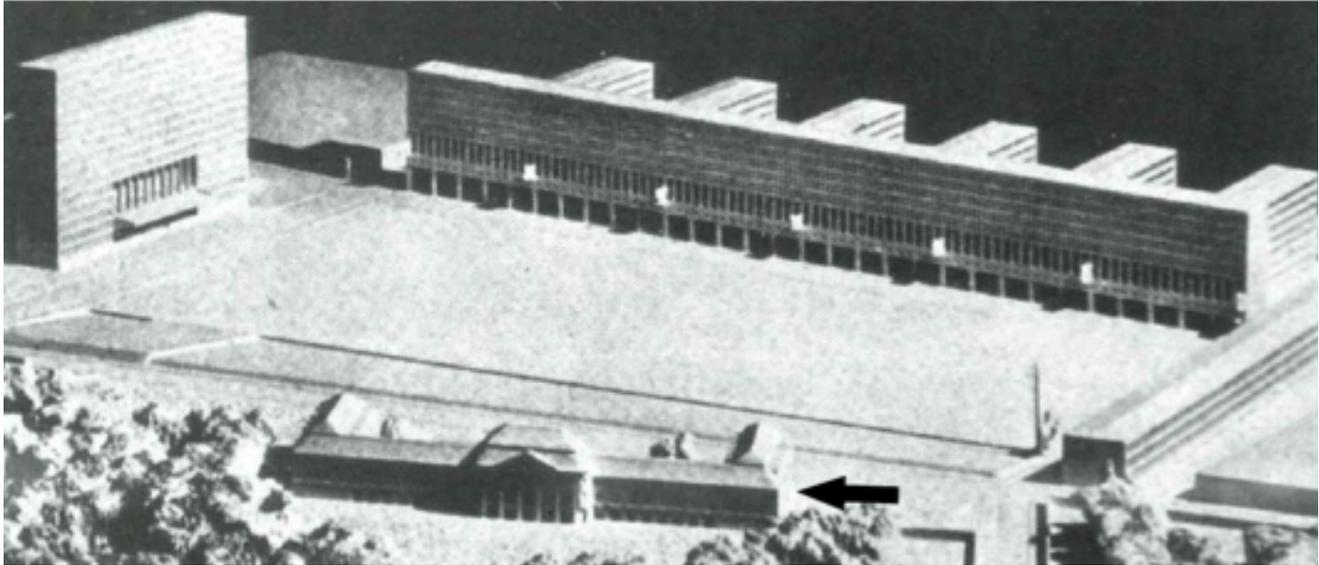


Fig. 8: Photo of a model of the design proposal for the competition for 'Government District' in 1942 (arrow marking the Archbishop's Palace). Authors: Adalberto Libera, Ernesto La Padula. Proposal was awarded the 2nd prize. Courtesy of the Archive of the Institute of Construction and Architecture of Slovak Academy of Sciences.

- ¹¹ Other prestigious competition was that one for master-planning of new University Campus on the Castle Hill and the Danube promenade of Bratislava in 1941. For more details about these competitions facilitated by Ministry of Construction see also Matúš Dulla and Henrieta Moravčíková, *Architektúra Slovenska v 20. Storočí*, (Bratislava: Slovart, 2002), pp. 172 – 174 and Elena Stoličná, 'Architektúra Nemeckej Provenienencie Na Slovensku v Rokoch 1939 – 1945', Diss. Thesis (Bratislava: Ústav stavebníctva a architektúry SAV, 2000). See also Jean-Louis Cohen, *Architecture in Uniform; Designing and Building for the Second World War* (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2011), pp. 364 – 367.
- ¹² From 1919 until 1940 the Palace housed a military hospital, after that it was reconstructed for purposes of the new Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Project was designed by Slovak architect Emil Belluš.
- ¹³ I.e. a political district, typically planned for regional capitals of the Third Reich. See Christiane Wolf, *Gauforen. Zentren der Macht: Zur nationalsozialistischen Architektur und Stadtplanung* (Verlag Bauwesen /Huss Med, 1999).
- ¹⁴ Compare also Lefebvre, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

Consequently, to crown their hegemony, the state elites intended to alter the landscape of Bratislava physically. The exclusive international master-planning Competition for Governmental District on *Námestie slobody* which took place in 1942 was among the most spectacular projects in this matter.¹¹ The program included new presentable edifices and monuments, including the freshly refurbished archbishop's palace,¹² and an assembly area for rallies. The concept of the district was clearly inspired by typological model of Nazi 'Gauforum',¹³ but in the development, opportunities were given for examination of different architectural methods stemming from various tendencies and currents. First of these was the legacy of the former Czechoslovakian inter-war avantgarde represented by the winning proposal of Josef Gočár, who resolved the program by proposing a simple modernist architecture. Bulky volumes of administrative complex were efficiently housed into the existing site, and thus avoided excessive demolition in the area. The second prize was awarded to the Viennese architectural office of Siegfried Theiss, Hans Jaksch and Werner Theiss, whose proposal was an exercise in the neoclassical style of National Socialism. The second runner-up team of Italians Adalberto Libera and Ernesto La Padula delivered a fine example of Italian rationalist architecture. Their proposal for a vast square was to be flanked by monumental cubic volumes; the abstract and repetitive textures of their façades stressed the emptiness of the open space and sought to create an effect of total 'spectacularization'.¹⁴ This self-confident proposal won particular acknowledgement from the local cultural scene, which commonly looked up to Italian models – not least because of the



Fig. 9: Building of the Central Postal Administration on Námestie slobody. Shortly after its completion at the beginning of 1950s, the edifice stood out decisively in the middle of low-rise structures of that time. Authors of the design are Eugen Kramár and Štefan Lukačovič. Courtesy of the Archive of the Slovak University of Technology

ideological proximities between the Slovakian ruling regime and Italian Fascism. Despite appreciation for these awarded proposals, the eventual construction of the Governmental district turned out to lie beyond the capabilities of the small war-time Republic.

1945 – 1951: The new University Campus

After World War II and the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic, the discourse on urban development and architecture was developing in the context of the gradual nationalization of the economy and the political transition towards a soviet-like socialism.¹⁵ Despite the sharp ideological shift, the development of architects' discourse concerning the Square was showing notable continuity. Even though the idea of the Government District on Námestie slobody was abandoned for the time being, architects in charge of the post-war projects spontaneously began

¹⁵ The Czechoslovak communist party linked to the Soviet union was the most influential party in the after-war governmental coalition of 'National front' and grasped full power in 1948. The further usage of the term 'socialist' is here meant as a reference to the political status quo of one-party dictatorship until 1989.



Fig. 10: Façade details of the building of 'Pavilion of Theoretical Institutes'. The role of technology and technical experts in a socialist society is depicted through comic-like narratives embossed in stone. Photo and collage by author, 2012.

Fig. 11: Volunteers' brigades are working on the Námestie slobody. According to the newsreel from 1950s, students, workers and clerks have voluntarily contributed 150 000 men-hours of work to the building of the Square where 'the citizens of Bratislava will be celebrating their joyful Maydays and rally for the peace'. Weekly newsreel No. 4 (1952), Courtesy of the Archive of the Slovak Film Institute.



¹⁶ It was designed by Slovak architects Štefan Lukáč and Eugen Kramár, both of who also took place on the competition in 1942. The Building is today the office of Slovak Ministry of Transport and Regional Development.

¹⁷ Klement Gottwald was the leader of communist party and since 1948 the first president of socialist Czechoslovakia; he died in 1953. Cult of his personality partially survived the wave of de-stalinization and saw revival in the period of 'normalization' in 1970s, which followed the occupation of Czechoslovakia by armies of Warsaw Pact in 1968.

to recycle and adapt formal concepts elaborated in the course of wartime competitions. The first modern construction on the Square actually took place in 1946, when the building of Ústředná poštová správa [Central Postal Administration] replaced the old military barracks on the north-east side of the Square.¹⁶ Its architectural form was knowingly derived from the Libera and La Padula's proposal for Government District, in which the design had the form of a distinctive slab volume of the House of the ruling party HSĽS.

As the cornerstone for the first University building – 'Pavillion of Theoretical Institutes' designed by Belluš himself – was laid in 1948, the ritual was held in a ceremonial fashion. After the communist party grasped full power on the same year, the Square, which was renamed 'Gottwaldovo námestie' ['Gottwald's Square']¹⁷ and the construction in progress was subsequently frequently presented in official news reels. It was turned into a performance which sought to establish an organic relationship between a particular urban space, city as a whole and the social order. Brigades of students, workers and public servants were shown, as they voluntarily worked on the site, thus supporting the project of a new Campus. The developing architectural and representational space became a metonym for empowering of the 'worker's state' through knowledge. The regime also continued the established tradition of public rituals staged on the Square – Gottwald's Square hosted parades of 'People's militia' and Mayday ceremonies. Due to such combined spatial practices, Gottwald's Square was quickly turned into a representation of the socialist regime.

1951 – 1989: Continuities and Ruptures in Architectural Strategies

The beginning of 1950s was a peculiar episode in the Square's history. At this time, as happened in other countries of Eastern Europe, architects in Czechoslovakia were directly pushed towards applying historicist eclecticism, also known as a 'method of socialist realism'. This Stalinist doctrine was an alleged synthesis of 'progressive' elements which appeared across history, and it was usually expressed under the simplified slogan 'national in form, socialist in content'. It did not actually bring about any robust theoretical discourse on architecture. Its role was more an instrumental one – a means for enforcing discipline upon the professional scene through an imposed drill in the production of particular architectural forms.

Curiously, a cosmopolitan modernist skyscraper for the Central Planning Institute was proposed for the northern side of the Square as late as 1951 by the team of the state planning office Stavoprojekt under the leadership of well-known avant-gardist Josef Havlíček. But the Stalinist cultural program prevailed soon afterwards, and a competition for new

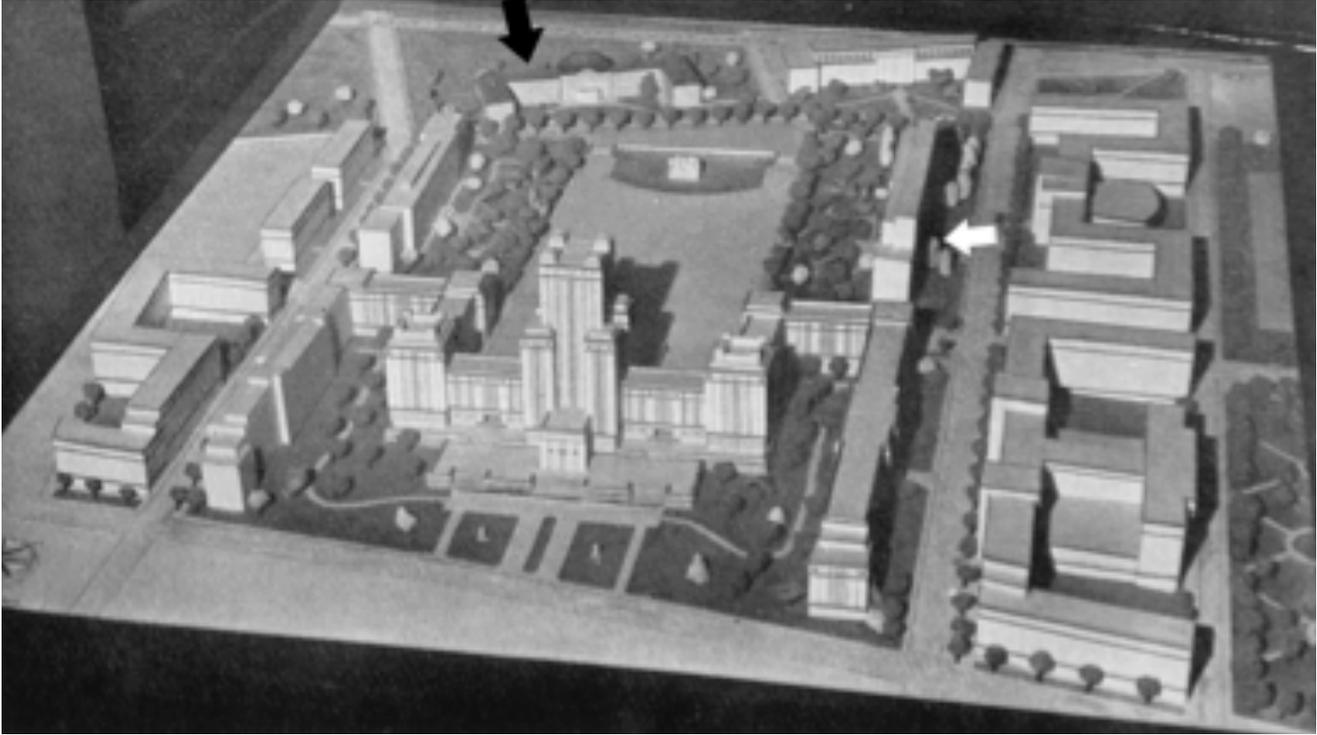


Fig. 12: Photo of a model of the design proposal for the competition for 'Solution for Gottwald's Square' in 1953 (black arrow marking the pre-existent Archbishop's Palace, white arrow marking the pre-existent Central Post Office). Authors: J. Bóna, M. Hladký, V. Uhliarík. Their proposal won first prize. Source: Architektura ČSR, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1954). pp. 82 – 90.

Fig. 13: Photo of a model of the design proposal for the competition for 'Solution for Gottwald's Square' in 1953 (black arrow marking the pre-existent Archbishop's Palace, white arrow marking the pre-existent Central Post Office). Authors: K. Kňava, Lugs. Source: Architektura ČSR, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1954). pp. 82 – 90.

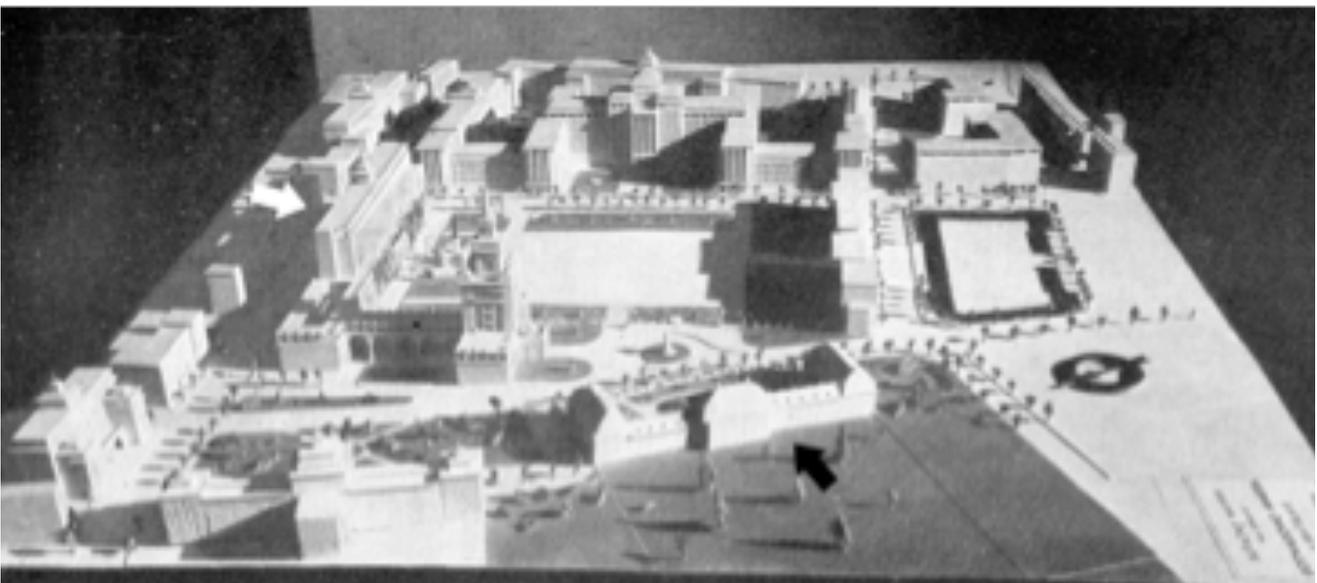




Fig. 14: Aerial view of the Square in early 1960s. Source: Karol Belický, *Nová tvár Slovenska*, (Bratislava: 1962).

Fig. 15: Ceremonial display of the Memorial of K. Gottwald on the *Námestie slobody* in 1981. Courtesy of the Archive of the News Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR).



master-plan for the Square was organized in 1953, just as modernist architecture turned from being a guiding star into a criminal overnight. Competing architects and artists were now expected to apply prescribed formal strategies of historicist monumental urbanism and architecture. In a bizarre turn of events, special emphasis was placed on the task of neglecting the figure of the recently-finished and much-celebrated building of the Postal Administration.¹⁸

¹⁸ One of architects of the buildings, Eugen Kramár was actually imprisoned in 1951 – 1961.

However, the overall political atmosphere turned again quickly after the death of Stalin and Gottwald (both 1953) whereupon Khrushchev announced a completely new official policy. The design proposals from the ill-fated competition of 1953 were criticized immediately following their publication in professional journals, and were embarrassingly scrapped as quickly as possible. The architectural epoch of ‘socialist realism’ left behind nothing but confused memories, and the staged festival of building the socialist Square in the socialist city was over, just as the sense of disappointment began to spread.

¹⁹ Namely the streets such as 'Valónska ulica' and 'Jánska ulica' south of the Square, which were notable, apart from the old gas-station, for their many traditional wine-cellar. Compare Dušan Kováč, Bratislava 1939-1945, p. 71, and Igor Janota, *Oprášené Historiky Zo Starej Bratislavy [Stories of old Bratislava]* (Albert Marenčin Vydavateľstvo PT, 2010). The Faculty of Mechanical engineering was built here and designed by a team of architects from Stavoprojekt, under the leading architect Martin Kusý.

²⁰ 'Normalisation' is the name of period of political repression following the failed attempts at political reform in Czechoslovakia in 1968 (the 'Prague Spring').

²¹ In direct reference to former usages and representations the Square, the mixed team of architects and artist, who were assigned for this job after winning a competition in 1976 admitted some creative inspiration stemming from wish for turning former 'Sahara' into thriving green Oasis a dignified place for the new memorial.

²² Most significant urban place during the 'Velvet Revolution' in 1989 in Bratislava was the Námestie SNP [The Square of Slovak National Uprising], which is located on the periphery of the old-town centre.

In the period between the 1930s and 1960s, the original avantgarde movement continuously matured towards a functionalist planning doctrine which defined urban areas and particular urban spaces as mostly mono-functional elements in relation to the organism of the city as a whole. Despite the fact that no more monuments for the leaders were designed, urban development continued to provide a metaphor for the reinforcing of political hegemony. Several more streets around the Square were demolished at the end of 1950s to make a place for more faculties of the SVŠT.¹⁹ The once heterogeneous 'northern suburb' was effectively replaced by a homogeneous fabric of official edifices. Apart from occasional official events and a routine functioning of the university and the administrative buildings, the Square was effectively degraded into a mere transition area. Despite the ongoing discussions among urban-planners and architects, and despite a few additional smaller master-planning competitions aimed at the 'revitalisation of the Square' which took place at the end of 1950s and 1960s, hesitancy prevailed. The Square as a public space remained in a provisional state and was used as a parking lot. The final alteration of its physical space was executed in only 1979 – 1981, during the later stage of 'normalisation'.²⁰ The memorial of K. Gottwald was finally installed in the form of an ensemble of colossal statues where the leading figure portrayed Gottwald himself. It used to be located on the highest, northern edge of the Square. The remaining landscape was turned into presentable urban park, its expressive design was based on a concentric, radially-organised grass areas and concrete blocks. A monumental steel fountain called 'Družba' [Unity] was erected on the focal point of the park, flanked with broad water-cascades.²¹

The landscape dominated by the memorial fixed the status quo of power relations in spatial form, which for its users limited the possibilities of interactions to the opposing poles of conformity or subversion. Once the Square was turned into the representation of an ideal urban space of the real socialist regime in the late period of dictatorship – the Námestie slobody used to be frequently depicted in tourist brochures and other materials published by the municipality – even a casual visit to the green areas was a contribution to the positive image of socialist Bratislava. The 'public space' of the city thus became a representational space of antagonistic social relations.

From a Monument to a Blind Spot – Námestie slobody after 1989

Although Námestie slobody was constructed to become the central stage of political rituals, the crucial events of 1989 took place in other urban places in Bratislava.²² Although the Square was among the first places to be renamed after the fall of socialist regime, the statue of K. Gottwald was only removed in 1991. Notably, the demolition of the prominent

monument of the perished regime did not take the form of spontaneous popular action (the demolition was executed by the municipality) and the Square was not subjected to any further alterations. As a result, the former unitary discourse on the Square, which was based on official ideology and its immanent antagonistic pendant of individual subversion, was not simply replaced by a particular – opposing – new one, but instead by a plurality of discourses.

After 1989, an attempt was made by the new representatives of the municipality to appropriate the Square into an open public space – space of democratic representations – and it was given an exception from common legal procedures regarding organized public events. Indeed, the Square is frequently used for assemblies, rallies, protests and other public events up until today. What differs from the formerly staged rituals is the indifferent or even dissonant relationship between the spectacle of the public events and the physical environment itself. The eventual adoption of the Square as an open public space is impeded by the associations of particular spatial forms with representations of the former totalitarian regime. Despite the physical removal of the memorial of K. Gottwald, *Námestie slobody* is further dominated by its history, and the landscape and the 'Družba' fountain are connoted as 'socialist' and out of scale colossi.²³ It is due mainly to the Square's unmatched physical size that it is continuously used for public events. As a result, the attempt to acknowledge the Square's role as the space of political representations has remained perplexed, and the exceptional legal dispensation for public events granted by the Municipality was cancelled in 2007.

²³ In fact 'Gotko' or 'Gotvalďák' (Slovak abbreviations for 'the Gottwald's Square') remain a commonly used colloquial references of *Námestie slobody*. The memorial of Klement Gottwald is thus haunting the imagination about the place despite its physical removal.

After 1989, other (non official) storytelling practices became possible once again. With them, alternative pictures of the Square as a space of representations, which it used to be before modern constructions took place (a place of parades, circus attractions, children), are being revived in retrospective and revisionist literature. But even the emergence of these representations of the Square do not really add to a reconciliation with contemporary society, as they rather touch the neuralgic issue of old versus new in the city development of Bratislava.

After the appropriation of the Square mostly failed, and the strict control of public space on the Square vanished after 1989, it became to be seen as an antisocial or derelict place. In local media, the site has recently being portrayed as a shabby, or even dangerous, place and site of obscenities. Whether or not such representations can be really supported by evidence, the fact is that they induce a self-fulfilling prophecy as they add to the stigmatization of the physical environment.

Multiple fragmented views on the *Námestie slobody* are a result of the fragmented nature of its development during the 20th Century. But

they also indicate its potential as a Monumental space, in accord with Lefebvre's description of monumental spaces of representation:

A monumental work, like a musical one, does not have a "signified" (or "signifieds"); rather, it has a horizon of meanings: a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which now one, now another meaning comes momentarily to the force, by means of – and for the sake of – a particular action.²⁴

²⁴ Lefebvre, op.cit., p. 222.

Just as the multiplicity of meanings are instrumentalized for the sake of various spatial acts in Lefebvre's theory, so the multiple views on Námesťie slobody resulted in different proposals for spatial acts on, and alterations of, Námesťie slobody.

Various installations of new sculptures on the Square have been proposed since the beginning of the 1990s. They should have provided a replacement for the former memorial of K. Gottwald, and were predominantly inspired by the pathos of the national history. None of these proposals were realised.²⁵ More recently, several public initiatives have used contemporary representational spaces as the basis of actions aimed at a re-appropriation of the Square on the level of an environment and of a representation. One example is the initiative 'Bod o' [Point Zero], which brought together several artists who proposed various spatial alterations to the Square. All of them took the physical absence of former political symbols as their point of departure. The only installation actually performed was by the Polish artist Paweł Althamer, who temporarily turned the 'Družba' fountain into a children's sandpit. In theory, it teased various representations of the space (the arranged space of the fountain, the former Square's nickname 'Sahara') and combined them with a children's playground in an attempt at creating a new situation. Due to the temporary character of the spatial installation, it did not achieve a permanent effect; moreover the value of its impact on the discussion about stigmatised post-war architecture could be questioned.

²⁵ An exception was a Temporary 'Memorial for the Victims of Fascism and Communist' voluntarily installed in 1991 by artist František Guldán, who reworked his concept again in 2004.

Other similar initiatives carried out by smaller stakeholders (such as the Faculty of Architecture at the STU) have been limited to tactical interventions, and remain far from establishing a new unitary discourse. For those decisive stakeholders such as private developers or the Municipality, who have more or less given up any further attempts to appropriate the Square, it has become an official blind-spot. Economical arguments, along with social stigmatization, are used for justifying of pragmatic economical solutions proposing demolition of the Square altogether and new commercial usage and new commercial usage.²⁶ In the context of private-market environment, its perception as an abstract space, with no purpose tangible by functionalist definitions, has prevailed.²⁷ Allegedly, costly maintenance is thus deemed unreasonable and since

²⁶ Such was the proposal for construction of garage house discussed since 2013.

²⁷ As a matter of fact, Bratislava did not have regulation master plan until 2007 and since then. The Square is symptomatically classified only vaguely as a 'green area'.

2007, the ‘Družba’ fountain has been out of order. Without further maintenance it is put at risk of suffering irreversible damage through erosion.

Different attempts at spatial interventions on the Square can be interpreted as a need for the complex renegotiation of appropriate relationships between the three forms of space – perceived, conceived and lived space. Apparently, for all of the aforementioned approaches to Námestie slobody, the strong presence of architecture from the period of the authoritarian regimes plays an instrumental role as a spatial form as well as a representation of ideology. Currently emerging as the central issue is the competition between various spaces of representation on one side and the abstract space of profit-oriented land-usage on the other.



Fig. 16: The ‘Družba’ Fountain, temporarily turned into a sandpit in 2012 (Author of the concept: Pawel Althamer / initiative ‘Bod o’). Photo by author, 2012.

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