

Architektur im Ringturm

Hungary

Architecture in the Long 1960s

6 April to 26 May 2017

- Curator:** Adolph Stiller
- Venue:** Exhibition Centre in the Ringturm
Schottenring 30, 1010 Vienna
- Opening hours:** Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm, free admission
(closed on public holidays)
- Press tour:** Wednesday, 5 April 2017, 10am
- Speakers:** András Hadik, Zoltán Fehérvári (both art historians) and Adolph Stiller
- Official opening:** Wednesday, 5 April 2017, 6.30pm (by invitation only)
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Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein launches new architecture website

In March 2017 Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein launched a new website devoted to the Architektur im Ringturm exhibition series. The highlight of this innovative information platform is an interactive journey through the Ringturm, Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein's headquarters – by scrolling up from the bottom of the screen, users can access the latest information and everything they need to know about the Architektur im Ringturm series. History lovers will also be in their element: ingenious timelines portray every Architektur im Ringturm exhibition staged since 1998, as well as the history of the Ringturm – from the original idea for the construction right through to the present day.



In the latest instalment of the Architektur im Ringturm exhibition series, Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein once again focuses on Hungary's architectural diversity. The current exhibition turns the spotlight on the Hungarian architectural scene during the period often referred to as "the long 1960s". In terms of its theme and chronology, the show ties in with the "Hungary: Architecture in the era of awakening" exhibition staged at the Ringturm in 2014.

A long decade of architecture

Architecturally speaking, the long 1960s were a highly productive period in Hungary, in spite of the Hungarian state's consolidation of power following the 1956 uprising. The material compiled for this exhibition and the accompanying catalogue is based on fundamental research carried out in the country over the past ten years. Selected projects are presented in order to highlight developments and trends in the period from around 1958 until 1971 for a wider audience, whose access to the topic is hindered by the language barrier in particular. In a way, Hungarian architectural history from the long 1960s is seen as an epoch in itself. In spite of political influences, architects enjoyed a relatively high level of autonomy, which in tandem with the sense of a new beginning at the time gave rise to a remarkable number of outstanding constructions.

Architecture has always been firmly embedded in the social situation of the period in question. And anyone looking to give an outline of the long 1960s needs to look in closer detail at developments after the Second World War, and in particular the time after Stalin's death, as well as the period of socialist realism in Hungarian architecture during the five years leading up to the 1956 uprising. Examples of Stalinist classicism could still be seen in Hungary after the Soviet leader's death, but there were soon calls for a break with eclectic baroque and classicist forms, and with the classicist style of socialist realism.

There was a huge shortage of residential space, so faster, better, cheaper and more attractive construction was the order of the day. The shift from traditional to industrial construction methods for housing was essential in terms of productivity and cost effectiveness. In addition, custom construction plans hindered the spread of standardised buildings and the industrial housing production programme – this was the thrust of Khrushchev's famous speech in December 1954, which ultimately ushered in a change of tack. The industrial housing production programme involved the prefabrication of reinforced concrete constructions, the replacement of brick walls and the use of precast concrete wall blocks that were assembled on site. Such constructions are commonly referred to as panel buildings.

From an architectural point of view, 1955 and 1956 saw the biggest upheaval. Architectural details and elements associated with the 1960s originated around the mid-50s and became increasingly widespread in the second half of that decade. These include the industrial housing production programme, as well as the consideration of and return to modernist architecture, and an architectural theory mindset which was labelled Marxist and primarily specified the design framework for industry professionals.

By the end of the 1950s, new constructions that had been started in line with the socialist realist style were – where possible – completed in a simplified form, without any ornamental details. As early as 1955, designers came up with a number of significant works of architecture based on customised plans, such as the Hungarian pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair in 1958, which was destined to become the first showpiece construction of the long 1960s. The pavilion signalled a new sense of liberalism in Hungary's architecture, as well as casting the country's government in an impressive light on the international stage. The construction was also symbolic of modernity and a new departure.

The majority of the buildings presented in "Architecture in the Long 1960s" were created during the period of the Kadar regime's consolidation, which began in the early 60s.

When selecting the construction to be showcased in the exhibition, a conscious effort was made to resist the temptation to focus predominantly on panel buildings. A large number of spectacular high-rise apartment complexes were built, and the urban planning approaches adopted for them were consistent with the Athens Charter of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM).

The aim of industrialised construction was the cost-effective creation of residential space. Production in Hungary alternated between different models. On the outskirts of industrial towns and cities, and in Budapest, housing production plants imported from the Soviet Union took on the leading role. These enabled high-volume production, although the technical standards of the buildings were usually below expectations. Some buildings, which are similar to modern-day developments, were constructed using in-situ concrete and sliding formwork. In the early 1960s a few prototype housing estates were built, where a wide variety of styles were adopted.

“Architecture in the Long 1960s” does not concentrate on panel buildings, but on the surprisingly diverse range of high-quality constructions, which is astonishing in comparison with the same period in Western Europe, or at least as far as Austria is concerned. The Hungarians were aware of developments in the UK, France and Germany. International attitudes were discussed in Hungarian architectural journal Magyar Építőművészet (MÉ), which included summaries in five languages and also presented projects that served as models and had a noticeable impact on formal language. Information on the latest construction techniques used around the world was also available. However, Hungarian architecture was distinct, and only possible in this particular form in the country. Universities attempted to raise awareness of broader European matters by means of Hungarian-language publications, and from time to time findings aimed at an international audience were published, for instance, in English.

Towards the end of the 1960s, economic and other problems had a negative impact on the level of construction work. Centrally planned schedules and local competition for funds served to reduce momentum. This resulted in the sorts of long lead times that were typical of all communist countries: from planning to implementation, projects often lasted several years. Looking back, it is therefore little wonder that temporary distortions in style emerged. However, the fact that the government had full control of construction – the state owned the land, gave itself planning permission, carried out building work through state construction companies and also represented the building users – was advantageous in terms of quality and the available options.

Reflecting a modernist spirit, a number of high-quality developments were completed in Hungary during the long 1960s, the most important of which are profiled in this exhibition. Selected photos and historical documents provide vivid impressions of this significant architectural era.

Catalogue

Architektur im Ringturm XLVI: Hungary – Architecture in the Long 1960s

Edited by Adolph Stiller, approx. 180 pages, with contributions from Endre Prakfalvi, András Hadik and Zoltán Fehérvári

Price: EUR 28

The photographs used in the exhibition, some of which are on display for the first time, are mainly taken from document collections and estates held by the Hungarian Museum of Architecture (Magyar Építészeti Múzeum, MÉM).