



POLITECNICO
DI TORINO

Honors thesis

COURSE OF MASTER DEGREE IN ARCHITECTURE FOR
THE SUSTAINABLE PROJECT

Abstract

ELECTRIC BUDAPEST

Rehabilitation project of the electric substation of
Erzsebetváros, historic jewish quarter of the capital

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My first travel in the Hungarian capital took place in July 2016, when I started to think about to explore the city and to write my master thesis of history and project about Budapest.

From that moment I came back to Hungary 5 more times; the longest period abroad from May to September 2017.

I immediately felt the infinite possibilities offered to the architects from the city in terms of research and experimentation, despite the controversial economic and politic moment. What struck me more was the presence of several empty urban spaces, occasion for different ways to design. Local population is very creative and active to use this empty spaces to create gardens and places for the spare time and cultural and quarter activities.

Thanks to these and other reasons I decided to start my work of research with the cooperation of my university tutors and my external tutor in Hungary Zsuzsanna Ordasi, professor in History of Art at the Pannon University (Veszprém, Hungary), expert in cultural relationships between Italy and Hungary in the artistic and architectural field.

During my experience abroad, I met lot of people, locals and international, that helped me in my research. It was amazing to see the large availability of books and data about the history and the architecture of the city. Despite the initial linguistic difficulty, I managed to find lots of local publications and to understand the local contemporary architectural debate. I can certainly affirm that the most amazing aspect of my thesis abroad was the time spent in that different cultural and local institutions. With the help of my supervisors, great connoisseurs of the city, I spent most of the time to find sources in order to build the core of my work. About that I used to attend local institutions like the Italian Institute of Culture, the Budapest Collection in the Szabo Ervin Metropolitan Library, the National Library, the Metropolitan Budapest Archive (BLF) and bookshops and the Centre of Contemporary Architecture (FUGA) too. The researches followed the tips of the officials of the aforementioned institutions and about the building, the main subject of my thesis, thanks to the young architect Bence Lestyán, nephew of the dead architect that designed the building within which and in connection with, I developed the last, most concrete, part of the thesis. Thanks to Lestyán I could go inside the structure to see the state of fact in the summer 2017.

During my first site inspection in February 2017, the choice of the project site was a substation for the transformation and distribution of the electric energy, built in 1969 in the inner Erzsèbetváros (VII district) on a project by Ernő Lestyán. It's a brick frontage, tall and narrow, interrupt only by two ribbon windows. The originality of the building, its actuality, the collocation in an urban contest characterized by a complex and old history, made a primary role for the choice of the site. The first step of my research took place from the analysis of the urban and architectural development if the city from XIX century, and after the topic is based on the history and the architecture of the VII district, characterized by a strong Jewish background.

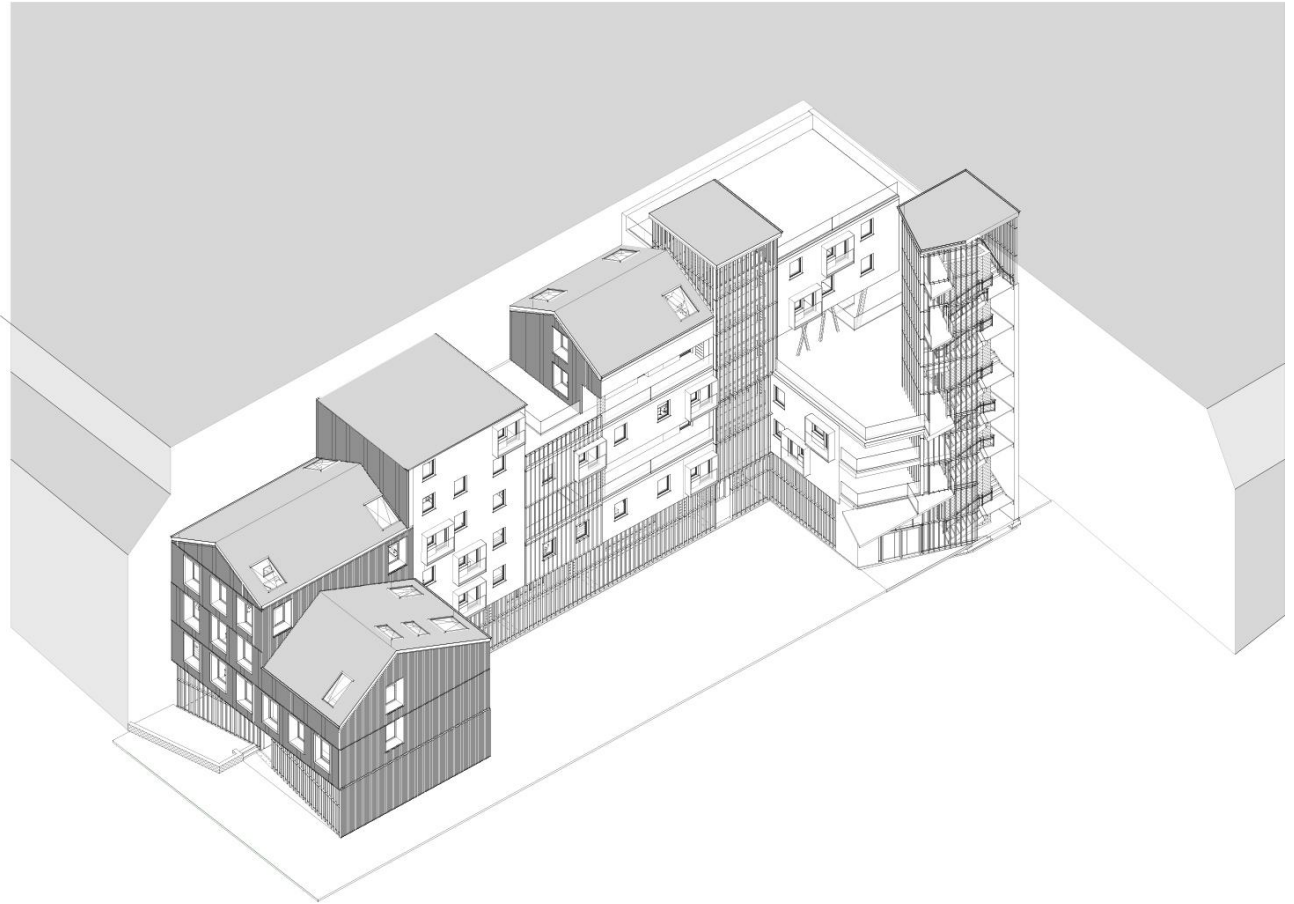
The main topic speaks about a kind of architecture, past and present, strictly influenced by the relationship between culture and local policy; inside this trend, orientated to make Budapest a modern and efficient European capital, lots of architect demonstrated an original and innovative regional spirit.

Most of electrical transformer substations of the '30 were object of renovation projects and are used today for very different purpose from the original, like cinemas, fitness gyms,

cultural centres, exposition halls and schools. Examples in this field are the Merlin theatre, the school of art in Liliom street, the electrotechnics museum in Kazinczy street and others. Lestyán's building, belongs to the second generation of transformer substations; it is an union of technic and architecture, it performs the function of a machine but not ignores the form. The gesture of the architect is outspoken, inspired by the Finnish modernism. It stands out for its volumetric contrast from the context, for its proportion (30 m tall, 50 m long and just 8 m narrow), and for the international and modern appearance.

Together with the historical analysis, the study of this particular typology of building, it is developed in a different part of my thesis, focused on the design of a project of renovation that imagine new functions for the substation in a future where, during the rehabilitation of the town centre, transformer activities will be dislocated or inter. The purpose of the research has been to outline a basis of knowledge to develop knowingly an architectural project of renovation and reuse of a complex urban space, where there are lots of actors and roles and a rich and characterizing architectural past.

The main aspects of the project are the relationship with the fabric and the preservation of its historical memory and appearance. The design of the new building try to use the empty space by the construction of a residential building in the courtyard, characterized by high housing standard and in the meantime to valorise the substation and to dialogue with it.





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