

Colours, Harmony, Historic Ambience in West-Hungary

Gábor Winkler

H-9028 Páva utca 38/F, Győr /Hungary, e-mail: winklerg@kabelnet.hu, Mobil: +36-30-9948-096

Abstract: *In this paper I would like to discuss about the colours and harmony in the rich historic milieu of West-Hungary in case of Győr, Sopron and Pápa.*

Keywords: *color, pattern, harmony*

Along the western border of Hungary, through the margin of the Alps and the Small Hungarian Plain where the highlands and the plain meet, there is a densely populated network of settlements having developed during the thousands of years. All settlements saved their own character, among others their typical urban structure, the relation between buildings and open spaces, the formal appearance – decoration and colour of buildings, the harmony between the urban areas and its natural surroundings and the characteristic functions that the settlements has acquired over time up to this day. The city's unique structure, the houses, streets and squares offer a characteristic atmosphere and are the most prominent documents of West-Hungary's rich history. I would like to present three of the charming historic towns of "West-Pannonia" – Győr, Sopron and Pápa.

The settlements owe their existence to the *geography of the area*. The landscape around the settlements, the relationships between the towns and its natural and manmade surrounding is one of the secrets of harmony and richness of the towns. Without doubt, one of the most important gifts of mother nature is also the gate-like characteristic of this region.



Fig. 1. Győr in the 16th century (Hufnagel 1597).

The landscape around *Győr* however retained characteristics of the preceding millennia. Rivers springing from the Alps head towards the Danube. Numerous water-courses of all sizes, including the Rábca, the Répce, the Keszeg, the Rába and the Marcal rush towards the same spot searching for the South branch of Danube, the Moson-Danube, where they virtually meet in one point. South of the Basin of Győr, three ridges of hills are prominent. Among the wide Pannonhalma Hills, Saint Paul Hill is the highest; to the east is Pannonhalma; and in the west rises Felpéc. It is a rich, versatile, gentle landscape, suitable for establishing a home, a land good for living. A safe river crossing connected the western Viennese, Czech and Moravian Basins with the Carpathian Basin. For thousands of years, people, migrant tribes and armies passed through this, one of the most important points in Europe.



Fig. 2. Sopron in the 18th century (Werner 1750).

The magic landscape around the city Sopron hardly changed till today. The widely spanning Sopron Basin is bordered from south-southwest by the Sopron Mountains, from east by the Balf Hills. The slopes of Bécsi Hill and the rise of Kuruc Hill are wedged in between both ranges. The low hills bisect the plain being broken up further by Ikva and Rák (Crab) Brook. The distant surroundings of the city is characterized by Lake Fertő (Neusiedlersee), a shallow sea to the northeast, and by the plain Kisalföld (Small Hungarian Plain) to the east.



Fig. 3. Pápa in the 16th century (Hufnagel 1597).

The town of *Pápa* is situated in the middle of the Pápa Plain, south from the Small Hungarian Plain, north from the Lake Balaton – not far from the Bakony mountains.

The character of the towns, the typical *urban patterns* defined by the lots and streets are in a close context with their history. Most of the settlements were established by the Celts, but the structure of the settlements were formed at the time of the brightest period of the Roman Empire. During the period of the Middle Age the structure of the towns was changed, the houses and flats was ever increasing. The buildings were rebuilt and brought up to date again and again; and their appearance was often changed as well. The life in the historic settlements in West Hungary took place mainly within the city walls. The supremacy of the city wall protecting the heart of the towns lasted till the beginning of the 18th century.

Győr – the one-time Arrabona – is the spiritual and economical center of the Upper-Transdanubia, home of 130 000 people. The architecture bears witness to an adventurous history: layered city structures demonstrate the settlement's

diversity. The settlement built where rivers intersect has been continuously inhabited since ancient times. The town has been established as a Roman military camp and a surrounding “village” – a real curiosity in this part of the ancient Pannonia – at the junction of the rivers Rába and the Moson-Danube.

The Hungarians first appeared in the area in the 10th century. In early medieval times, the Chapter Hill was the residences of the Bishopric and the city for civilians was established around the hill. The loose, fibrous structure of the town was similar to the small villages on both sides of the river Danube where modest houses were built on the hills, streams and dips followed the crooked courses of narrow alleys. The early medieval structure of the outlying area of the fortress was an irregular, web-like pattern of the suburban streets. Even today, most of the early-medieval downtown with its tight, curved alleys, and narrow, short side streets are still intact. The regular, rectangular street system with the four-sided blocks of houses is the result from the late-medieval redevelopment of the city.



Fig. 4. Győr in the 19th century (Alajos Holló 1920).

From the first quarter of the 16th century, Győr became the border fortress of Europe. The town was surrounded with walls fortified by unified up-to-date New-Italian bastions. Urban houses in Baroque style were raised on the grounds of the former modest gable houses. The walls and gates of the fortress was demolished in the years after 1828. In the 19th century began the improvement of Győr to the south and east. The regular medieval streets of the city were further developed, maintaining the existing reticular street system. New, broad streets were opened along the former fortress walls, and a row of two-storied, elegant, middle-class mansions in style of Historismus were built in along the riverbanks in the 19th century. Most of the façades were green or blue at this time.



Fig. 5. The Székesfehérvári Gate in Győr
(Alajos Holló 1920).

The inner city of *Sopron* – the late *Scarbantia* – is still surrounded by the oval shaped city wall of the Romans. Hungarians arrived into the area around 907. They found the still standing Roman city walls. The walls were restored and fortified again. The elliptic designed of the Roman city was inherited in *Sopron*'s later and present structure. The towns grew rich during the Middle Ages: the handicrafts and the commerce were prosperous.



Fig. 6. Sopron in the 16th century (János Kugler 1857).

A considerable number of the houses located in the heart of the historic settlements originate from the Middle Ages. The newcomer Hungarians did not built their tiny houses around the former regular Roman streets. Houses was at

first built in the inner side of the city walls, later opposite them. The narrow houses with gable stood perpendicularly to the streets. The upper storey was supported by stone consoles and decorated by stone framed gothic windows. The streets showed a close character and friendly atmosphere. The gabled houses was painted white or red. The line drawing on the edges of the houses imitated the former stone architecture.



Fig. 7. Sopron Fire Tower in the 19th century
(Ferenc Storno junior 1920).

The most buildings lost step by step their gothic appearances after the great fire in 1676 in the 17th century. The façades of the houses were rebuilt by elements of the Baroque architecture. The Baroque façades were painted with lively, vivid, warm and bright colours. Do not forget to look into the yards of the Baroque houses decorated by loggias.

Commercial life boomed at the middle of the 19th century. The houses was built in the style of Historismus. Buildings in classicist style was painted with soft grey and blue colours. All neo-renaissance building received a stone-like character. Houses in picturesque style of Late Historismus was painted with one soft pastel-like colour. The theatre reconstructed in the style of Secession (Art Nouveau) by architect István Medgyaszay was decorated with a colourful stucco. The façades in the style of early modern movement with sweepingly curved reinforce concrete balconies and with flat roofs received a dazzling white colour. Only the frame of the windows show high colours – often red or blue.



Fig. 8. Sopron The Fire Tower with the Nep. St. Johann Chapel (Ferenc Storno junior 1920).

Pápa is a nice, small town in West-Hungary with a celebrated history, great traditions, important cultural values and Baroque ambience. The small town with its 35.000 inhabitants was established by Hungarians in the 11th century. In the middle ages there were eleven settlements in the today's territory of the town.



Fig. 9. Pápa in the 18th century (Unknown Master).

The development of the settlement was due to the watermills on the stream of Tapolca. The fortification of the family Garay was built in the 14th century. Next to the castle, the market place was surrounded by high gabled small houses. The modest village-like buildings were whitewashed.

As a defence against the Turkish attacks a simple rectangular fortress of stockade was built in the year 1554. After the Turkish period Count Esterházy, the bishop of Eger played an important part in rebuilding the town. The heart of the town is the Main Square (Fő tér) with the Parish Church of St. Stephen the Martyr, behind it the Esterházy Castle with a rich “Palatine Baroque Interior Exhibition”. The presbytery mansions, the Botka House, Hotel Griffin, Zichy House and the Kenessey-Szondy House were built in the style of Baroque. Also the façades of the Benedictine church in the Main Street (Fő utca) received a modest lime coating. The Museum of Blue Dyeing, one of Central Europe's oldest blue dye works functioned in a 18th-century late Baroque building too.



Fig. 10. Győr Apáca Street (Alajos Holló. 1920).

But not only the high quality and richness of interiors and exteriors, scale, size, style, construction, materials, colours and decoration of buildings in historic towns must be preserved. Every historic town has an *individual historic colour image*. In Győr, green, blue and lilac colours were popular, in Sopron the limestone yellow, in Pápa the sand-drab from time immemorial. The typical colours of the towns must be saved and restored.

Urban spaces surrounded by old houses need good pavements, street furniture with fine design, lovely formed direction signs, terraces for the shops and coffee

houses and sweet shops with friendly atmosphere. Large squares covered with white monolith cobblestone may be empty and uninteresting.

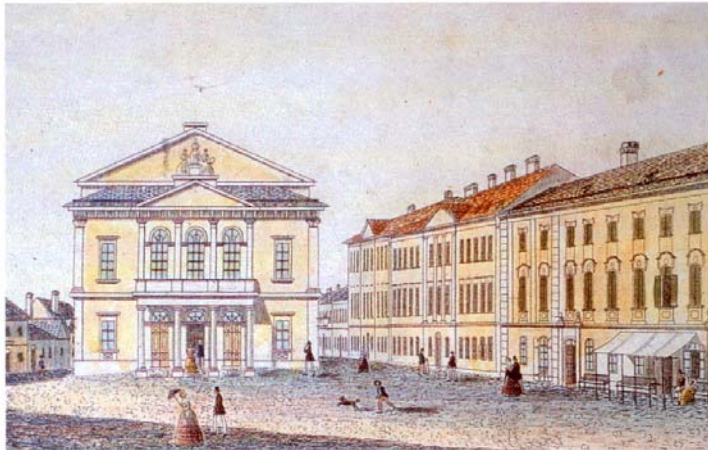


Fig. 11. Sopron The Town Theater
(Unknown Master 1850.).

The historic towns acquired various typical functions over time. The old traditions of city life – headquarter of different religions, site for market, traditional schools for high education, little shops with special articles made in the town, etc. – must be preserved.



Fig. 12. Győr Duna Gate Square
(György Opitz 1930.).

Historic towns often exude an aroma of local flowers, a pleasant smell of new bread, scent of coffee houses etc. And at least but not last: all old settlements have special sound effects. The peal of bells, the sound of trumpets in the fire tower, organ in the church, the voice of muezzins, the blur of citizens, the swarming of tourists and the snatch of the music school. All these fine sound effects can enrich the ambience. At the same time, the rough crash of town fountains – there are very fashionable in today's Europe – can disturb the historic feeling and the whole atmosphere of the towns.



Fig. 13. Győr Duna Gate Square
(Antal Fruhman 1845.).

All settlements in West-Hungary has undergone a great improvement in the fields of both town-planning and town embellishment since 1974. Thorough integrated research into the history and historic environment of the towns was carried out at first. The town planner collected rich pictorial material containing views and historic colours of the town, as documented through the centuries. In the years after 1980, most Hungarian architects and town planners followed these methods: good historical surveys of old towns became the norm as an important part of a town planner's work to save the harmony, colours and ambience in historic towns.



Fig. 14. Győr Sarló Street
(Dénes Csánky 1930.).

References

- [1]