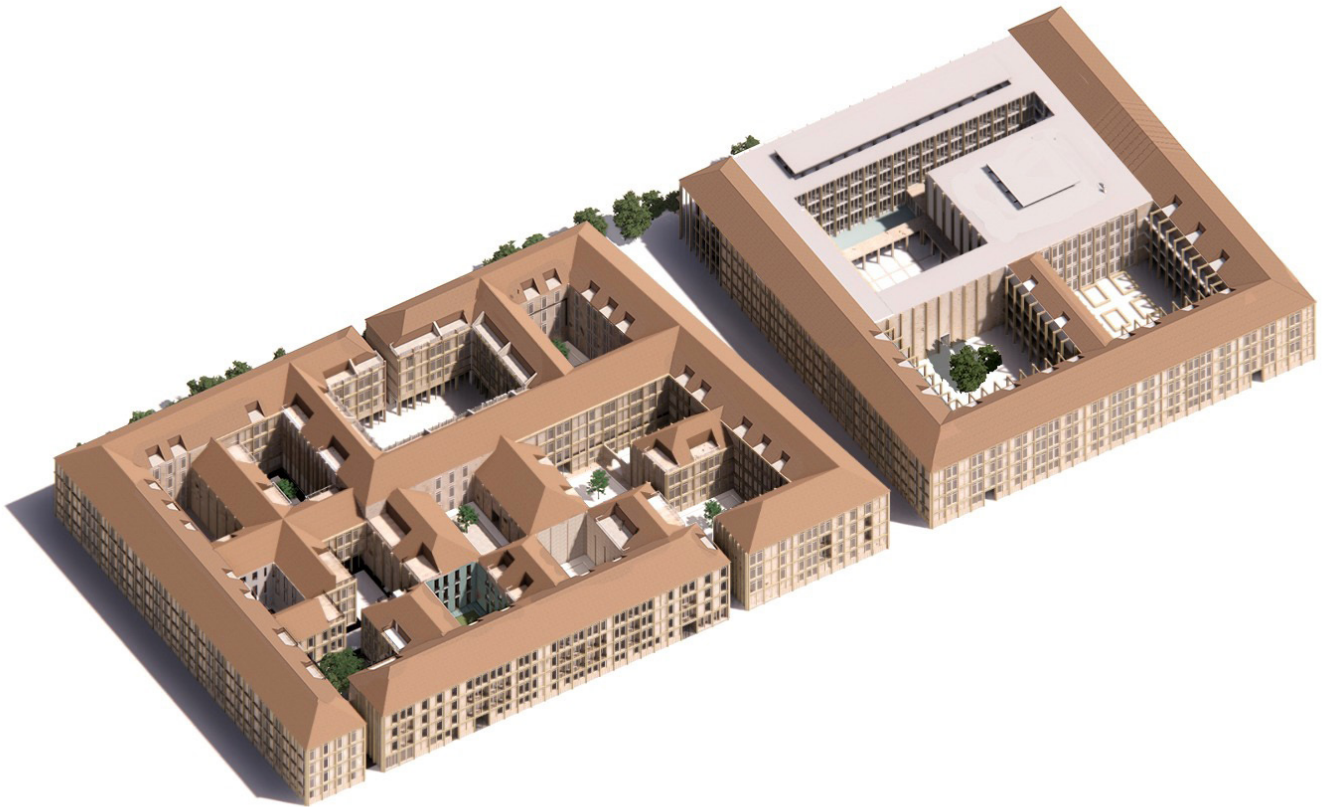


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P5 Project description and reflection



The project takes as a starting point the architectural exploration and revival of the typology of a courtyard block – a type that has a long history in the city of Budapest and yet, is getting abandoned and rejected in the in the last decades – a predicament that surprises as the type has been realised successfully for centuries and even millennia across the world. For that fact, I take a stance that a courtyard is a universal and everlasting type, but in need of adaptation to the changing conditions of current times.

The main flaws of the majority of Budapestian courtyard blocks derive from the very failure to adapt to growing and densifying cities – in pursuit to accommodate more people on smaller plots, most of the courtyards are too small compared to the height of the building, the dwellings have one-sided orientation and the courtyards are too practical serving mainly as circulation space and an access to natural ventilation resulting in an overly elongated, narrow shape and thus a dark and uninviting space. Another common weakness is the deteriorating state of the courtyards resulting from a complex and inefficient system of ownership in Hungary – a consequence of rapidly changing political systems in the 1990s when after the fall of communism and its

structures most of real properties became privatised over-night without any general, comprehensive scheme or strategy, overlooking the role and significance of shared private and semi-private spaces and the significance of their maintenance. As a result, even once beautiful courtyards and facades became neglected and deteriorated as it proved difficult to make the residents look after them on their own account without any system.

The revitalisation of a Budapestian courtyard is then two-fold – systematic and architectural. As part of the design, all properties in the project come partially owned by the municipal/civic body to ensure organised maintenance and enduring quality of the building. The main architectural improvements are opening up the dwellings to at least both sides of the block introducing more light and diverse views, and careful proportioning of the courtyards ensuring sufficient access of light and a more usable space. Having done these pivotal improvements, the exploration of the typology could begin by posing questions about its potential...

What could a courtyard be? What architectural, urban and societal possibilities can it bring? What can we learn from courtyards of different cultures across the world? Can we experiment with them to maximize their richness and potential? What different experiences can they create? How can it be shared to give as much to the public and private life within a building as possible? How can diversity be enjoyed and fostered through the typology? Can they introduce poetry of space into the public life?

The project lies in a Vizafogó just east of the new Vizafogó Park, between the Visegrádi, Esztergomi and Süllő streets, in a mainly residential neighbourhood in a place that is historically and morphologically very heterogenous. The plot is currently a big, wasted open space, with another open space to the west (partially covered by the park) and with surrounding blocks from nearly every decade of the 20th century. Directly to the east lie one of the oldest blocks of Budapest from 1890s, right to the north there are brand new office blocks and to the south there is a chaotic mix of one-storey hangars and garages. Across the park, the 11-storey blocks from the 1980s tower of the neighbourhood, and the 4-storey half-courtyard blocks corner the plot on each side. The project aims to give back coherency to the urban tissue by working with a rectangular perimeter, taking the whole 80m by 200m plot and extending the Zsilip street across, cutting the site, and thus the building, roughly in two-thirds. The perimeter is also pushed in the north to provide a visual access to the historical freight building, and in the west to keep the numerous trees that make the Esztergomi street a green alley. The extended Zsilip street is also widened toward the west to open it up towards the park entrance and greenery. The buildings use the courtyard system to break down the scale of the block and create multiple different environments and more private spaces within. Introducing more blocks within the plot also allows to reduce the overall number of floors adjusting for human scale and responding to the neighbouring historical blocks. The perimeter of the building and the most public spaces is 4-floors tall, and the other inner blocks are 3-floors tall.

In the spirit of creating a design harmonizing with its surrounding, the project meets the scale of its surrounding blocks and responds to their roofscape. The roof of the dwelling blocks is pitched with roof terraces cutting-in on the inner side of the perimeter, which

alongside the shifting heights creates a diverse roof scene. Together with the varying system of courtyards, it embraces the disorderliness of the surroundings to create a welcoming and home-like environment while simultaneously introducing structure and coherency to the urban tissue.

A vast study of courtyards across the world brought forth the forms and techniques that make them successful, giving inspiration for the design that aims to capture these different qualities and collect them creating a diverse courtyard maze.

The project explores the diversity of the typology and plays with the juxtaposition of different types, introducing both outdoor and indoor courtyards, large and small ones, public and private, loud and quiet, exposed and secluded, green and paved, colourful and toned, densely and lightly programmed. The common use of Budapestian courtyards as a circulation is embraced and developed. The access to each dwelling is from a private courtyard leading to private staircase for two to four apartments per floor. The access is always from the inner side of the building rather than directly from the street, creating a safer and more private access and allowing for neighbourly interactions. The public courtyards in the southern block have shops on the ground floor and are interconnected, sequenced forming a street that provides connections throughout the building and that culminates at the most public courtyard taking shape of a square, inspired by the Praça Reial, with cafes, a bar and restaurants on the ground floor. The colonnade and pillars are recognised as a symbol of publicness and thus characterise the public facades, route and the square.

Aiming to create a thorough public environment of quality, the project also provides a place for study and seclusion – a library located in the northern building. As a highly public space, it explores more the typology of a colonnade. Essentially, a triple colonnade forms the main book hall, taking inspiration from the Trinity College Dublin Library of the traditional arrangement of smaller aisles on each side of the nave. The hall is also located within the perimeter of the block and directly towards the street, forming, together with shallow pools of water, a visual threshold between the outside and the inside. Behind the hall, the indoor and outdoor courtyards are juxtaposed, the indoor one giving space to a reading hall. The remaining perimeter of the block houses a lecture hall, offices, rentable offices, lounges and storage areas until the end of the library where the block transfers into housing, making the library integrated with dwellings on a block level, yet separated from the courtyards by a south wing. The northern dwellings are aimed at younger and less affluent population hence they are more densely subdivided and are accessible from the balcony corridor. In turn, they have the access to the library and two, bigger, private courtyards – a large, densely green space and another one with spaces for growing plants and barbecuing. The library caters to the whole neighbourhood of Vizafogó that has numerous schools around yet no public space for reading and studying within reach. The rentable office spaces also cater to the new offices built right north of the plot.

The façades of the public spaces are characterized by rhythm responding to the grid of the historical blocks to the east. The system of primary and secondary pillars and beams form grids for window panels and balconies and support the façade itself as only concrete columns and timber and steel beams are loadbearing, allowing for more flexible subdivision and possible future reuse. The walls are filled in with hempcrete

that extremely decreases the overall CO2 emissions and that serves as an ecological insulation. The façade pillars are made of timber in the regular public spaces and of stone in the most public spaces (the square and the library), recognising these materials as programmatic indicators. The façade infills differ across courtyards to create a diverse environment, but the outer perimeter has soft-coloured stone panels and roof tiles to harmonize with the neighbouring blocks.

Reflection

I consider my process since the beginning of the year to be rather consistent throughout, with a healthy period of the initial back and forth at the beginning that resulted in the basic scheme, and just a few setbacks since, proceeded by either challenging and reflective talks with the tutors, further thematic, typological research or other means of seeking inspiration like literary review; each way being as always extremely helpful for me. One approach that I wish I could improve is to use more ways of architectural expression whilst conducting the design research. At a particular stage of the preliminary design, I am often stuck mainly in the plans, as when I split my attention into other planes (like section, or perspectives) I often end up with utterly different and unrelatable conclusion and ideas. Maybe that could be a drive for further design development though, that could help me in my future processes. In summary, the method of mixing hand drawing with literary review and analyses of relevant projects seems most effective for me.

I consider the method of going back to the research in crucial moments absolutely effective. Ironically though, the result of my initial research proved not applicable to my design, as at the end of my research the topic of 'the charged void' I borrowed from Peter Smithson proved not appropriate for the program I chose which is mainly residential. Still though, I really appreciate it and consider it crucial to my architectural education as I feel I will be coming back to it in the future and that it will be useful one day.

In the remaining period I will accommodate for the refinement of the courtyard and library design focusing on such details as column and beam joint, the finish of a column, the detailed proportions of the halls, the floor finishes, but mainly the overall final presentation of the project.

I deem my project relevant as it focuses on reviving the traditional and yet forgotten type of a courtyard block that possesses numerous architectural, environmental, urban and societal advantages that I strived to capture in my project, like the size and proportions more appropriate to the human scale, ways of natural ventilation, improved light access, liveability and diversity on the block scale. Moreover, the typology is universal and hence the results of my design research could be applicable likewise, especially on the European scene in places of a similar block grid to the Budapestian one.