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Searching for Styles of National Architecture in Habsburg Central Europe, 1890–1920 (Art Nouveau and Turn-of-the-Century Architecture as Nation-Building)

My architectural history-based still interdisciplinary research makes an attempt to range the miscellaneous national architectural tentatives in the *fin-de-siècle* Habsburg Central Europe and furthermore to depict their interrelations with the artistic, political and social factors that affected them. Owing to the wide scope of my examination, I rely on the secondary literature of the topic and I handle this diversified set of sources with the methodology of comparative history and *histoire croisée*.

Vienna took a controversial place in the architectural history of the Empire. On the one hand, Vienna was a salient centre of the Art Nouveau and concomitantly a motor of the architectural revolution not only in the Empire, but also in Europe. On the other hand, architects of the neighbouring cities considered it as the suppressor of their nations. Thus, they tried to ignore every influence (even the artistic ones) originated from the *Kaiserstadt*. This contradiction was underlined by the fact that, while the Hungarian, Czech and Polish architects were working on the task of the national style in the “political gravitational zone” of Vienna, their colleagues in the latter city almost did not even realize that architecture could be “national”.

Among the three national approaches in question only the Hungarian one was acquainted with modern architecture (despite historicism), as well as being the only “fully fledged” national style. This Hungarian substyle was implemented by Ödön Lechner as a synthesis of modern architecture and folk art ornamentation. Although the Czech and the Polish architects were searching for an architecture of their own, before 1914 they could not implement it. The histories of the Czech and Polish national architectural attempts were obviously similar, especially if one takes into consideration the period which followed the Great War and the establishment of the autonomous Polish and Czechoslovakian states. In the young nation states the same architects and his disciples could finally evolve a national

architecture, which were appreciated by the state and among the peer architects. The Czechs furnished a radically modern, even avant-garde style: the Rondo-Cubism, while the Poles combined the peculiar arrangement of the *dwór*; the manor of the national nobility with ornaments of historical styles. Despite the mutual development, in one aspect the architecture of the two nations diverged all along: while the Poles considered the rural art as a main source for the rejuvenation of their architecture, the Czechs were hardly concerned with the vernacular art of the Czech lands.

The architectural correspondences and discrepancies I could relate with the politico-social circumstances of the declining Habsburg Empire. These architectural attempts in question are inseparable from the nation-building processes since their aims were to emphasize the singularity of the Hungarian, Czech, and Polish national culture. Among the three nations only the Hungarians could elaborate a national architecture, while the same nation had relatively the greatest independence and a semi-independent state within the Habsburg Empire after 1867. Considering the above mentioned facts, it is worth analysing further the interconnection between the existence of state and the national architecture. Accordingly, my suggestion is that an accepted and fully fledged national style could emerge only under the aegis of a sovereign state.

Besides, I presuppose correspondence between the scale of urbanization and the approach of a distinct national styles as well. I predicate this thesis on the observation that in the more industrialized and urbanized part of the Empire (Austria, the Czech lands) architects were concerned only with the historical styles (either they developed, or exceeded them), while in the agricultural-based Eastern part (Hungary, Galicia), where a greater portion of the society lived still among rural conditions, the vernacular art remarkably influenced the national style attempts.