

*Strand 4. Research and Doctoral Thesis in Progress*

## **The etymological problem of Szecesszió in Hungary via Albert Kálmán Kőrössy's œuvre**

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### **Abstract**

In the 19th and 20th century, a new art trend appeared that tended to change the obsolete academic way of architecture in Europe. In Hungary it was designated as „Szecesszió” that asseverated the significance of handicraft and folk art by such revolutionists of the style as József Huszka or Ödön Lechner. They made an attempt to create a specific Hungarian style based on oriental forms and Hungarian ornaments. However, what is Szecesszió in fact? Today we use this term for almost every building of Belle Epoque, although it stems from different sources of art like the British Arts and Crafts Movement, the French and the Belgian Art Nouveau, the German Jugendstil, the Austrian Secession, the Finnish national romanticism and even our own endeavours as well. That is why the Hungarian szecesszió has some etymological problems.

**Keywords:** Art Nouveau, Hungary, Szecesszió, Etymology, Albert Kálmán Kőrössy, European endeavours, Jugendstil, use of terms, Hungarian architecture, national form language

## Background of the research of Albert Kálmán Körössy

In 2009 during the writing of the BA thesis about Albert Kálmán Körössy's architecture in Budapest, he was mentioned only by some sentences as one of Ödön Lechner's followers. In addition, in an article his works were mentioned as examples for Hungarian architecture inspired by the French Art Nouveau. After I compared his buildings with French and Belgian architectures but did not find any close connection I observed the German Jugendstil houses as it was known that Körössy attended the College of Technology (Technische Hochschule) in Munich.<sup>1</sup>

Thanks to the Hungarian Art Academy I visited five German cities in 2013 to examine the Jugendstil structures and ornaments. Körössy's teacher was the well-known professor Friedrich von Thiersch who was one of the first architects applied Jugendstil form language. In Germany monument heritage protection started this time and due to this way of thinking the restoration of the cathedral in Cologne was in the lime-light all over Europe. Therefore many European architects received information about the medieval fragments and ornaments. These medieval decorations and structures affected the Jugendstil style.

The results of the analogies between the Hungarian and the German architecture started an avalanche in sense of the research. The main goal was to get acquainted with any special characteristics of different cities that can regard as a center of Art Nouveau. After every trip the collection of monographs were needed to get to know not only information about the history of the buildings but also the point of view of foreign art historians. As more data appeared about the history of society, politics, culture and the demands of procurers in art, the difference was realised between these countries in the background of the form languages.

Four manuscripts were written by the author of this paper thanks to the National Cultural Fund of Hungary and the Hungarian Art Academy. The main aim of these studies are representing the connection between the Hungarian architecture and European cultural centers such as Paris, Munich, Antwerpen or London.

Representing the difference among some main streams of Art Nouveau Albert Kálmán Körössy's oeuvre is convenient to describe these tendencies.

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<sup>1</sup> GERLE János: Századforduló, Budapest, 2001, p. 105.

## Albert Kálmán Körössy's oeuvre

Albert Kálmán Körössy was one of the most talented Hungarian architects around the 19th and 20th century even there is just few information about his life and works. Most literature mention him as an Art Nouveau epigone, but if we compare his buildings with architecture from the early Jugendstil, we can see those have much more common characteristics than with the Belgian or the French style. I have collected information and took photographs about these architectures in Berlin, Cottbus, Munich, Karlsruhe and Stuttgart. The facades of the examined German buildings have more common shaping and motives besides the moderate colours and the ornaments in particular the animal figures. Connections are visible, by the presented examples, these buildings of Körössy's early period had impact from the early Jugenstil indeed.<sup>2</sup> Altought he gave up designing after the first world war he became a municipality corporator in Budapest.

He was born in 18th June 1869 in Szeged (South-Hungary) named Albert Neumann, attended the University of Technology in Budapest – he changed his name to Körössy these years – then he travelled to Paris and Berlin. After his trips he learned architecture in Munich, where his professor was the well-known Friedrich von Thiersch who was one of the first Jugendstil designers in Munich (in the quarter of Bogenhausen he designed some tenement houses). After Körössy received his degree in Munich, he returned to Budapest where he started to work in the well-known Alajos Hauszmann's studio. Three years after Körössy continued designing alone until the 1910's, meanwhile he designed myriad public and private works.<sup>3</sup>

The City Park Alle became elite part of the city around the begining of the 1900's when numerous architects desgined their own mansion and office here. One of the most representative mansions of the allee is Albert Kálmán Körössy's own house (picture no. 1.) that was built in 1900. As we take a look at its facade we can realise the influence of the German Jugenstil architecture. Lajos Walkó bank director's tenement house (picture no. 2.)

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<sup>2</sup> BALDAVÁRI Eszter: A német korai Jugendstil hatása Körössy Albert Kálmán építőművészetiére, Kóstolni a szép-tudományba, 2014, p. 157-172.

<sup>3</sup> BALDAVÁRI Eszter: Körössy Albert Kálmán (1869–1955). A szecessziók mestere, Építőművészek Ybl és Lechner korában, Budapest, 2015, p. 318–351.

was in 1901 which was one of the first Art Nouveau apartment houses in not only Budapest but also in Hungary.

Kőrössy's most well-known building is the Ferenc Kölcsey Secondary Grammar School that was built in 1906, due to István Bárczy, the mayor of Budapest who started educational programme included school constructions as well. The school building reminds a Renaissance palace. Lechner form language.

One if his most remarkable plans was the tender of an insane asylum of Kecskemét city in Hungary in 1908 which ornaments were inspired by Ödön Lechner, moreover the master probably took part in the designing as those years they had some common tenders.<sup>4</sup> In the same year Kőrössy designed a ferro-concrete bridge (picture no. 4.) over the Bega in Timisoara in partnership with the well-known engineer, Győző Michailich. Albert Kálmán Kőrössy received diploma of merit in World Fair in Paris in 1910 for the design of the bridge which was that time the widest ferro-concrete girder-brige in the world.<sup>5</sup>

In 1909 last time he returned back to the Jugendstil to design a florist's (picture no. 3.) in Budapest. According to the Hungarian literature the only original Art Nouveau flower shop in Europe was built in the groundfloor of a classical style house.<sup>6</sup> The shop called Philanthia (means: lover of flowers) was inspired by the German Jugendstil. The portal of the florist's is decorated by roses that recall the cover of Irene Forbes-Mosse's Rosenthor – Rose Gate – book created by Heinrich Vogeler.

In the 1910's because of the revival of the connection between Finland and Hungary many architects paid attention to the contemporary Finnish architecture. A Hungarian group of architects called The Juveniles were improved by the folk art and the Finnish architecture. even Kőrössy was not the part of this group he was inspired by them when he designed the Secondary Grammar School near the block of apartment houses of the Postofficers in Budapest. The school, that is called as Fairy palace today, was built between 1910 and 1911.

In the 1910's moving away from Ödön Lechner's Hungarian form Kőrössy was keen on the geometric forms instead of rich floral ornaments. One of the most beautiful examples

<sup>4</sup> Magyar Művészet, 1908. VI. 9.

<sup>5</sup> JANCSÓ Árpád: A temesvári Bega-hidak krónikája, Budapest, Temesvár, 1999, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> TARR László: A régi Váci utca regényes krónikája, Budapest, 1984, p. 44.

from these years is a commercial and tenement house in the heart of Budapest. The house was built for György Kutnewsky who was a furrier hence the facade is decorated by hunters and different animals like squirrels and lambs. Apart from the ornaments on the facade the materials and the geometric forms recall Otto Wagner's architecture especially the Sluice House (Kaiserbad Barrage) that was built between 1906 and 1907.

Across Albert Körössy's oeuvre we got to know various style of architecture that proves that we cannot use a single word for these endeavours because those different stems.

### **Art Nouveau in Europe: foreign endeavours and Hungarian national form language**

We can see how many kind of form languages were used by Albert Kálmán Körössy but we use the term Szecesszió for all. This etymological problem can be observed not only in an oeuvre of an architect but also in the diversity of Art Nouveau buildings in Budapest and the in country side as well.

Art Nouveau is the most well-known term for the movement not only in French but also in English language. In Hungarian Literature on the turn-of-the-century frequently Art Nouveau term is used for the Belgian and French endeavours as Belgan-French Art Nouveau style.<sup>7</sup> Due to methods like style history and criticism one can explore these buildings more closely in order to identify the sources of their style.

Wooden pediments of the facade of houses appear in France (stems from the medieval mansion in Eugéne Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc's Dictionnaire). The decorations are from a fantasy world and also from the Far-East such as Japan<sup>8</sup> that fine motives suit rich motives of French Rococo style.

The English architecture appears in the Belgian cities with its oriel or bow windows and its narrow facades. These buildings are decorated with not only English and Belgian stones but also the symbols of Congo representing the high positions of Belgium in Europe according to Deborah L. Silverman.<sup>9</sup> Ironwork was represented on the façades as the pure and simple truth

<sup>7</sup> PAMER Nóra: Art Nouveau a belga építészetben, Budapest, 1979, p. 187.

<sup>8</sup> Philippe JULIAN: The Triumph of Art Nouveau. Paris Exhibition 1900, London, 1974, p. 104.

<sup>9</sup> SILVERMAN, Debora L.: Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism. Chicago, 2011, p. 1-73.

of the structure at first in Bruxelles. The Belgian effect is less typical in Hungary but we had numerous direct contact with London and some guilds via Walter Crane. Two examples are mentionable: the Schanzer-house<sup>10</sup> (1904-1905) in Budapest which windows are inspired by the Ciamberlani house<sup>11</sup> (1897) in Bruxelles designed by Paul Hankar and the Reformed Palace<sup>12</sup> (1910-1912) in Szeged designed by Ede Magyar who travelled to Bruxelles after he received his degree. His building has similar decoration as the Waterloo Street houses<sup>13</sup> (1903) in Antwerpen.<sup>14</sup>

The Italian Stile Liberty and the catalan Modernismo is only mentioned among the names in the articles because the motives of these „styles” are not really closed to the Hungarian forms even the movement is similar regarding the searching for a special own language of art.

Among the main streams in Hungary the Viennese Secession is the best known partly because of the Austian-Hungarian Monarchy party because of the word Szecesszió. Austria used renaissance structures at the first time but later via Otto Wagner's oeuvre most European architects found their real way of Art Nouveau in Viennese Secession. The Hungarian architects attended the academies and colleges in Vienna, Munich and Berlin, so they used firstly Jugendstil and Secession ornaments. Many Hungarian architects followed Wagner such as Aladár Kármán and Gyula Ullmann or later Samu Révész and József Kollár. The main figure of Austrian style was József Vágó who was inspired by the master such as in the National Salon (1907) in Budapest by Wagner's Karlplatz destination (1899) of the city railway.

Jugendstil term is less known in Hungary even our architects were firstly influenced by this endeavour. This is because of the word Szecesszió. Most people believe that szecesszió is only a style with colourful motives and rich ornaments with creatures such as fairys and beautiful women, peacocks and chestnut leaves. Moreover when foreigners visit our country Austrian Szecesszió style buildings are expected to appear in Budapest and in the countyside

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<sup>10</sup> It was built by the architect Rezső Schütz in Thököly Street 27, Budapest.

<sup>11</sup> Hôtel Ciamberlani, rue Defacqz 73, Bruxelles

<sup>12</sup> Avenue Lajos Tisza 27, Szeged, South-Hungary.

<sup>13</sup> The houses are designed by August Cols and Alfried Defever in Waterlostraat 57. (Den Dag), 59. (Den Tijd), 61. (De Nacht), Antwerpen.

<sup>14</sup> BALDAVÁRI Eszter: Milyen volt Afrika? A kongoi népművészet megjelenése a belga Art Nouveau-ban, Örökségfigyelő. [http://oroksegfigyelo.blog.hu/2016/02/13/milyen\\_volt\\_afrika\\_kongo\\_termeszeti\\_formainak\\_megjelenese\\_a\\_belga\\_art\\_nouveau-ban](http://oroksegfigyelo.blog.hu/2016/02/13/milyen_volt_afrika_kongo_termeszeti_formainak_megjelenese_a_belga_art_nouveau-ban), 19/03/2017.

as well. On the other hand Jugendstil term is associated to the geometrical style spread from Darmstadt.<sup>15</sup> However, early Jugendstil was spread from Munich where the professor Friedrich Thiersch was one of the first ones who designed Jugendstil houses in the Bogenhausen district of Munich.

The German Jugenstil forms recall the medieval German architecture its ornaments are accurate in botanical way, so we can identify any plants and creatures if we use a Plant Encyclopedia on the spot. Using the ornaments and the baroque structures German Jugendstil is quite different from Art Nouveau. The second half of Emil Vidor's work was inspired by the Jugendstil but the most talented artist was admittedly Albert Kálmán Körössy.

There is a nation that also influenced the Hungarian architecture in the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Finland and Hungary got close to each other because of history, same states inside Empires. During the 1910's a new generation of architects were in the spotlight due to an exhibition in Budapest. This group, called '*The Juveniles*', aimed to find the origins of pure Hungarian ornaments, therefore they preferred mainly the Transylvanian motives. Besides these they adopted not only the English structures, but it was also the heroic Finland, which fought for its independence from the Russian Empire<sup>16</sup>, that became an example for Hungary, that was by then part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The relationship between the Hungarian and Finnish artists were the strongest at this time, moreover an exhibition was organized in Budapest by Akseli Gallen-Kallela.<sup>17</sup> The great architects of the Finnish national romanticism (Karelianism) such as Lars Sonck, Eliel Saarinen, Herman Gesellius and Armas Lindgren affected the works of '*The Juveniles*' like Károly Kós, Béla Jánszky, Dénes Györgyi or Ede<sup>18</sup> Torockai Wigand.<sup>19</sup>

After these tendencies do not forget the Hungarian language of form. The searching of our own style improved many artists to prove via oriental ornaments or Hungarian folk motives that we can create something special something really Hungarian. The first architect who

<sup>15</sup> LIEB, Stefanie: Was ist Jugendstil? Eine Analyse der Jugendstilarchitektur 1890–1910, Darmstadt, 2000, p. 104.

<sup>16</sup> MÄKINEN, Anne: Katajanokka: an Art Nouveau District in Helsinki, Coup de Fouet, XXI. 2010, p. 3–9.

<sup>17</sup> CSÁKI Tamás: A finn építészet és az „architektúra magyar lelke” Kultúrpolitika, építészet, publicisztika a századelő Magyarországon, Múltunk, 2006. 1. p. 201.

<sup>18</sup> KESERŰ Katalin: Ede Torockai Wigand: Architect and Designer, Coup de Fouet, 2010, 16. p. 35–39.

<sup>19</sup> BALDAVÁRI Eszter: Art Nouveau and Kansallisromantiikka: Belgium and Finland in the light of the Hungarian Architecture, Képváltás, 2017, p. 181–198.

represented his alternative was Ödön Lechner whose oriental forms became too Eastern for the contemporary criticism but later his ornaments became closer to the Hungarian folk motives. He did believe that as there is not Hungarian style artists should create one by the collection of ancient objects and folk art. Later the Juveniles had opposite way of thinking and they wanted to prove that we have ever had own Hungarian style just we have to find it in the oldest villages where the traditional form were remained. Therefore these artist travelled to the country side of Hungary and they found their ideal place in Kalotaszeg which is the part of Transylvania.

These intentions are separated in the Hungarian literature of art history and we call Lechner's style as Hungarian Art Nouveau and the Juveniles' style as Hungarian folk Art Nouveau. In Hungarian language the meaning is not so definite as in English that is why most people do not understand the differences. Are these adequate terms if most people cannot use it?

### **Summary: Alternative solutions for the term 'Szecesszió'**

After the examination of architecture in France and Belgium realised that in the Hungarian literature the term French-Belgian Art Nouveau style is incorrect if we discover the history of these countries and we observe the specialities of these buildings.

In Germany, arthistorians like Ulrich Gräf<sup>20</sup> proposed new terms for these specific styles to avoid misunderstanding or confusion in professional practice. In Jugendstil art the late architecture of Vienna and Darmstadt are interrelated as well, and it is essential to separate these trends from each other by new terms as Secessionism, Vorpurism and Profunctionalism.

In addition, German arthistorians emphasise that Art Nouveau term includes not only the new modern style but also the movement. Hence it is quite significant to separate those different sources in Szecesszió that had influences by Art Nouveau, Jugendstil and Viennese Secession. Secondly, it is crucial to know better our own style to determine accurately the architectural design of Hungarian architects as well. Whenever I guide a group in Budapest I

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<sup>20</sup> GRÄF, Ulrich: The Situation of The Jugendstil Architecture in The Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Dyroff, Hans-Dieter (ed.): Art Nouveau/Jugendstil Architecture in Europe, Bonn, 1988, p. 85.



try to be compromised with Szecesszió but refer to the movement as well, so I use: Art Nouveaus (Szecessziók).

In the future it will be a serious task to merge that four handscripts were written in the past few years and make conclusions in a single thesis. Via these experiences we can make clear these styles if these are styles at all. The final intention is not creating sharp borderlines among these endeavours (because Art Nouveau was for freedom in design) but erecting some magnets in our fictional map of Europe and due to the special characteristics of each building those will be magnetized closer the main streams. In this way we can define an accurate form language of these buildings wherever we are.

## Curriculum Vitae

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### Employment history:

- November 2015: art historian, curator: Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center
- January 2017: board member: Association CentrArt New Workshop of Art Historians
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### Areas of interest:

Albert Kálmán Körössy's monography,  
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Analogies and connections of Art Nouveau in Europe  
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### Activity:

curator work of exhibitions for the Hungarian Museum of Architecture and for the Museum of Applied Arts  
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