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The National Heroes' Monument in Budapest. A case study for World War I memorials as symbolic-political venues for interaction between politics and the masses

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### **Abstract**

The paper introduces the World War I memorials in Hungary within the historiographical framework of the 'memory boom'. It discusses the artistic sources that were used in their formation, their characteristics and types. Special attention is paid to the description of their role as a communication tool in the hands of contemporary politics. Brief overview concentrating on legal requirements and on elements of the commemoration acts provides a historical and social background for the case study. The center memorial that still exists in the capital of Hungary, is analyzed thoroughly with detailed descriptions and contextualization. The three phases of the National Heroes' Monument can be seen as the three sections of Hungarian history in 20<sup>th</sup> century, and an artistic realization of the contemporary power's message about the given section of the past. At the end, the author places the paper's topic into the scholarly discourse of nation building, by adapting the notion of imagined community of Anderson, Calhoun and Finlayson.

### **Keywords**

World War I - memorial - National heroes - Hungary - Remember

### **I. Memory, memorials, World War I memorials with focus on the Hungarian examples**

During the last couple of decades, much research and publications worldwide have dealt with memorial rituals and memorials. One of the motivation factors is said to be the influence of the works of Pierre Nora, who published his main work *Realms of Memory* (written with many outstanding scholars) between 1984 and 1992. Through its republications and translations, it has served as the source of many regional researches and concrete case studies. For instance in the US, the main focus is on the venues of memory, and on the connection between different time phases through these venues (Kennon and Somma 2004; Bodnar

1994). Another French, influential historian, Francois Hartog, in his book *The Regimes of Historicity*, points out the need of a constant research, and rethink the connection of the three classical time phrases, which had also a significant impact on these research. Unquestionably, not just these two authors and their influences directed the attention to memory and memorial venues, but also the fact that many disciplines (for instance art history, anthropology, psychology, gender studies) chose these areas as their major research topic at the same time (Dabakis 1998; Schacter et al 1995). Similarly, the 20<sup>th</sup> century events increased the importance of memory and the identification of guilt and innocence. Those studies that help understanding cultures and the past via biographical or monographic works, serve the same aim (Milward 2000). Specialists call this intensive increasement of projects on this topic 'memory boom' (Winter 2000).

One segment of the 'memory boom' researches and publications concentrates on the creators or procurers of the memorials, who define the messages and their interpretations. As Kirk Savages writes: "Public monuments do not arise as if by natural law to celebrate the deserving; they are built by people with sufficient power to marshal, or to impose public consent for their erection" (Savage 1999, 135). Their strong influences are present not just at the foundations of the memorials but also later (Bogart, 1989; Kammen, 1991). The role of the official powers is also coming from the fact that most memorials are built on public spaces. Accordingly, the memorials aim to express social norms in a timeless manner, and their venues also add to their interpretations (Mumford 1938).

Another group of these projects put emphasis on the constitution of memorials, their types through time and cultures, as well as on their expressed symbols and mythologies (Best 1982; Ragon 1983; Etlin 1984). Many of these works research the contemporary views and trends at the time of the establishment and at later memorial ceremonies at the same venues. For example, multiculturalism and the evaluation of different sections of the society influenced the history of the memorials, their interpretations and appraisal (Blight 2001). As Will Kymlicka says: "state decisions about language, national holidays and state symbols unquestionably support certain cultural identities and suppress others" (Kymlicka 1995, 120). Based on this, the memorials and the memory practices have been researched together with nationalism for decades (Megill 1988; Olick and Robbins 1998).

The memory of the fallen soldier, as well as the military cemeteries form a unique category within the memorials. The former is connected to both the

individual and the public or official history, like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier category (Mosse 1990). While the latter can be seen as a necessary consequence of fights; since its early examples, there have been numerous expectations and usages of them (Grant 2005). In both cases, religious symbols and understandings can also be detached (Kammen 1986). World War I memorials also form an identical public art category worldwide. Significant number of these monuments have been created in the 1920s and 1930s, and they reached importance again in the 1980s and 1990s, when their necessary renovations took place (Sinkó 1983, 185-201). They have some general features due to the common time and subject that define most of the examples, no matter their locations. They are mostly conservative in terms of representation, using classical symbols and allegories. A combination of religious signs and depictions of the glorious past are frequently mixed in these monuments, as well as the representation of the soldier himself, as the subject of these memorials, is common. The mood of these objects is usually a combination of mourning and noble pride (Boros 2003, 3-21).

As in the case of other memorials, contemporary ideas and political situations define uses and understandings of them, even if aims and subjects of these art pieces are generated in the past. Mainly, the celebrations at these memorials reflect the actual messages and viewpoints. Especially during the interwar period in Eastern Europe the importance of these art pieces was enforced, but with the aim to motivate the public for revenge, and not to commemorate those who lost their lives in the fights. Another significant period was the post World War II time, when the Soviet occupation and influence decreased the possibility of establishing new World War I memorials, or of commemorating at the existing ones (Ságvári 2005, 147-180).

Along with the above described dual aspect of these pieces – their mourning and/or enforcing power –, the object of their representations can show two approaches. In every Hungarian settlement, the community had to establish a monument with the names of those locals who died in World War I. The group of these public art elements has formed the national memory of World War I. The National Committee for Keeping Alive the Memory of the Heroes organized exhibitions both in the capital and in other major cities, where the preferred representations and prototypes could be seen. Besides that, the Committee prepared and distributed catalogue-like publications with contact information of the artists, who could provide the acceptable examples (Ságvári 2007, 13-6). On the other hand, these officially required monuments became the manifestations

of personal remembering. Accordingly, both the private tone and the patriotic representation, which were requested by the direct procurer, appear on these monuments. Along these lines, the named fallen soldiers could be evaluated either as victims or heroes of the war (Kovács 1991, 5-8).

This double aspect can be identified in the used symbolic sets as well. The grief over losing members of the community is expressed usually by adopting religious baroque art examples, as well as by using burying art icons (Nagy 1968, 57-64). On the other hand, the ruling political power wanted first to keep alive the motivation for participating at the war, then to enforce the idea of irredentism with these art pieces. Therefore, they required to use symbols of earlier official monuments. The military statues of the glorious 1848 revolution were one of the main sources for this. That is why flags and horns are regular elements of the Hungarian World War I memorials, even if these objects were rarely presented at the actual fights of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Another source of icons to express patriotism and the necessary political message was the category of millennium statues. In 1896, Hungary celebrated the thousand-year anniversary of its existence. The chain of celebration contained creations of new statues and public art pieces that represented the glorious past both by actual historical figures and allegorical creatures (Gerő 2004, 137-149). By adapting these elements on World War I memorials, the leading power had the aim to express the everlasting fame of the nation. That is the reason why Hungaria (the symbolic female figure of the country), King Csaba (one of the earliest rulers of Hungary) and Turul (the mythological bird) are common elements of war memorials. By melting together the historical elements and the contemporary events, the nation's participation in World War I gained historical relevance and importance (Szabó 1991, 46-63). Another common element of these public art pieces is the sword of God. This symbol was generated in 1915 in an official document written by Ferenc Herczeg, a member of the National Committee for Keeping Alive the Memory of the Heroes. It was understood as the weapon of Attila, the Hun leader, who took over almost all Europe according to the legends, and was evaluated as the ancestor of present Hungarians<sup>1</sup>. The motif of the soil has special importance too, either as the motherland that is watered with blood or as the mud from the war fields. It became a symbolic and concrete part of the memorials (Nagy 2001, 191-218).

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<sup>1</sup> Ferenc Herczeg phrased the concept of God's sword as the following in the introduction of an official tender by the Committee in 1926: "God's sword was the weapon of the god of wars, a razor grown up from the earth on the low land of Turan, whose user became the lord of the whole world".

The architectural tendencies of the time required mainly one of the following two types of memorials: it should be either a pantheon or a sacred altar piece. In both cases, a kind of hierarchy would be expressed, in which the individual and the community, i.e. the national grievance, melted together. The emphasis was always on the community's memory aspect, so the main obelisk or column would express the feeling of the whole community as one (Boros 2004, 12-13). Ildiko Nagy, prestigious Hungarian art historian, categorizes the Hungarian World War I public art examples into eleven groups. These are the followings: the grieving soldier (with bowed head, flag or weapon); the fighting soldier; the wounded soldier; the death of the hero (showing the hero in heaven, or in front of Hungaria); the Hungarian past (with heroes from the glorious early ages); the Hungarian family (the Hungarian mother, as a side figure); the allegorical representations (like freedom as lion, nation as Hungaria, or sacrifice as a man offering his sword), the simple plaques; the memorial columns with Turul, the mythological bird; the memorial columns with national motifs (also with grieving, fighting or victimized soldiers, as side figures) and the equestrian statues (Nagy 1991, 125-139).

Even though the aims and the motivations behind the inauguration of these art pieces were modified, their elements have not changed over the decades, only the emphasis was moved. These public art pieces are permanent reminders, a very condensed and generalized method of keeping and projecting the message (Bedécs 2008, 75-88). So if these memorials are the realizations of the preferred (state) message, then these examples should be evaluated as ideological monuments, and not as esthetical art pieces (Sinkó 1992, 67-79).

## **II. Historical overview of the Hungarian regulations and laws**

Hungary had entered World War I as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and lost almost two thirds of its territory. More than two million Hungarians died or got injured during the fights (Für 1992, 97-101). This devastating loss was foreseeable since 1915, when the first known intention was made to establish public monuments honoring all those who had offered their lives for the nation, as it is said in a letter from the battlefield to the leaders: "The diet needs to put into force that the state establish stone memorial in every settlement that has the name of the local fallen heroes engraved" (Gudenus 1990, 22). From then until today, different artistic representations have been established by the governing power in different forms, sizes and styles to create venues for

remembering. Accordingly, they can be seen as symbolic-political venues, where politics and the masses meet to contemplate one segment of their past.

From the first art piece (established in 1914) until the most current state regulation regarding the artistic representation of World War I, these historical events and legal texts have influenced the subject and process of the commemorations, as well as the reception of the art pieces and their contents. In 1917, a law and several ministerial regulations were formed for the establishment of these memorials (*1000 év törvényei internetes adatbázis* 2003). These state requirements forced every settlement to establish a memorial with their own budget that had the names of the local victims of World War I. According to these regulations, these memorials would serve as “the altar of patriotism, on which the names of our saint heroes would shine with the light of our honor and never fading gratitude towards them” (Belügyi Közlöny CD-ROM 2011). The National Committee for Keeping Alive the Memory of the Heroes tried to supervise these new art pieces, their esthetical values, as well as, the official and legal processes with publications and organizing activities.

Strengthening the importance of the World War I victims, a new law was made in 1924 that established the last Sunday of May to be “Heroes’ Memorial Celebration”, and made Heroes’ Day national holiday (Liber 1934, 82). A year later, the Ministry of Interior and National Defense made a new set of regulations that defined the meaning of the holiday and the necessary methods of commemoration (*1000 év törvényei internetes adatbázis* 2003). Until World War II, and after 1989 again, these celebrations consisted of memorial speeches, wreathing and many times Masses. A contemporary newspaper in Oradea, in today’s Rumania, called *Nagyvárad* (the Hungarian name of the city) described it as follows “During the elevated and magnificent memorial ceremony, all transportation stopped in the city, which was fully decorated with flags and flowers” (Kuszárlik 1996, 300). The youth was also involved in these events, and the last Sunday of May became a community event in Hungary. Many times, contemporary issues and ideologies (like irredentism) also appeared in these occasions, besides the remembering act (Ravasz 2006, 19-23).

World War II brought devastated loss again in terms of human resources and lost territories. Consequently, in 1942, the Ministry of Interior and National Defense required the names of local World War II victims to be added onto the World War I memorials (Makó 1998, 51-68). With that regulation, the meanings and the significances of these public art pieces was modified. The memorial events slowly moved from the last Sunday of May to November, to All Saints’ Day. From 1945,

due to the influence of the Allied Controlling Council, neither commemoration of Heroes' Day, nor the maintenance or the establishment of World War memorials was allowed (Gerő 1993, 343-77). Instead, more and more public art pieces were created to celebrate the Allied Forces that "had liberated Hungary" and also to emphasize the ideology of USSR (Pótó 1989, 518-31).

Even though Heroes' Day has been celebrated again since 1989, it was only in 2001 that a new law officially re-established it, but not as a national holiday any more. The legal text widens the group of the Hungarian heroes, who are the subjects of these commemorations. It names anybody who "has ever got injured, threatened or sacrificed his or her life for Hungary" (*1000 év törvényei internetes adatbázis* 2003). The regulation again emphasizes that the last Sunday in May is the time to remember not only our World War I heroes, since most of the art pieces also have the names of the World War II victims and many times even the names of the 1956 revolution's.

In 2011, the 149<sup>th</sup> Law was erected for the protection of cultural heritage (this is the modification of a previous law signed in 2001). The modifications are composed of the definitions of historical, national and especially important national memorials. It describes who has the responsibility and authority over each category; how these categories should be declared and what are the necessary protection processes. (*Magyar Közlöny* 2011, 3245) By re-categorizing our memorial places the Hungarian government tried to adopt the international system, established mainly by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (*26th World Heritage Committee Session* 2002, 58)<sup>2</sup>. As a result of all these changes, the number of solely World War I memorials decreased drastically. The existing examples serve as sources both individually and in a group together with the modified art pieces.

### III. The National Heroes' Monument

At the beginning of 1920s, a strong voice was formulated among the public, and got verbalized by the contemporary media that the state should establish a central memorial mainly to honor those heroic victims, who were buried anonymously: "There is no venue in Budapest yet that would remind us to Hungarian soldiers who are buried in the Carpathian Mountains, in Galicia, in the

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<sup>2</sup> "26 COM 23.10 The World Heritage Committee, Approves the extension of Budapest, the Banks of the Danube and the Buda Castle Quarter, Hungary with the Andrassy Avenue and the Millennium Underground Railway on the basis of the existing cultural criteria (ii) and (iv)."

Polish Low Land or in the Rumanian forests" (*Újság* 1925 October 4, 5). An invitation to tender was called in 1924 with the aim to create the central memorial, and approximately 160 proposals were submitted. The winner was Count Miklós Bánffy with a proposal titled *His Coffin is Taken in between Two Cliffs Extremely High to the Sky* (Ferkai 2001, 39-42). He planned to establish his art piece on Gellért Mountain, but neither the municipal nor the voice of the public with the leading newspaper – the *Újság* – supported this idea. In 1926, due to the high costs and to the risk of destructing the structure and view of the mountain, Bánffy's plan got denied. On the pages of the *Újság*, the Millennium Monument was named to be the proper place of the central memorial: "The idea itself to have the memorial in front of the Millennium Monument is so valuable that we could have not found any other possible or precious place for that aim" (*Újság* 1925 November 1, 5). The Millennium Monument is situated between the Fine Arts Museum and the Contemporary Art Gallery, at end of Andrassy Avenue in Budapest, on a very prestigious square between the City Park and the line of urban palaces of Andrassy Avenue. The Millennium Monument contains statues of symbolic figures and Hungarian leaders from the first thousand-year, including the heads of the seven tribes concurring the territory, as well as, the most recent Habsburg kings and queens of that time (Hajós 2001, 59-78).

From 1927, when the Fine Art Committee and the Artistic Department of the Religion and Public Education Ministry started to renegotiate the idea of the central memorial, they named specifically this territory as the ideal location of the new memorial. By the end of the 1920s, not just the location but the message of the new art piece changed too. From commemoration and mourning, it became the realization of the motivating, self-conscious national identity and the never again ideology of irredentism that became more and more popular before World War II. There was no second tender to be announced, but Róbert Kertész K., the under-secretary of the Cultural Ministry, created the new plan, and Jenő Lechner was the artist who was responsible for its realization (Nagy 2001, 191-218). Kertész, besides his political career, had architect education, and participated in various committees and other memorial related institutions. Jenő Lechner was the niece of the Europe-wide known and acknowledged Ödön Lechner architect. By this time, Jenő Lechner earned high reputation with his own works, among which there were blocks of houses, as well as, restoration of historical buildings, like one of the main gate at the Buda Castle (Berza 1993, 684).



The first central memorial was established officially with a significant ceremony on 26 May, 1929, on Heroes' Day. The event was particularly special, as by that time the whole Millennium Monument became completed with all the parts that had been postponed to finish since the Millennium Celebration Year (1896) due to World War I. Based on the description in *Az Est* newspaper, leading military, political and religious actors participated on the celebration and every theatrical presentation started with a silent memorial on that night. The art piece was a 6.5 meter × 3 meter × 1.3 meter monolith limestone. It had the form of a simple coffin that had the dates of World War I (1914–1918) on its shorter side, facing Andrassy Avenue, and the text "Dedicated to the thousand-year old national boundaries" on its other side. On the top, a sword hilt-like cross was carved. The art piece was under the street level, and surrounded by lawn (Gerő 1987, 3-27). This very simple, but, due to its size, very momentous form symbolized a mass grave, like Kertész described it in a newspaper interview: "Historical figures on the Millennium Monument are recognizing even from the afterlife those unknown millions, whose bloody memories are connected to theirs" (*Újság* 1929 May 29, 1). Opposing to Kertész, Count István Bethlen, the prime minister of Hungary at that time, emphasized in his speech the empowering effect of the art piece at the inauguration ceremony, when he said:

Those numerous Hungarians died for the thousand-year old national boundaries in the World War, and now, here is the memorial, as a closing stone to the thousand-year improvement that was stopped, and got distanced from us by the thunders of World War.

But the art piece was "a symbol of the true and brave nation, who is always ready to act for its independent, free and whole life, as well as, for its national culture, and who is ready to live another thousand year ahead" (Boros 1994, 28-9).

After 1929, every year celebrations took place at the National Heroes' Monument, and three years after its establishment, the whole square was renamed to be Heroes' Square (Helgert 2002, 75-84). With that final move the war victims' cult and the thousand-year old Hungarian heroes' cult were melted into one general and nationalistic discourse. On the yearly occasions, the speakers did not just commemorate the past, but spoke about contemporary issues, and the upcoming future as well. Accordingly, as the time passed, the mood and tone of these occasions changed. Moreover, new rules and

regulations were formed for the necessary daily routine of honoring the memorials. With these regulations not just the everyday life of the public was defined, but certain messages got also emphasized. The given internal political situation and the economically and emotionally broken society must have supported these regulations (for concrete regulations see: Belügyi Közlöny CD-ROM 2011). During World War II fights, both the Millennium Monument and the National Heroes' Monument were damaged (Gerő 1990, 37-42). Due to the political and ideological changes, the original National Heroes' Monument with its message from 1929 became unacceptable after World War II. Accordingly, during the 1951 reconstructions the symbolic mass grave was vanished away totally from the square. The Heroes' Day was not a national holiday anymore, and the last Sunday in May, the victims of World War II were commemorated as well (Gábor 1983, 202-217).

The second version of the National Heroes' Monument was formed in 1956 spring, based on the plans of Béla Gebhardt. He was an architect and a painter due to his education that was conducted both in Hungary and in foreign countries. He was also the author of many books, and a member of the urban structuring institute of Budapest (Sümegi 2006, 18-21). The size (4.5 m × 2.4 m × 0.5 m) and the form of the new monument were similar to the previous one, but it was on a small pediment on the street level, which had become covered with stone cladding in 1938 for the Eucharistic World Congress (Sinkó 1987, 29-50). The new, symbolic grave had no allusion to World War I, the only text that was carved on its top said "To the memory of those heroes, who sacrificed their lives for the Hungarians' independence and freedom" (Pótó 1996, 15-18). One additional decoration was a laurel branch next to the text. The carved statement generalized the subject not just in time, but implicitly, on national level as well. According to the contemporary official ideology, the Allies of World War II, including the Soviet Union, also fought for Hungarians' independence and freedom. This hidden message was underlined by the inauguration day of the new memorial. Instead of Heroes' Day in May, it happened on 4<sup>th</sup> of April, 1956, on the 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "liberation of Hungary" – by the Soviet army – (Boros 2001, 130-3). Like the previous celebrations, there were speeches, military parades, wreathings, but no Mass or sanctification of the new National Heroes' Monument. Another parallel between 1929 and 1956 was that the latter occasion was also the celebration of the full reconstruction of the Millennium Monument that meant modification as well on ideological basis (Pótó 1989, 518-31).

The new National Heroes' Monument also served as a protocol venue during the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Foreign delegations and diplomatic corps had their official enwreathing ceremonies regularly there, and that also promoted the incorrect understanding of the National Heroes' Monument to be the Hungarian Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Even though the events connecting to the particular monument could be stated in parallel with the commemorations at the tombs of the unknown soldiers, neither the architects nor the commissioning state power saw the art piece at the Heroes' Square in Budapest other than a symbolic mass grave. Moreover, by definition, the tombs of the unknown soldiers always had an actual skeleton buried inside, which was not the case in the Hungarian example, and due to that reason, the tombs of the unknown soldiers were real graves, not symbolic ones (Kilián 1934, 218-25). Despite all this, due to the practices on the Square, the actual aim and meaning of the art piece seemed to be faded away. The official events were so general that they became rather occasions to appreciate the Hungarian past, than to commemorate any heroes. Similarly, Gebhardt's art piece witnessed so many diverse occasions (like mass marches, public meetings, May 1 festivals), but was never used as a part of these occasions (Boros 1999, 75-89).

The third, and till now the last phase of the history of the central art piece of World War I memorials, started by the general reconstruction of the square between 1996 and 2000 (Gerő 1995, 63). During these processes András Szilágyi, the head of the Public Art Department at the Budapest Gallery, had the task to supervise, and led the reconstruction processes at Heroes' Square. Once again, he was an artist by education, but had organizational and partly political positions (Helgert 2002, 27-8). The most recent art piece also has a very simple but momentous form, and only the text got changed. On the short end of the memorial, facing Andrassy Avenue, the shortest text ever says: "For the memory of our heroes." The inauguration of the newest monument was on a special day again, but like in 1956, it was not in May, but on 20<sup>th</sup> August. The thousand-year anniversary of Saint Stephen's coronation was celebrated with an eighteen-month long chain of events that was ended with the inauguration of the monument in 2001. Similar to the previous celebrations, that occasion consisted in enwrathing, military marches and speeches. At the end of the ceremony, the Honvéd Folk Ensemble performed, which added cultural aspect to the strictly official programs. The speakers talked about the end of the immediate past that was evaluated as sad and harmful, and foresaw a motivating and optimistic future. At the same time, many reconstruction projects took place in the country, and numerous new Saint Stephen statues were erected and referred to the

nostalgic appreciation of the historical past. The same message was included by the prime minister' speech on the inauguration day, though not on Heroes' Square, when he said:

We have closed the long, ill, self-centered and bitter 20<sup>th</sup> century with the Millennium celebrations. We have closed it out in the very last minute, as it threatened us to continue and so our future would be same as our past. But we have opened new doors by the Millennium celebrations, we planned a new direction, and we have started our journey towards it. (Nemeskürty 2001, 70)

This dual function of the memorial (to close something and to open up another option) had already appeared in previous speeches.

In order to decide if the latest National Heroes' Monument is just a copy of the previous ones or it is connected to contemporary aims and ideologies, it is necessary to review not just the celebration, but the connecting legislative texts and decisions. The law of 2001 is directly connected to the central memorial, and to the way of commemorating. It names "the monument of the Hungarian heroes, who got injured, threatened or sacrificed their lives for Hungary" (*Magyar Közlöny* 2011, 3245). Accordingly, there is no concrete historical date or event defined, but the nationality of the heroes who have to be commemorated. This national specification might have been generated by the protocol events that took place in the previous decades on Heroes' Square, but without any concrete reference this connection is just a possible assumption. The same law makes the National Heroes' Monument with the Millennium Monument national memorial that provides special protective rights to these art pieces. Another change in the status of the originally central monument of World War I victims happened in 2002, when Heroes' Square with all its elements was chosen to be World Cultural Heritage site by the UNESCO. It was evaluated as an outstanding universal value (Jokilehto 2008), which provided the right for special (international) protection. Despite all the increasing appreciation of the art pieces on Heroes' Square, it is important to mention that the National Heroes' Monument has never mentioned in these official texts neither by the Hungarian, nor the international authorities (*Belügyi Közlöny CD-ROM* 2011). This might mean that the National Heroes' Monument is not seen as a symbolic-political venue in the eyes of the contemporary politics and the public; and other locations or historical periods have potentials instead.

#### **IV. World War I memorials in the context of scholarly discourse on nationalism**

One of the most prestigious Hungarian historians, János Póttó says: "Public memorials have been the tools that mainly adapt not to the represented past, but to the current political situation, and they are just seemed to be the object of the historical cult, but in reality, they have always been political symbols with ideological values" (Póttó 1989, 79). This quote reflects the history of the National Heroes' Monument of Hungary, as well as many of the academic discourses on nation building, especially on the role of art and cultural institutions as tools in this process. From the wide theoretical literature in Nationalism Studies, the concept of imagined community by Benedict Anderson, Carig Calhoun and Alan Finlayson has to be mentioned. Anderson speaks about imagined communities in comparison with nations and nationalism, more properly he says that nation is an imagined, limited and sovereign political community (Anderson 1983, 6). He looks for similarities and differences between the two notions. He emphasizes that nation is a modern phenomenon, and its meaning is changing during time. He also searches the possible roots of this ideology, and names religious communities and dynastic realms.

Anderson also highlights the fact that for nationalism it is necessary to form cultural symbols (such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier). He says it is unquestionable that cultural institutions, monuments and politics are connected, and this can be justified most vividly with the amount of money that the state provides for supporting them. He provides three possible answers why rulers and politicians commit to this cultural reason. The first is that financially supporting researches and publications helps state's educational policies. Secondly, it is a good tool for spreading certain ideology or view on the community, or in our researched case, on World War I. Thirdly, such step makes state appear as the supporter of both local and broader heritage and values (Anderson 1983, 36). This supporting role appears also in the case of establishing and honoring World War I memorial. With this process, the religious or non-religious image or a memorial would be distanced from its community, and become a valued symbol of the state.

The author emphasizes the reproducible feature of this institutionalized past. With different kinds of media, as well as with certain directed commemorations, remembrances can be modified to serve certain interests. This kind of shift has been discussed through the history of the National Heroes' Monument of Hungary. The process of simplification shows a good tool for changing the message. In the research case, simple coffin with less and less symbols or texts

can have a wider range of possible meanings. Anderson also emphasizes that the explained transformation continuum happens usually without the acknowledgement of any participants: neither the modifiers nor the receivers. Similarly, the current Hungarian politics has most probably unconsciously left out the central World War I monument from their representative procedures.

Craig Calhoun concentrates more on the characteristics of the relationships that connect people, and provides diverse integrations in the modern world (Calhoun 1991). He examines thoroughly Jürgen Habermas', the post-modernists' and Michel Foucault's concepts in order to deliver a closer understanding of the current change in the roles and significances of direct and indirect relations. Calhoun uses Anderson's term of imagined communities, and describes its members as those who "take as an important part of their personal identities, their memberships in categories of persons linked minimally by direct interpersonal bonds, but established culturally by tradition, media, or slogans of political protest" (Calhoun 1991, 106). The central memorial, as opposed to most of the Hungarian World War I memorials, does not have names of the fallen, and accordingly it does not provide possibility for direct connectedness. Still, the monument itself and the celebrations have enforced a kind of interpersonal bond among the Hungarians.

Calhoun states that there is a relevant difference between those imagined communities that do have direct relationships, and those that are defined by external attributes. He names the former "social groups," and the latter "social categories". By adapting Habermas' view, he says social categories could increase because since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century "people [have] not enter[ed] the public sphere with well-formed identities" (Calhoun 1991, 108). Accordingly, the possibility of starting arguments or discourse is minimal, but passive acceptance and identification have become the universal act in public sphere. This kind of passive coexistence that formulates social categories and imagined communities can be identified with the commemorations on Heroes' Day, when almost all segments of society were forced to participate to the ordered and directed commemorations. Tradition has to be seen as an active transition of social practices and activities through direct interpersonal relations within the community (Calhoun 1991, 111). The new communication media can preserve the tradition for a much larger community than by the chain of interpersonal relations, but through this communication technique, the possibility of incorrect transmission is much higher. The role of contemporary media, the *Újság*, at the

time of establishing the first Hungarian central memorial, was also unquestionable.

Alan Finlayson states that community is a dynamic social theory, and the criteria of belonging are changeable throughout time (Finlayson 2001, 283). In case of the central Hungarian World War I memorial, the identification of the ones who were commemorated changed many times. Another main feature of community is its boundaries or limits, with which the members of the community differentiate themselves from the others. The three different texts on the central World War I memorial in Budapest ("Dedicated to the thousand-year old national boundaries" in 1929, "To the memory of those heroes who sacrificed their lives for the Hungarians' independence and freedom" in 1956, and "For the memory of our heroes" in 2001) alluded to, but did not express explicitly, the transformation of the Hungarian community's boundaries and limits throughout history. Alan Finlayson integrates a wide range of theories and methods, as there are very different ways in which culture, as well as concrete monuments are understood, passed on and formed (verbalized, visualized, vocalized and instrumentalized). Moreover, he explicitly states that: "Nationalism is about this imperative that state and culture can be linked" (Finlayson 2001, 284). According to him, after industrialization, culture is the organizing power of society, as by collecting and enacting its elements (images, traditions, rituals of remembering) the imagined community's connectedness can be theorized (see also Ernest Gellner's *Nation and Nationalism* 1983). The systematic and directed formation of World War I memorials throughout the country, with defined outlook as well as pre-planned commemoration procedures, connected the inhabitants of each Hungarian settlement within and even outside the country.

Similarly, Finlayson underlines the importance of the symbolic or sometimes straightforward resources, with which connectedness can be articulated. These elements do not have meanings, they "form [just] the material of interpretation and understanding" (Finlayson 2001, 289). For instance, national symbols (like the Hungarian crown) and religious symbols (as the cross) have straightforward and transcendent-related interpretations for every member of the Hungarian society. But the simple coffin, as form of the central memorial, had significantly different interpretations throughout the decades. Finlayson emphasizes the important effect of education (more precisely, school curriculum), and the institutionalization of communication in forming and maintaining national communities. The role of the youth in the commemorations at the World War I memorials can be put in parallel with Finlayson's research. Similarly, in the time

of mid-World Wars in Hungary, all events, publications and objects, including the memorials and the commemorations, were spreading almost exclusively one message: the willingness to enter World War II.

As a summary, it can be stated that the World War I monuments in Hungary, especially the central memorial in the capital, as well as the connecting commemorative occasions throughout the decades, have played a significant role in nation-building and national self-identification in 20<sup>th</sup> century. The central memorial can be seen as a location and a context, where both indirect relations with other Hungarians and personal rootedness within the imagined community can be formed. It has become significant symbolic-political venue for the interaction of contemporary politics and masses. The commemorations, in different times, can be rather seen as the realizations of new political messages, rather than remembrances of given periods in national history.

### Images

Examples for the eleven categories of Hungarian WWI public art

Available at: <http://www.agt.bme.hu/varga/foto/vh1/vh1.html>

Heroes' Square, the Millennium Monument, but without the National Heroes' Monument in 1927

From the Budapest Collection of the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library

"Dedicated to the thousand-year old national boundaries" sign on the first

National Heroes' Monument

Available at: <http://www.regikalaz.hu/a-hosok-emlekkove.html>

Destruction of WWII on Millennium Monument

Available at: [http://mult-](http://mult-kor.hu/20061124_a_habsburgok_visszatertek_budapestre)

[kor.hu/20061124\\_a\\_habsburgok\\_visszatertek\\_budapestre](http://mult-kor.hu/20061124_a_habsburgok_visszatertek_budapestre)

Heroes' Square without Heroes' Monument

Available at: [http://budapest-anno.blog.hu/tags/h%C5%91s%C3%B6k\\_tere](http://budapest-anno.blog.hu/tags/h%C5%91s%C3%B6k_tere)

The second National Heroes' Monument

Helgert, Imre 2002. Nemzeti emlékhely a Hősök terén. Budapest: Szaktudás K.

99. Commemoration in 1956

Available at:



[http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/oha\\_picture\\_id.asp?pid=10426&idx=2174&lang=h](http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/oha_picture_id.asp?pid=10426&idx=2174&lang=h)

The current National Heroes' Memorial

Hajós, György 2001. Hősök tere. Budapest: Városháza Kiadó. 10.



### Examples for the eleven categories of Hungarian WWI public art

Category	Example	Location, description
1. Grieving soldier		Szigetújfalu, 1924 The soldier is on his knee to honor the lost comrades.
2. Fighting soldier		Döbrököz, 1923 The soldier calls his comrades into action with horn a historical and not contemporary tool of fighting.

3.  
Wounded  
soldier



Abony, 1924  
Besides the wounded soldier, national motifs like the double cross on three hills as well as the allegory of comradeship by the strong and brave helper can be identified.

4.  
Death of the  
hero



Budapest 4<sup>th</sup> district, 1931  
The dead hero is glorified by Hungaria, who has the Hungarian saint crown on her head.

5.  
Hungarian past



Pécel, 1923  
A Hungarian ancestor with archaic clothes and the saint sword is represented on the pediment.

6.  
Hungarian  
family



Sopron, 1933  
The mother figure with the child in her arms is supporting the man, who is heading towards the war fields, no scare or sadness can be identified in her representation.

7.  
Allegorical  
representation



Dég, 1927  
The classical representation of the lion symbolizes not just freedom but the fighters noble status due to their sacrifying act.



## 8.

## Simple plaque



## Makó, 1924

This plaque is about the victims of a school naming separately the teachers and the students who lost their lives in World War I.

## 9.

## Memorial column with national motifs



## Városlőd, 1932

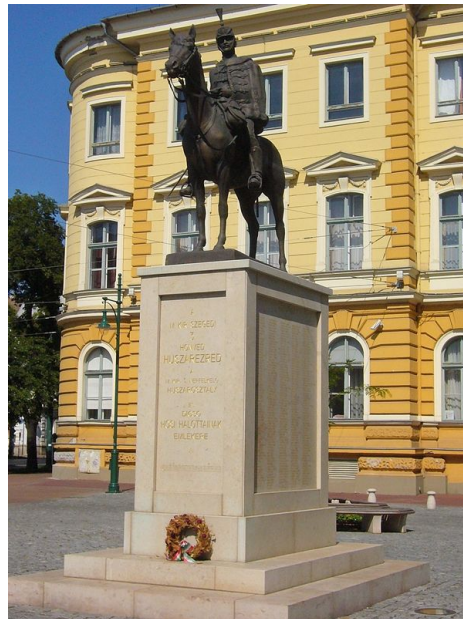
On the column there is the Hungarian hatchment within laurel branch and on the top the double cross can be seen.

10.  
Memorial  
column with  
Turul



Adorjánháza, 1930  
Besides the  
mythological bird on  
the top, the  
enumeration of the  
local victims can be  
seen on the column  
and some weapons and  
cannons at the basis.

11.  
Equestrian  
statue



Szeged, 1943  
The representation is  
closer to the historical  
hussar outfit rather  
than the actual World  
War I military uniform.

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