

**The Emergence of Regional Scale:  
Lake Balaton Conceptualizations by the Architect-Ethnographer János Tóth  
(1936-1946)**

**Keywords**

regional planning, landscape architecture, modern architecture, scale changes, planning history

**Abstract**

The processes of landscape urbanization made new scales of planning necessary in the first half of the century. In the history of the Hungarian architectural profession, the largest lake region in Central Europe, Lake Balaton, served as an experimental territory in issues of settlement and landscape-scale planning. The study analyzes this historical process, during which the scale of architectural design increasingly expanded, and architects began to deal with the scale of landscape. The focus of the study is the work of János Tóth, who developed the first regional concept in 1946. This turning point in the professional history had previously appeared less in the focus of scientific thinking, but at the same time it represented an important step in the change of scale of planning and prepared the later, internationally recognized regional plan. The study outlines the process of professional differentiation and points to the knowledge transfer and interaction between professional fields in regional planning. By comparing regional concepts, the different positions and approaches become visible between architecture, urban design and regional planning, as well as the gradual rise of the ethnographic and ecological perspectives.

**Biography**

Domonkos Wettstein PhD is an architect and researcher, associate professor at Department of Urban Planning and Design, Faculty of Architecture, Budapest University of Technology and Economics. His research deals with planning history in the 20th century. In 2013-14 he was a visiting scholar at the ETH Zürich and conducted his research at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (GTA). His book *Balaton Architecture – Searching for Strategy in the Twentieth Century* was published in 2022. In 2023, he won the Bolyai scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

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# The Emergence of Regional Scale: Lake Balaton Conceptualizations by the Architect-Ethnographer János Tóth (1936–46)

### Introduction: The Emergence of Regional-scale Conceptualization

In the first half of the twentieth century, new scales of planning emerged, and this process can also be observed in the history of Hungarian architecture and planning. In addition to architecture, urban design and planning gradually became an independent field of expertise, which was also strengthened at legislative levels. However, urbanization processes raised the issue of regional-scale planning in some regions even before the Second World War. In addition to urban design issues, the international forums of the modern movement also examined the possibilities of regional planning, and Hungarian architects also participated in this discourse<sup>1</sup>. The new scales of conceptualizations were accompanied by the differentiation of professional roles, and although initially architects with architectural qualifications also tried to solve larger-scale spatial problems, new fields of expertise developed over time in the course of the professional history reorganization.

In recent years, numerous studies have been published on the history of twentieth-century urban design<sup>2</sup>. The publications point to the shift in urban scale concepts, but at the same time, due to the specific scale and urbanization problem of the Balaton region, it directs attention to the issue of landscape-scale conceptualization. This essay points to the turning point in the scale shift, through a methodology that synthesizes the approaches of different disciplines. This turning point shows examples of early landscape-scale experiments and helps to understand the process of professional historical differentiation, i.e. the branching of architecture, urban planning, and regional planning.

In this professional history process, the urbanizing recreational areas of the Balaton coast provided an experimental territory, where architectural, urban planning and landscape scale issues had to be addressed even before the Second World War. The tourist development of Lake Balaton began after the 1860s, when the railway line connecting Budapest with the Adriatic was built. After the First World War, the role of the lake increased due to the new national borders and it became accessible to a wider range of social groups, which presented new challenges for regional architecture<sup>3</sup>. The study examines the rearrangement of professional historical positions on the Balaton coast during the period between the two world wars. By processing archival planning history documents<sup>4</sup>, contemporary professional journals and publications, it seeks answers to how

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<sup>1</sup> For details on the work of the Hungarian CIAM group, see: András Ferkai, *Molnár Farkas* (Terc Kiadó, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> For the discourse on historical analyses of urban architecture, see: Tom Avermaete and Janina Gosseye, *Urban Design in the 20th Century: A History* (GTA Verlag, 2023); Mirle Rabinowitz Bussell, *History of Urban Planning and Design* (Cognella Academic Publishing, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Vera Schleicher, *Kultúrfürdő. Kulturális kölcsönhatások a Balaton térségben 1821–1960 között* (L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2018) [Cultural Bath. Cultural Interactions in the Balaton Region between 1821–1960].

<sup>4</sup> Archival source of the planning history documents: Secretarial documents of the Balaton Management Committee. Hungarian National Archives Veszprém County Archives, MNL VeMLXIV.28.; Balaton Management Committee documents 1935–1950. Hungarian National Archives Somogy County Archives, MNL SML X.208.

Balatonföldvár: Villas along the shoreline promenade, 1899. Credits: Fortepan 132265, Magyar Műszaki és Közlekedési Múzeum, Történeti Fényképek Gyűjteménye MMKM.TFGY. 2017-11-08.



the differentiation process of individual professional fields developed, what relationships developed between the different professional fields dealing with the urbanization problem and on what professional basis new-scale conceptualization were developed. The study points out that the problems of the recreational settlements of the Balaton coast posed a novel challenge due to the specific scale of the region. In the process of professional differentiation, architectural training played a decisive role in the history of the Hungarian profession, and this also had an impact on the institutionalized regional planning that developed after the war. The focus of this study is on the regional work of architect János Tóth. Previous research has not yet examined this lesser-known work in detail, even though he played an important role in the development of regional conceptualization in the history of the Hungarian profession.

### **János Tóth between Architecture, Planning and Ethnography**

János Tóth (1899–1978) was born in Zalaegerszeg, and as a child he was sent to the Balaton-side town of Keszthely, where he attended high school at the Premontre Gymnasium<sup>5</sup>. In 1921 he graduated as an architect from the Budapest University of Technology and then studied at the Agricultural Academy in Keszthely for a year, which already indicates his interest in vernacular architecture and landscape. Between 1922 and 1948 he worked in Szombathely as a chief engineer and city engineer. At that time, he had already begun to deal with large-scale development plans, participating in numerous urban development design competitions, preparing plans for the cities of Szeged, Győr and Pécs, for example. He also actively participated in the development of the urban development plans of Szombathely. His work greatly contributed to Szombathely becoming a city with municipal rights in 1942. In addition to urban planning, he is also responsible for the design of several significant residential buildings, while he also maintained good relations with artists and they jointly designed monuments for the city. In 1924, he traveled to Rome on a study trip with a scholarship and was greatly influenced by Italian architecture.

However, his interest soon turned to the vernacular architecture of the Hungarian countryside and, in addition to his architectural activities, he also produced ethnographic works. From 1932, he surveyed the villages around Szombathely, and then dealt with other Hungarian regions, such as Göcsej, the Upper Tisza region and the Balaton Uplands. The first attempt to define the concept of “vernacular monument” is also associated with his name. He published several studies and books on the regional processing of vernacular architectural monuments<sup>6</sup>. In 1938, his study “This is how the people of Vas County build” was published, which reached Le Corbusier, who sent him a letter

<sup>5</sup> Péter Balogh, “Zalai Tóth János (1899–1978), a reneszánsz ember,” *Vasi Építész és Mérnök* 12, n. 3 (2015): 16-19 [János Zalai Tóth (1899–1978), the Renaissance Man].

<sup>6</sup> János Tóth, *A magyar falu építőművészete* (Martineum, 1945) [The Architectural Art of the Hungarian Village].



9.2

Balatonalmádi: View of the settlement, 1930. Credits: Fortepan 116508, Album009.

of greeting with kind words<sup>7</sup>. His research also ensured advancement in his academic career: in 1940 he earned a doctorate with his dissertation entitled *The Development of Village Buildings in the Western Regions*, and from 1942 he became a private tutor at the University of Szeged. In 1948, he moved to Budapest and worked first in design offices and then in the Ministry of Architecture on vernacular monuments. Later, in 1973, he became a doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He died in Budapest in 1978.

János Tóth's interdisciplinary work was largely ignored by Hungarian architectural history, although his versatile personality made him suitable for collaborating with several fields of expertise. He was interested in vernacular architectural heritage and larger-scale planning in addition to his architectural and fine art works. The problem of rural architecture and landscape-scale planning was uniquely combined in the attempt at a regional plan for Lake Balaton. He had a close connection to the Balaton coast since his youth, and he did not break away from the region in his later work. He is also responsible for designing one of the largest beaches on Lake Balaton of the era, the Balatonalmádi beach building, in 1943. As a painter, the theme of Lake Balaton primarily inspired his paintings. In the first half of the twentieth century, tourism in the region developed explosively. The waterfront areas began to be built on first, but tourism's interest soon turned to the vernacular architectural heritage of the Balaton Uplands. János Tóth was one of the first to start surveying vernacular monuments. In addition to documenting, however, he also became involved in the debate on the design of new buildings and was later asked to develop the preliminary conceptual plan for the Balaton shore. With his characteristic vision, he shaped his works with definite contours, whether it was a building or a regional plan. The analysis of his work provides an opportunity to show a specific example of the process of developing new scales of planning.

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### Lake Balaton Development between the Two Wars

The tourism regions produced by industrial societies represented a new challenge for architectural and urban regionalisms in Europe.<sup>8</sup> Tourism, which mobilized ever wider masses, resulted in the increasing scale of developments from era to era and the spectacular transformation of tourism regions<sup>9</sup>. However, there were no prototypes available for the architectural forms of the new holiday lifestyles, while the light and simple buildings for recreational purposes and the tourist discovery of the countryside also provided an inspiring opportunity for architecture to rethink the means of formation<sup>10</sup>. The problems of recreational architecture becoming widespread in the freer rural environment, breaking away from the urban framework, not only directed attention

<sup>7</sup> "Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon," <https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyar-eletrajzi-lexikon-7428D>, last accessed December 9, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Orvar Lögfren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Alden, Robert Morgan: *Regional Planning: A Comprehensive View* (Leonard Hill Books, 1974).

<sup>10</sup> Leen Meganck and Linda Van Santvoort and Jan De Maeyer, eds., *Regionalism and Modernity: Architecture in Western Europe 1914-1940* (Leuven University Press, 2013).

### 9.3

Balatonalmádi: Beach and sand bath, János Tóth, 1941.  
Credits: Fortepan 263360, Kovács Györgyi.



to the local adaptation of modernity, but also to the necessity of larger-scale planning. The tasks of tourism regions approaching the landscape from different positions opened up a wide space for experimentation with their questions regarding local patterns. The problem of regional unity placed the interpretations of regionality in the focus of the search for solutions both at the level of architectural works and landscape planning. In the light of the regional toolkits that were still forming between the two wars, architectural and urban concepts developed in parallel, but mostly in autonomous branches. Regional strategies formulated within different disciplinary frameworks could approach landscape problems by intertwining with tourism and holiday interpretations, while questions of the modernization of the countryside also appeared in their perspective.

The concepts were typically born from professional positions, as regional experts constructed with academic tools, and we can interpret their role as a means of mediation between different horizons in search of a local adaptation of modernity<sup>11</sup>. These constructions clashed modernization and recreation, as the universal, standardized knowledge of the given era, with local conditions and professional practice. In seeking answers to the problem of the resort area, the concept of regionality also carried the possibilities of connecting different positions and scales. Although the issues of landscape-level conceptualization also aroused the interest of architects due to the scale of the developments that were starting and the emphasis on modernization, the architectural and urban branches of regional strategies were not closely connected – based on examples known in contemporary publications and international literature<sup>12</sup>. However, due to its scale, the Balaton shore in its early planning period promised to be a special meeting point and attracted the interest of international professional organizations.

In the recreational architecture of the Balaton coast between the two world wars, the search for a regional strategy based on a civil base emerged, in contrast to the later centralized development perspectives<sup>13</sup>, instead of historical continuity, architects took topography, climate and function as their basis, and sought to develop the tools of recreational architecture in an autonomous and regionally followable manner<sup>14</sup>. In search of solutions to the urbanization problems of the leisure-scape, the regional approach appeared at the level of both architecture and urban planning, and the solutions became models for later periods.

The number of lakeside buildings began to increase after the First World War. Following the Treaty of Trianon, which ended First World War, the country lost significant territory. With the annexed parts Hungary lost its traditional spas and resorts, and in the closed country, Lake Balaton became the focus of tourism and the search for a holiday destination<sup>15</sup>. At the same time, a new social class

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Achleitner, *Region, ein Konstrukt? Regionalismus, eine Pleite?* (Birkhäuser, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> See Wilhelm Lang, *L'unità tedesca e l'unità italiana: memoria* (Salviucci; Libreria Internazionale Ermanno Loescher, 1871); Heinrich von Treitschke, "Cavour" (1867), in *Historische und politische Aufsätze: Neue Folge*, 2 vols. (S. Hirzel, 1870), 349–494.

<sup>13</sup> Domonkos Wettstein, "Regionális törekvések a Balaton-parti üdülőterületek építéstörténetében a két világháború között," *Építés- Építészettudomány* 45, no. 1–2 (2017): 139–71 [Regional Efforts in the Architecture History of the Lake Balaton Resort Areas between the Two World Wars].

<sup>14</sup> Dezső Antal, "Balatoni Fürdőtelepek kialakítása," in *Balaton. A Magyar Mérnök és Építész Egylet értekezletsorozatának anyaga*, ed. D. Antal (Tér és Forma Kiadó, 1931), 34–41 [Development of Balaton Resorts].

<sup>15</sup> Sándor Bősze, "A Dél-Balatoni fürdőegyesületek történetéből (1890–1944)," in *Somogy megye múltjából – Levéltári évkönyv* 20, ed. J. Kanyar (Somogy Megyei Levéltár, 1989), 211–52 [From the History of the South Balaton Bathing Associations (1890–1944)].



9.4

Balatonvilágos: A problematic overview of seaside vacation homes in the 1920s. Credits: Fortepan 183442, Magyar Műszaki és Közlekedési Múzeum, BAHART Archívum, MMKM TEMGY 2019.I.I. 0958.



9.5

Balatonkenese: Filled area in front of the resort row, 1940. Credits: Fortepan 183505, Magyar Műszaki és Közlekedési Múzeum. BAHART Archívum, MMKM TEMGY 2019.I.I. 1075.

also appeared on the lakeside. While previously the wealthier bourgeoisie built on villa estates, in the twenties and thirties property on Lake Balaton also became available to the middle class of officials and intellectuals, although their financial capacity was also lower due to the global economic crisis that had broken out in the meantime. All this was also reflected in the quality of holiday home construction. The buildings were designed in a simpler design, with lower quality technical and aesthetic solutions. The earlier lakeside villas still evoked memories of mountain and alpine trips and were designed with a row of spaces and building structures equivalent to city houses, although they were only used seasonally from the beginning. After the war, the holiday lifestyle also became increasingly easygoing, thanks to modernity, people no longer required the cumbersome representation that characterized the decades around the turn of the century. However, there were no suitable models available for the space requirements of the new lifestyle. The local craftsmen and master builders were not familiar with the modern architectural experiments of the

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Iván Kotsis: The architect's own summer house, Balatonboglár. Source: Iván Kotsis, *Épületek és tervez* (Pósa, 1945).



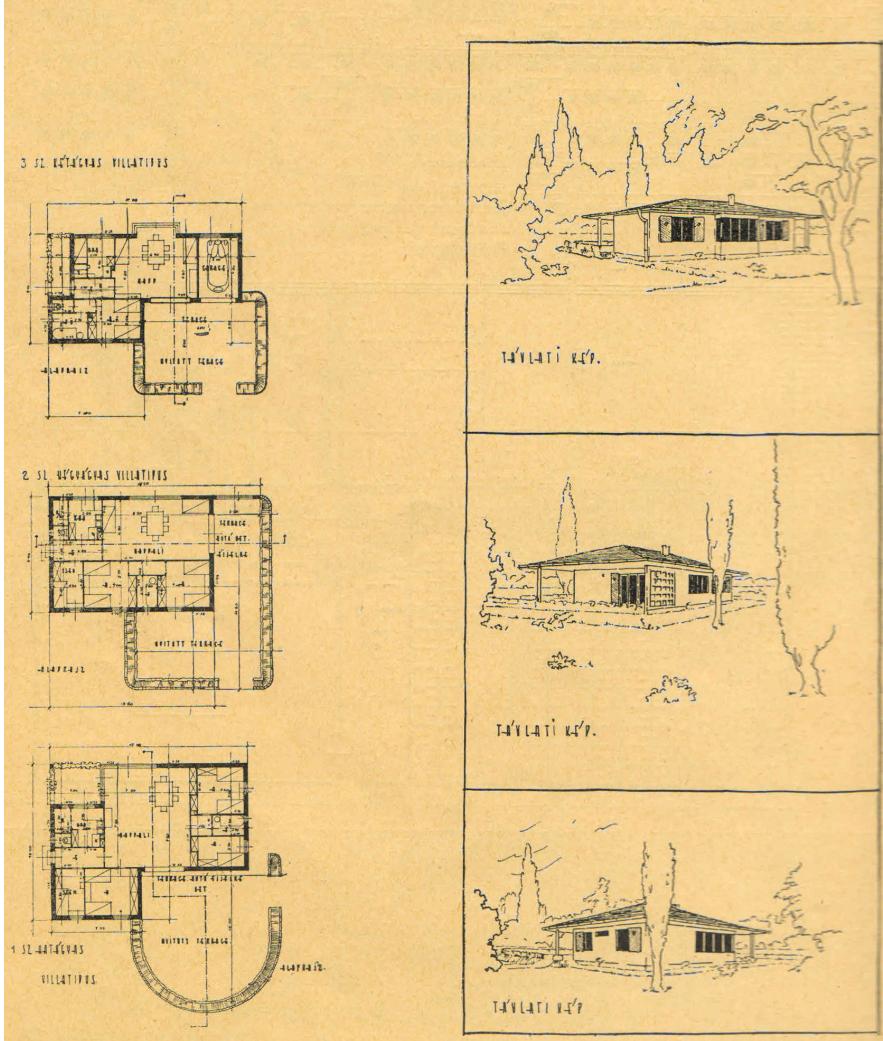
time, and mostly naively copied historical forms, building a row of clumsy towered, mansard-roofed houses on the lakeshore. In addition to the stylistic pluralism, the technical problems of the buildings and land speculation also harmed the holiday homeowners<sup>16</sup>. In many cases, the plots were already too narrow, in flood or ice-prone areas. In the absence of urban planning regulations, spontaneous land acquisitions, the constantly increasing number of holiday homes, and the lack of infrastructure also resulted in an increasingly confusing overall picture. Such a high proportion of small holiday homes is a unique phenomenon in both landscape use and tourism in international terms, and the scale of emergent urbanization was still unknown in European holiday areas at that time<sup>17</sup>.

The unified development of the lake shore was long overshadowed by other matters in the country, and the number and quality of hotel constructions lagged far behind Western European resorts. At the same time, the self-organization of the resort civil society began in the recreational settlements in the first decade of the century. As part of spending their free time, the citizens who migrated from the cities, especially from the capital, to the Balaton shore in the summer, organized spa associations. These local civil organizations primarily aimed to revitalize the cultural life of the recreational settlements and to care for the image of the settlement. The objectives of the grassroots movements soon converged in the vision of the unified development of the Balaton shore. It was recognized that the problems of the lake shore and the organization of the holiday required comprehensive solutions for the entire Balaton shore, and the idea of a "Balaton County" also came to the fore, because it was believed that the reasons for the lag were to be found in the jurisdiction of the three counties. The aspirations were finally realized in the establishment of the Balaton Management Committee (Balatoni Intéző Bizottság (BIB)) in the late 1920s. Such a distinctive self-organization of the resort's civil society at the settlement and regional level is considered a unique phenomenon in contemporary Europe<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Gyula Héjj, "A balatoni építkezések hatósági felügyelete," *Tér és Forma* 4, no. 2-4 (1931): 77–80 [Official Supervision of Construction Projects at Lake Balaton].

<sup>17</sup> Hungarian professional journals of the era examined the problem with an international perspective and comparison. See for example: Dezső Antal, "Balatoni Fürdőtelepek kialakítása," in *Balaton. A Magyar Mérnök és Építész Egylet értekezletsorozatának anyaga*, ed. D. Antal (Tér és Forma Kiadó: 1931), 34–41. For historical analysis of European trends, see: Meganck and Van Santvoort and De Maeyer, eds., *Regionalism and Modernity. Architecture in Western Europe, 1914–1940*, 73–94; Kai Krauskopf, Hans-Georg Lippert, Kerstin Zaschke (eds.), *Die Neue Tradition III. – Europäische Architektur im Zeichen von Traditionalismus und Regionalismus* (Dresden: Helem, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> For a historical overview of regional planning methodology, see: Vincent B. Canizaro, *Architectural Regionalism. Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2007).



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## 9.7

Holiday home plans by Nándor Ilonczay prepared under the leadership of Iván Kotsis at the Building Design Department of the József Nádor Műegyetem (University of Technology) in 1939. Source: *A m. kir. József Nádor Műegyetem épülettervezési tanszékén készült tervez* [Plans Prepared at the Department of Building Design of the József Nádor University of Technology], Special issue of the journal *Technika*, Budapest, 1944, Tableau: LV.7.

was connected to the shores of Lake Balaton in several ways. They quickly noticed the problems appearing in the image of the lakeside and urged comprehensive solutions. The aim of BIB was to improve the architectural quality of the region, therefore, with the support of the organization, summer house architectural design competitions and thematic publications were prepared as guidelines for those wishing to build. International trends were reflected in the architectural design of the summer houses<sup>19</sup>. The design principles of modern architecture were adapted to the landscape, climatic conditions and local building materials. Iván Kotsis, a professor at the Technical University, was a defining figure in the architecture of the era, who had extensive international connections<sup>20</sup>. He developed closer ties primarily with Italian and South German schools, which methods also shaped his regional approach. Although he did not consider the vernacular architectural forms of the region as a reference, but the simplicity of the concept of vacation reflected in the summer house built from local materials<sup>21</sup>. The practicality and generosity of modern architecture were combined with the use of local materials and the simple, low-pitched roof form. This created a general Balaton-side character that did not emphasize the characters of individual settlements but rather sought to define the general character of the lakeside as a resort area. All this was in line with the lakeside identity of the builders. The holiday-going bourgeoisie coming from outside the region was not closely linked to the background settlements and ancient com-

<sup>19</sup> For thematic publications on the holiday home architecture of the period, see: Walter Breunig, *Wochenende* (München: Brudman, 1935); Paul Artaria, *Ferien und Landhäuser* (Erlenbach-Zürich: Verlag für Architektur, 1947); Herman Sörgel, *Das Haus fürs Wochenende* (Gebhardt Verlag, 1930); Ella Carter, ed., *Seaside Houses and Bungalows* (Country Life, 1937).

<sup>20</sup> Domonkos Wetstein, "Resort Architecture in Regional Perceptions: Multiple Aspects of a Region in Iván Kotsis' Design Method for Balaton Lakeshore," in *Prostor* 29, no. 2 (2021): 226–37.

<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of the trends and international relations of Hungarian architecture between the two wars, see: András Ferkai, "Hungarian Architecture between the Wars," in *The Architecture of Historic Hungary*, ed. J. Sisa and D. Wiebenson (MIT Press, 1998).

munities, and for the residents of the newly parceled settlements, proximity to Lake Balaton was the primary goal.

Following the thematic holiday home model collections of international architecture, the BIB also attempted to organize exhibitions and publish proposal design collections. However, the direct impact of the foreign publications<sup>22</sup> is not known, and their impact was probably felt in the domestic literature only through architects with international knowledge. At the same time, Hungarian publications have been thematizing the issues of recreational construction on the shores of Lake Balaton uniformly, at a regional level, since the thirties. The development of general concepts was also necessitated by the settlement image problems of the resorts. In the strategies, the creators combined modern architectural principles with local characteristics, while attempting to create a regional-level quality of the resort area, which was far from copying vernacular and urban forms. The general nature of the developed characters is shown by the fact that although they adapted to the characteristics of the region, they were primarily linked to seasonal functions.

As an alternative effort, the idea of a summer house built from the regional vernacular architectural forms emerged. In the second half of the thirties, the Friends of the Hungarian House group conducted the first comprehensive survey and collection in the Balaton Uplands to document the forms of vernacular architecture and initiated the application of their approach in the design of summer houses<sup>23</sup>. This folkloristic interest can also be linked to the tendencies outlined in the international overview, which was motivated by the interest in tourism on the shores of Balaton in addition to ideological aspirations of the concept of national architecture<sup>24</sup>. Their collection was published in book form by BIB, the organization that promoted vernacular culture to holidaymakers on several platforms at that time. Although János Tóth did not join the group, his interest in vernacular architecture was close to the aspirations from the beginning.

Iván Kotsis considered vernacular architectural forms and structures to be alien to the light, modern nature of the holiday.<sup>25</sup> Due to Iván Kotsis's academic approach, he wanted to organize the debate in a two-round competition. In the first round, an essay competition was planned, and later a design competition, but the latter was eventually swept away by the war years. The essay competition was announced in 1936, and the call for entries was worded as follows: "Can the elements of Transdanubian Hungarian vernacular architecture be applied to the modern design of summer houses on the shores of Lake Balaton?"<sup>26</sup>. According to the call, the positions could be explained on a maximum of 12 pages, including figures. Nine entries were submitted to the call, including the entry by János Tóth, whose work was ultimately awarded the highest award by the committee in a tie with another entry by György Lehoczky. János Tóth's entry was also published in the professional press of the time, where a lively debate ensued about the work<sup>27</sup>. János Tóth not only presented survey drawings of the vernacular architecture of the Balaton Uplands as a form treasure to be applied to new buildings but also proposed the establishment of a regional building authority. This proposal of his already shows a new scale of concept creation, as a vision that encompasses the region, but many considered this to be too strong an ideological control. In the case of public buildings, it would have made the use of traditional forms mandatory.

<sup>22</sup> For the list of foreign thematic publications on holiday home architecture, see footnote 15.

<sup>23</sup> Kálmán Tóth and Miklós Nászay, *A Balaton vidék népének építésze* (Balatoni Intéző Bizottság, 1936).

<sup>24</sup> For the connections between the tourist and national architectural aspirations of regionalism, see: Leen Meganc and Linda Van Santvoort, Jan De Maeyer, eds., *Regionalism and Modernity. Architecture in Western Europe, 1914-1940* (Leuven University Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Endre Prakfalvi, ed., *Kotsis Iván: Életrajzom* (HAP Tervezőiroda Kft. and Magyar Építészeti Múzeum, 2010) [Iván Kotsis: My Biography].

<sup>26</sup> Virgil Bierbauer, "Pályakérdez: Alkalmazhatók-e a dunántúli magyar népies építészet elemei a balatonmenti nyaralók korszerű meg-tervezésénél?" *Tér és Forma* 9, no. 1 (1936): 7 [Application Question: Can the Elements of Transdanubian Hungarian Vernacular Architecture be Applied in the Modern Design of Holiday Homes along Lake Balaton?].

<sup>27</sup> János Tóth, "Alkalmazhatók-e a dunántúli magyar népi építészet elemei a balatonmenti nyaralók korszerű megtervezésében?," *Vasi Szemle* 6, n. 1-2 (1937): 33-48.

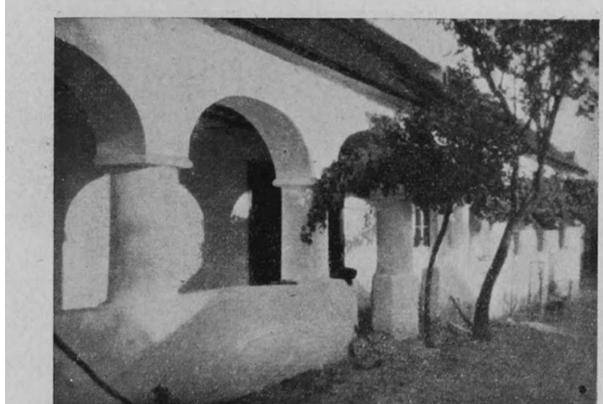
<sup>28</sup> Virgil Bierbauer, "Rövid hozzászólás Tóth János I. díjas pályáirásához," *Tér és Forma* 19, no. 11 (1936): 321 [A Short Comment on János Tóth's First Prize Winning Essay].



6. ábra. Kódisállás. („Bettlerstand“.) Épült 1884-ben. Gőcsfa (Vas vm.)  
Fot.: T. J.



7. ábra. Falmélyedéssel összefoglalt oszlopos tornács. (Mit Wandhohlung zusammengefasster Säulengang). Nagynarda 48. hsz. (Vas vm.)  
Fot.: T. J.



8. ábra. Oszloptornács külső képe (Säulengang). Nemescsó, 15. hsz. (Vas vm.). — Fot.: T. J.



13. ábra. Velemi gyermeküdülő terve (Plan des Kindererholungsheimes in Velem). Tervezte: T. J.

Virgil Bierbauer, the editor of the journal *Tér és Forma*, responded to his study and, committed to a modern architectural trend, criticized the mandatory use of vernacular forms: "The conclusions of János Tóth can give rise to the most far-reaching misunderstandings in those who are not as close to architecture and vernacular construction as János Tóth and a few others"<sup>28</sup>. Bierbauer, with his modern architectural approach, drew attention to the senseless copying of vernacular forms if it becomes mandatory under regional-level institutional control. This critique attacked re-

#### 9.8

János Tóth's analysis of Transdanubian folk architecture, 1937. Credits: János Tóth, "Alkalmazhatók-e a dunántúli magyar népi építészet elemei a balatonmenti nyaralók korszerű megtervezésében?", *Vasi Szemle* 6 (1937) 1-2, 33-48.

## 9.9

Balatonvilágos, railway station, 1920. Credits: Fortepan 183486, Magyar Műszaki és Közlekedési Múzeum; BAHART Archívum; MMKM TEMGY 2019.I.I. 1097.



gional-scale conceptualization both as a prescription for architectural style and as an institutional authority. The tender and the discussion did not continue due to the war situation, but the issue of a regional-scale concept clearly emerged. For János Tóth, the regional character was not only a formal but also an institutional issue, which also foreshadowed the possibility of regional-scale planning.

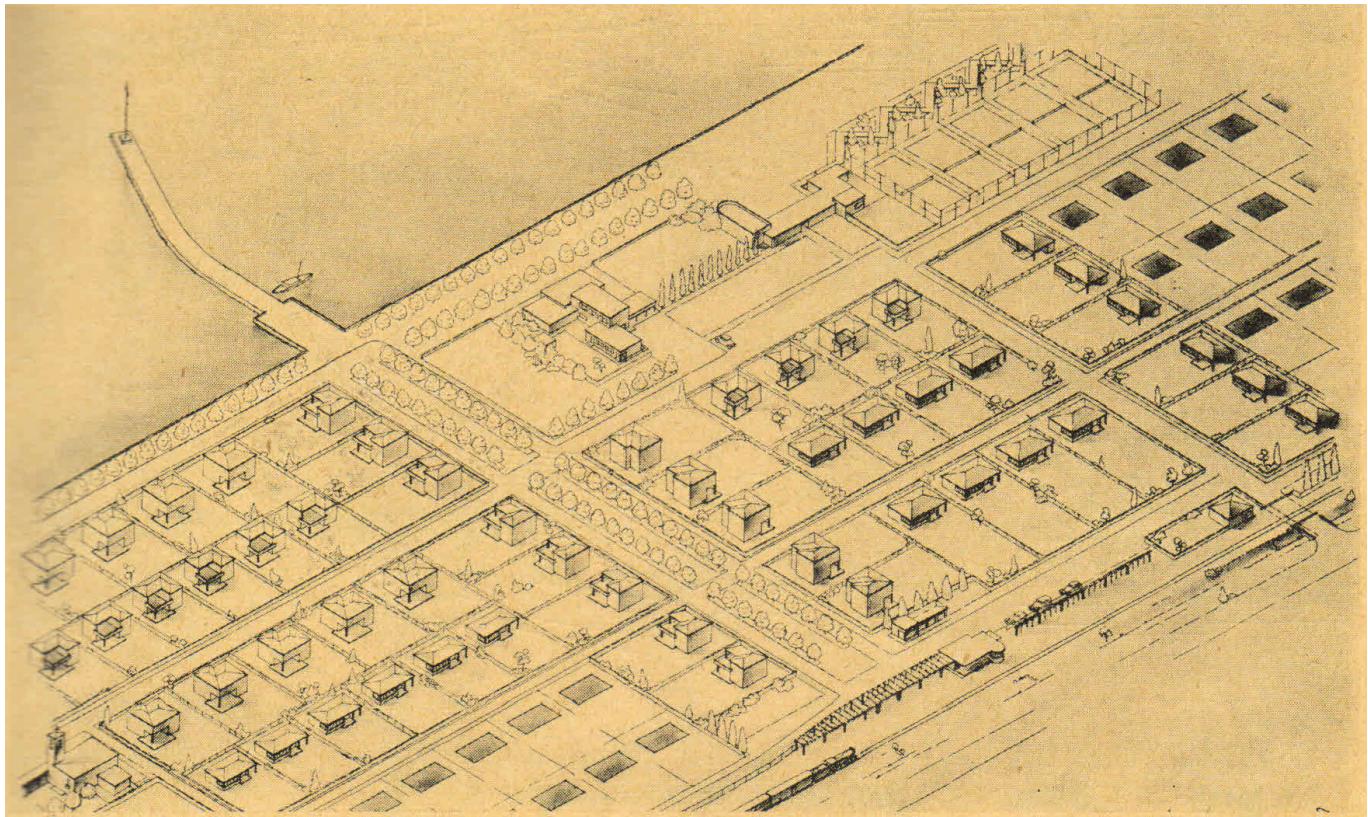
### Urbanization Processes and the Challenges of Large-scale Planning

When developing the recreational settlements, they considered the development of foreign, primarily Western European, resorts as a model. The periodicals of the time published both seaside and mountain lake resorts<sup>29</sup>. In the descriptions of the resorts, they emphasized “fitting into the landscape”<sup>30</sup> and “scenic composition”<sup>31</sup>, although the periodical articles remained indebted for their professional explanation. The settlement centers of foreign historical bathing settlements had already been formed at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and their character could in many cases also provide a starting point for the further, organic development of the settlement. On the shores of Lake Balaton, only Füred had such a settlement core, while in the case of the other completely newly founded bathing settlements the formation of the identity and character was also the task of the plotters. Moreover, the topography could not provide a guide on the southern shore, unlike the northern shore, where the development of the hillsides could follow the stepped arrangement of the Alpine lake shores, continuously overlooking the lake shore. On the flat belt area of the southern shore, which was freed from water when the Southern Railway was built in the early 1860s, the orthogonal grid typical of Adriatic resorts could therefore provide a starting point. The railway, as a symbol of modernity, appears simultaneously through the fast connection to the big city and through large-scale landscape development. All along the shoreline, the uniform settlement network was divided by the centers and decenters of the settlements. This is where the community buildings and services were located. The spread of this uniform pattern was also facilitated by the model plans developed by the BIB. This general urban character contributed to the development of a seasonal resort strip around the lake, which functioned as a remote resort of the city. All this could also be linked to the functional approach to modern urban planning formulated in the Athens Charter, where the four elements of housing, work, transport and leisure are organized in a clear separation from

<sup>29</sup> Among the Hungarian architectural journals of the era, *Tér és Forma* and *Magyar Építőművészeti* regularly reported and presented the developments of the newly completed European resorts of the era.

<sup>30</sup> Iván Kotsis, “Művészet a balatoni építkezésekben,” in *Balaton. A Magyar Mérnök és Építész Egylet értekezletsorozatának anyaga*, ed. D. Antal Dezső (Tér és Forma Kiadó: 1931), 8–10.

<sup>31</sup> Dezső Antal, “Balatoni Fürdőtelepek kialakítása,” in *Balaton. A Magyar Mérnök és Építész Egylet értekezletsorozatának anyaga*, ed. D. Antal Dezső (Tér és Forma Kiadó: 1931), 34–41.



each other. In this case, the resort area was separated from the city body by a hundred kilometers, but in terms of its operation and society it developed as an integral part of the city. However, all this was not the result of modern urban planning, the processes of developing the lakeshore had started earlier historically, although modernity, as the driving force behind the development of recreation and mass recreation, was undoubtedly a determining factor. The functional modern approach also appeared in the design of the spa resorts, in the separation of residential, rest zones and settlement centers, while at the same time the more moderate taste of the middle class was reflected in the architectural and urban image.

The unified planning concept of the recreational settlements was formulated after the spread of architectural patterns. In this way, by building additively from the bottom up, from the individual buildings, the coherent nature of the resorts was developed, reflecting the self-organizing, bottom-up nature of the lakeside civil society. The conceptualization of the recreational settlements emerged as a general problem independent of the local community background, for which the planners developed a comprehensive, regional-level toolkit by defining a Balaton character. Identical value aspects appeared in the architectural and urbanistic concepts, and the typifiable solutions promoted the orderly settlement image of the lakeside resorts, which also laid the foundation for the developments of later periods<sup>32</sup>. In the period between the two world wars, a civil-based, grassroots development unfolded on the shores of Lake Balaton, which was assisted by professionals representing various fields of expertise. Architects played a key role in this process, and they soon began to address the issue of larger-scale planning.

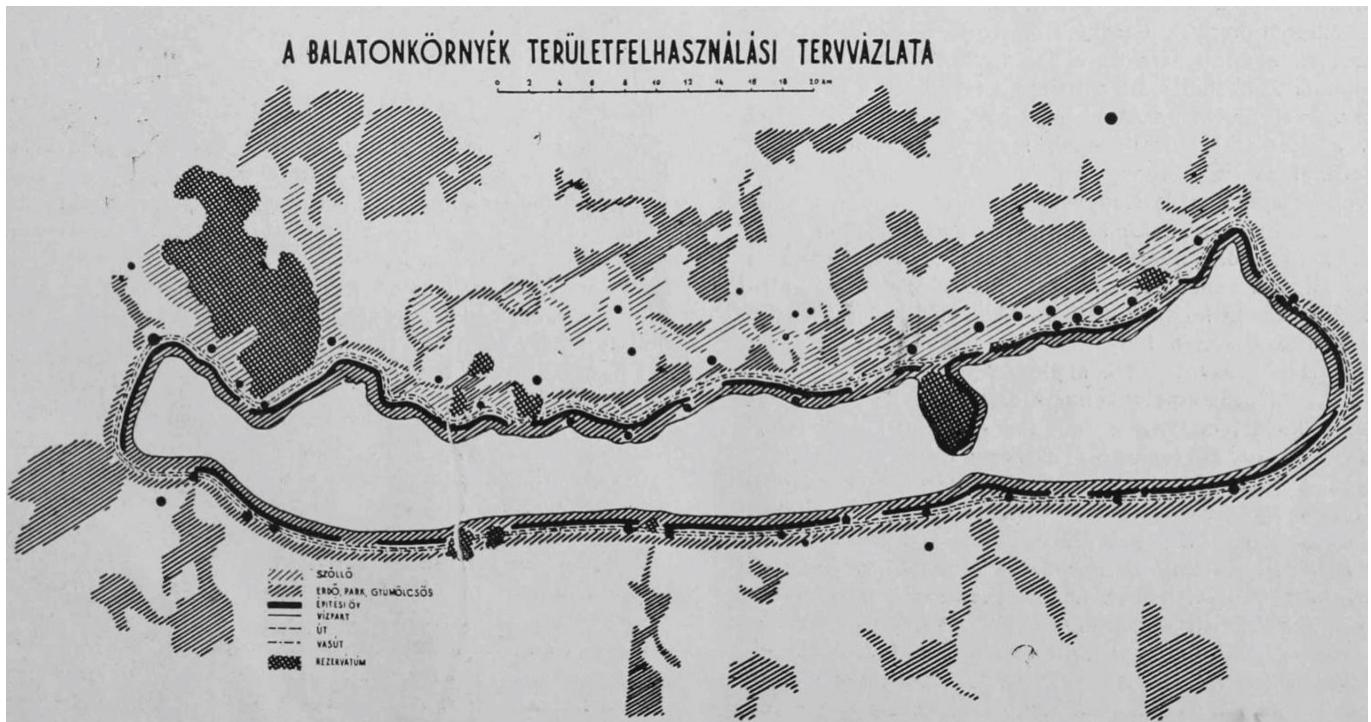
There were already examples of regional-scale planning in international practice at that time, and the question of large-scale conceptualizations also appeared on the CIAM platform. The CIAM discussed the regional issue of resort areas at its 5<sup>th</sup> congress, but the Balaton problem did not appear on the forum. The reason for this was that the Hungarian group of CIAM was primarily concerned

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### 9.10

Resort settlement plans by László Tomory prepared under the leadership of Iván Kotsis at the Building Design Department of the József Nádor Műegyetem (University of Technology) in 1939. Source: *Anonymous, A m. kir. József Nádor Műegyetem épülettervezési tanszékén készült tervez*, Special issue of the journal *Technika*, Budapest, 1944, Tableau: LXVIII.

<sup>32</sup> Kálmán Tóth, *Balaton telekfelosztási építési szabályrendeletek és azok magyarázata* (Balaton Intéző Bizottság, 1935) [Balaton Land Subdivision and Building Regulations and their Explanation].



### 9.11

Regional Concept for the Balaton area by János Tóth titled: "Unified Development and Planning of the Balaton Area," 1946. Credits: János Tóth, "A Balaton környék egységes fejlesztése és rendezése," *Tér és Forma* 19 (1946) 1-3. 14-18.

with social issues in the countryside, and the problem of middle-class vacationing did not concern the group led by Farkas Molnár. The Hungarian group developed a regional plan for a rural area, Dévaványa, but due to the scale and task of the project, it deviated from the Balaton issue<sup>33</sup>.

An interesting parallel from the international planning history of the era is the regional-scale conceptualization of the northern Italian Aosta Valley resort area that began in 1937, although the area covered by the plan is significantly smaller than the Balaton region<sup>34</sup>. The design group coordinated by engineering magnate Adriano Olivetti was greatly influenced by the complex spirit of the American Tennessee Valley Authority development. In addition to examining the landscape and architectural environment, the methodology also included detailed analysis of issues of demography, public health, hygiene, and climate. However, the plan ultimately could not be implemented<sup>35</sup>, but it pointed out the need for conceptualization on a landscape scale of tourist regions in the mid-twentieth century.

The problems of the urbanization of the lakeshore had become increasingly visible by the mid-thirties, while regional-scale planning began as a grassroots initiative. The lakeshore resort civil society

<sup>33</sup> See the Dévaványa plan of the Hungarian group of CIAM as a contemporary regional concept: András Ferkai, *Molnár Farkas* (Terc Kiadó, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Adriano Olivetti, *Studi e proposte preliminari per il piano regolatore della Valle d'Aosta* (Einaudi, 2001).

organizations began to develop the framework for regional development as a grassroots initiative. All this is a unique phenomenon in the international history of the field, starting from the village, with a civil-based methodology. The overall concept would have been developed by coordinating the individual development proposals of the settlements at the regional level, but the effort was swept away by the Second World War. After the war, the civil society organizations in the resorts were disbanded, putting an end to the autonomous self-organizing lakeside culture. However, after the war, the development of the first regional plan began in a more centralized state administration situation. The state no longer wanted to resolve the Balaton issue based on initiatives coming from below, but from above, as a central initiative. The task was entrusted to János Tóth, who had been given a position in the state administration in Budapest. He prepared a draft concept for the regional planning of Lake Balaton on behalf of the ministry. This plan became the first unified regional concept for Lake Balaton and a unique solution in the Hungarian planning history of the period. At the same time, the plan also marks a turning point in the regional movements of Lake Balaton. While previously regional aspirations were typically formulated from the bottom up, organized on a civil basis, this plan was already part of a centralized state project built from the top down.

The starting point of his analysis is the administrative problem of the unified organization of the region. Three counties and 40 settlements shared the Balaton shore, which made it difficult to solve the urbanization problem of the lakeshore in a unified way. As he states in the introduction to his study: "In the new large administrative unit and the reduced number of districts, the unified organization and development of the settlements on the shore of Lake Balaton will only become continuous if all the settlements are permeated by a single will and aspiration, that is, if the entire Balaton shore becomes a single, continuous resort settlement"<sup>36</sup>. That is, since the contemporary administration could not handle the regional-scale unit, and the settlements had by then largely been integrated, he proposed the introduction of a unified local government unit around the lake. When establishing the administrative borders, he took transport and natural conditions as a basis.

In his methodological approach, he took the transport and natural conditions as a basis for establishing the administrative borders. He analyzed the transport situation of the lakeshore in detail and took into account the natural values. His primary consideration in landscape planning was aesthetic interpretation. "Development is twofold: practical and artistic, (aesthetic) the two are organically connected. This is a large landscape blessed by nature, full of practical and artistic possibilities, so the development program must be practical and artistic"<sup>37</sup>. He considered urbanization processes and orthogonal settlement structures harmful and considered traditional, vernacular settlement morphologies to be followed.

János Tóth's plan wanted to preserve the natural areas of the Lake Balaton area with radical interventions. He would have demolished entire holiday complexes and, as compensation, would have given plots of land in other places to holiday homeowners in exchange. "My outline plan was guided by the idea that only those settlements that beautify Lake Balaton from a landscape

<sup>35</sup> In addition to Olivetti, significant Italian architects of the time participated: Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Antonio Banfi, Enrico Peressutti, Ernesto N Rogers. See: Ákos Moravánszky, "Zooming In: The Powers of Scale 1960-1980," in *Re-Scaling the Environment. New Landscapes of Design, 1960-1980. East West Central. Re-Building Europe 1950-1990. Vol. 2*, ed. Á. Moravánszky, K. R. Kegler (Birkhäuser, 2017), 23-40.

<sup>36</sup> János Tóth, "A Balaton környék egységes fejlesztése és rendezése," *Tér és Forma* 19, no. 1-3 (1946): 14 [Unified Development and Planning of the Balaton Area].

<sup>37</sup> Tóth, "A Balaton környék egységes fejlesztése és rendezése," 15.

perspective can remain on the shore 250 meters deep. New settlements can only be established in places that enhance the beauty of Lake Balaton”<sup>38</sup>. He proposed the expropriation of plots and compensation for the liberation of lakeside areas, which may have reflected the radical changes of the post-war years. “Where these conditions are not present, a ban on land subdivision must be imposed, and where land subdivisions have already taken place, all plots must be replaced with plots that lie outside these areas, based on Article VI of 1937, paragraph 17.” In his vision, the waterfront was surrounded by a continuous park. The idea could also be an early ecological idea, but its goal was not to restore the natural waterfront, but to create a green belt for recreation. “Public construction can also be permitted in this area outside the above cases. In this way, Balaton is surrounded by a park and sandy beach that encloses Lake Balaton in an almost uninterrupted park setting”<sup>39</sup>.

He designated reserves for the natural values of Lake Balaton and the still untouched areas of the Balaton Uplands, which protected the values of the landscape. This was a novel, early ecological approach at the time, because the first landscape protection area was only established in the country in 1952, on the Tihany Peninsula, which extends into Lake Balaton. In János Tóth's concept, the landscape is both an ecological value and a tourist destination. In his methodology, he strives to reconcile the two interests, to control modernization and to protect natural areas. He shapes his vision primarily according to aesthetic considerations. The planning concept, which prioritizes the traditions of the landscape, has provided an opportunity to create what he calls “an organic unity”.

However, his plan was extremely controversial. Although he would have created natural shorelines around the lake, he envisioned dense urban development behind the green belt, with settlements built up almost like a ring around the lake. He imagined the unified urban ring as a single connected city and would have created an international-level resort called a “world spa.” Behind the city ring, however, he would have created tightly protected natural zones in the Balaton Uplands. In the functional ring concept, we can also detect the influence of the CIAM urban planning principles. Although the plan was pushed into the background due to post-war reconstruction, the regional-scale concept was the precursor<sup>40</sup> to the later, internationally recognized<sup>41</sup> Balaton development: in the 1950s, following the communist takeover of power, new efforts were made in the centralized state administration towards regional-scale planning and the first target area was the development of the Balaton coast due to its prominent tourist status. The methodological development of Hungarian regional planning achieved significant results not only in Hungarian but also in international planning history<sup>42</sup>, which is also shown by international reflections and awards. The Balaton development won the Abercrombie Prize of the International Union of Architects (UIA) in 1965, the first among socialist countries. The award highlighted the regional plan's sensitive approach to landscape features and architectural solutions<sup>43</sup>. In this planning history process, János Tóth's early experiment was a turning point; his concept transformed settlement-scale thinking into landscape-scale concept creation, and he developed the first regional plan in the history of Lake Balaton.

<sup>38</sup> Tóth, “A Balaton környék egységes fejlesztése és rendezése,” 16.

<sup>39</sup> Tóth, “A Balaton környék egységes fejlesztése és rendezése,” 16.

<sup>40</sup> Lajos Komoróczy, “A Balatonkörnyék üdülőterületeinek fejlesztési kérdései,” *Építésügyi Szemle* 1, no. 2 (1957): 64–71 [Development Issues of the Recreational Areas of the Lake Balaton].

<sup>41</sup> Ákos Moravánszky, “Peripheral Modernism: Charles Polónyi and the Lessons of the Village,” *The Journal of Architecture* 17, no. 3 (2012): 333–359.

<sup>42</sup> Domonkos Wettstein, “A Desire for innocence? Collectivity and recreational architecture around the lake Balaton (1957–1968),” in *Re-humanizing Architecture: New Forms of Community. East West Central. Re-Building Europe 1950–1990*. Vol. 1, ed. Á. Moravánszky, J. Hopfengärtner, T. Lange (Birkhäuser Verlag, 2016), 325–37.

<sup>43</sup> The description of the award is available in the UIA magazine: Anonymous, “Prix August Perret et sir Patrick Abercrombie 1965,” *UIA* 34 (1965): 12–17.

## Conclusion

In the light of international trends in regional-level thinking, it can be stated that a regional perspective comprehensively examining the problems of the region appeared very early in the history of regional development of Lake Balaton, before the war. Due to the seasonally bound society of the resort area and the nature of the institutional system centered in the capital, experts approached the resort area primarily from an external urban position. The architect János Tóth played an important role in the process, first making attempts to define the character of the landscape, then outlining the tasks of a regional-scale institution, and later developing the first regional-scale plan. However, his work is not only an individual achievement; several architects of the era also dealt with different alternatives, so we can speak of a process of planning history. Examining the attempts made to formulate the general Balaton-side character, we can interpret regional architecture not in the context of the countryside, but in the context of the resort area, and we can perceive the concepts as strategic tools for the uniform appearance of mass constructions in the settlement image. In the search for solutions for the resort area, regional strategy creation also affected the architectural and urban planning levels, and branches that had been developing on separate paths in international professional history were intertwined on the shores of Lake Balaton due to the complex landscape problems of recreation. The comprehensive attempt at unified regional planning, in line with the organizational system relying on a civil base, sought to develop a specific, bottom-up methodology, which can be classified as an autonomous methodological phenomenon and an early initiative in the history of both Hungarian and international resort area regional planning.

In contrast to the central development of the later period, the bottom-up approach to the image of the region was also reflected in the conceptualization tools and institutionalization. The construction efforts focused on the development and organization of the spa resorts in close connection with the resort civil initiatives for a unified region. All this can be understood as a specific resort regionalism, where the civil society, which was only seasonally connected to the area, wanted to organize the lakeshore using the professional and social positions of its permanent lifestyle. At the same time, the process contributed to the one-sided development of the seasonally used resort area, which was increasingly separated from the organic whole of the lakeshore, in terms of the entire Balaton area. Examining the development of the regional idea at different scales, it can be stated that the regional perspective appeared in the resort areas on the shore of Lake Balaton at both the architectural and urban planning levels, and the approach could also serve as a starting point for later concepts.