



More than the sum of its parts

Contextual government quarter development Budapest, Hungary

Regional competition **Holcim Awards Gold 2008 Europe; jury appraisal page 50**

The brief: a building complex to house 11 ministries of the Hungarian government in Budapest. The response: a comprehensive approach to urban renewal. Architect Péter Janesch and his team developed a project which not only meets client needs, but includes the revitalization of neighboring urban areas. The result, therefore, is the design of an integrated and operable urban system.



“I think in systems,” Péter Janesch says during a walk through his hometown of Budapest. “A system that functions well is more important to me than obeying the urge to create something unique or aesthetically appealing.” As example, he points to a structure beside the city’s main railway station. The famous station building, designed by the studio of Gustave Eiffel in 1877, has a new neighbor – a multi-storey car park. On its roof is an outdoor complex including café, playground and viewing platform. But the space is not well utilized. “If the system doesn’t function, the archi-

ture has not been well-designed,” he explains.

New location for a long-term project

Systems-thinking won Péter Janesch his biggest project to date – the building of the new Hungarian government complex. For years, the government expressed the desire to find a solution to the dilemma of having its various ministries scattered throughout the city.

Efficiencies of operation were close to nil. Maintenance, renovation and costs of re-

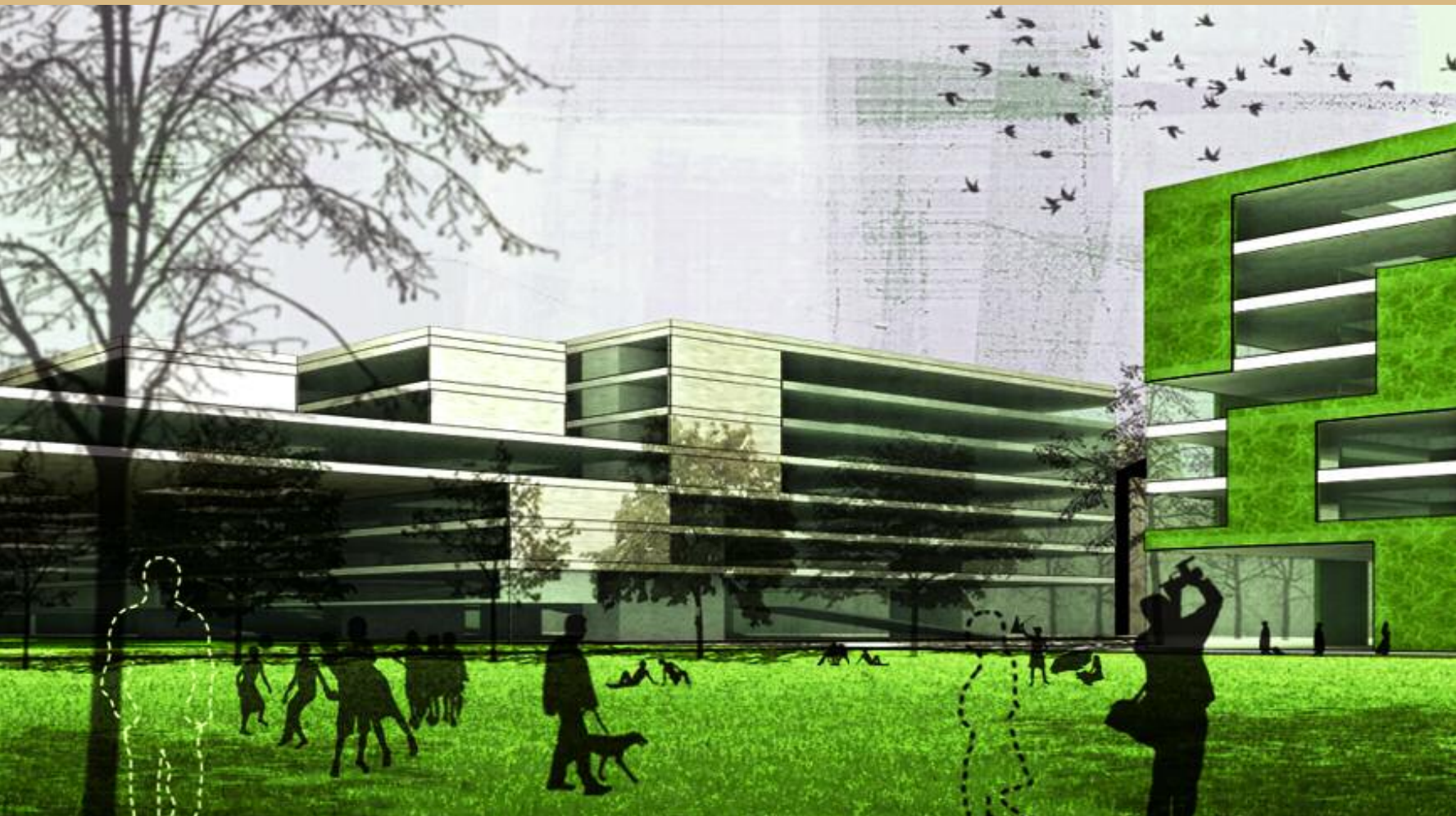
organization were becoming greater. Over time, various site proposals had been flagged, looking at one city area or another. Then, in 2007, agreement was reached – the 30 hectares of largely vacant land beside Gustave Eiffel’s railway station.

All woven together

An international competition was announced for the design of the new government quarter. The jury received 17 proposals; the winner – Teamo7o8, a Hungarian-Japanese co-production. Péter Janesch was team-leader of more than ten young Hungarian



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The government complex is highly accessible to the public and open to walk-through.

architects and 25-30 specialists; Kengo Kuma, well-known for his work in natural materials, led another team of architects and specialists. “Kengo held a lecture in 2007 at a conference here in Budapest. When he heard of the competition, he requested local support – even though the competition was international, the host language was Hungarian.” The teams divided the work amongst themselves – the Japanese looked at the West End City

Center 2 and related urban design issues while the government building was designed by the Hungarians. Péter Janesch and his team worked on a complex of glass and concrete with a horticultural façade – 400 meters long, several storeys high, housing some 150,000 square meters of space for all government ministries. The building, however, is not a square block, but a woven tapestry of spaces connected by inner courtyards which provide for the circulation of light, air and heat. According to the Budapest competition jury led by architect Adam

Sylvester, chairman of the Hungarian Chamber of Architects: “The building is open, spatially variable with the possibility of reorganization as required. It does not represent a symbol to power.”

An integrated concept

This last point of the jury’s was very important for Péter Janesch. “It was clear from the outset that we would not design a government complex with “power” as its leitmotif. Instead our goal is to be a model of common sense, responsibility and sustainability.” Architecture cannot help but be political – the questions confronting the profession today have changed, just as the political context alongside it has also changed.

Through the project’s integrated concept of energy, architecture and urban renewal, it aims to raise awareness within the community and demonstrate the long-term bene-



The system of inner courtyards circulates light, air and heat.

A new experience for Budapest – “green” government buildings.



fits of such an approach for the nation's future development. The designed complex is indeed a role model of eco-consciousness. Its sustainable energy concept fulfills zero-emission requirements. Heat pumps meet 100% of heating and 50% of cooling energy needs. The remaining cooling needs are met by ground air collectors applied to the base plate of the railway lines (or, alternatively, via water piped from the river Danube).

Wall heating and cooling is combined with extreme thermal insulation using innovative materials. Direct heat impact is eliminated by plants on the façade. The use of natural light significantly reduces electricity consumption. Green electricity and hot-water needs are met by solar vacuum tubes and photovoltaic panels. Rainwater is collected, there is split wastewater management. Selective waste management is carried out on site.

“I learned a lot with this design – especially about the integration of new technologies.” **Péter Janesch**

All these measures will lead, in the next 25 years, to energy savings of some USD 700 million. The financing concept for the complex is also sustainable. The plan is for private investors to buy-in and then lease the buildings back to the state. “Private owners are interested in good building quality,” Péter Janesch says. “They do not want the expense of constant renovation.”

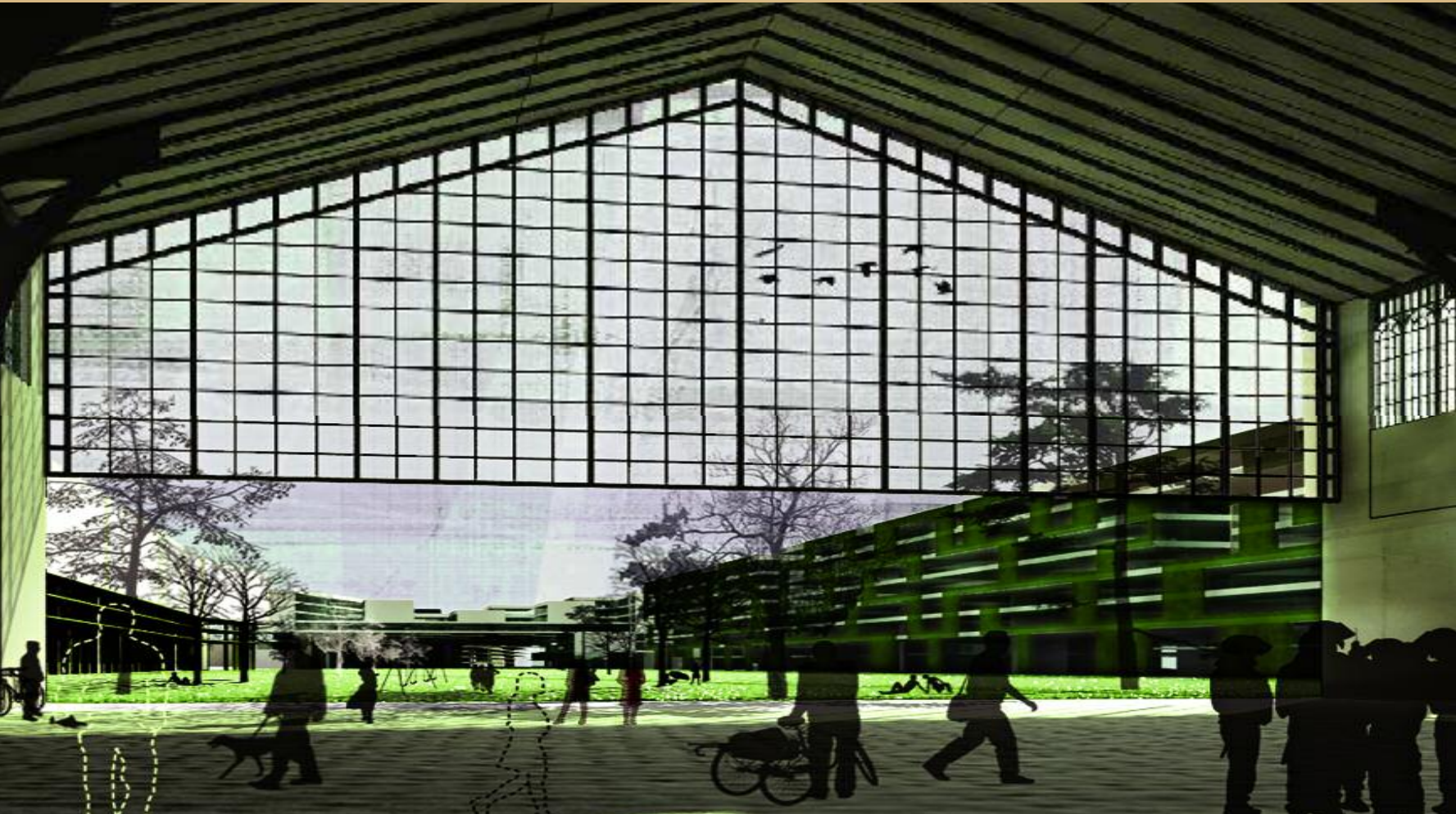
“Four quarters make a whole”

Behind Péter Janesch's quiet demeanor lies the excitement of a man at work on a project he believes in. “I learned a lot with this design – especially about the integration of new technologies. Bringing together tech-

nologies for sustainable building services, eleven different functional units, security requirements, the system of green façades, creating the balance and logistics for all this – it was an enormous challenge.” But he is



The government quarter is a system embedded in the redevelopment of three other precincts.



proud of the result. “It is beautiful to see it all come together – as a system. There is poetry in its complex simplicity.” Yet the government building is only one part of the architect’s vision of a fully-functioning system. “Placing this structure in the middle of the city raises many questions. It needs to have a relationship with the spaces around it. We need to find an equilibrium between its quality and its surrounding environment.”

The team’s ambitious plan is to entirely transform the poorly functioning urban area neighboring the project location. The government building is set into a framework of three equally radical interventions.

“The new complex is only one quarter,” Péter Janesch explains. “It only becomes whole after reworking the other three precincts.” In this way, the resulting system

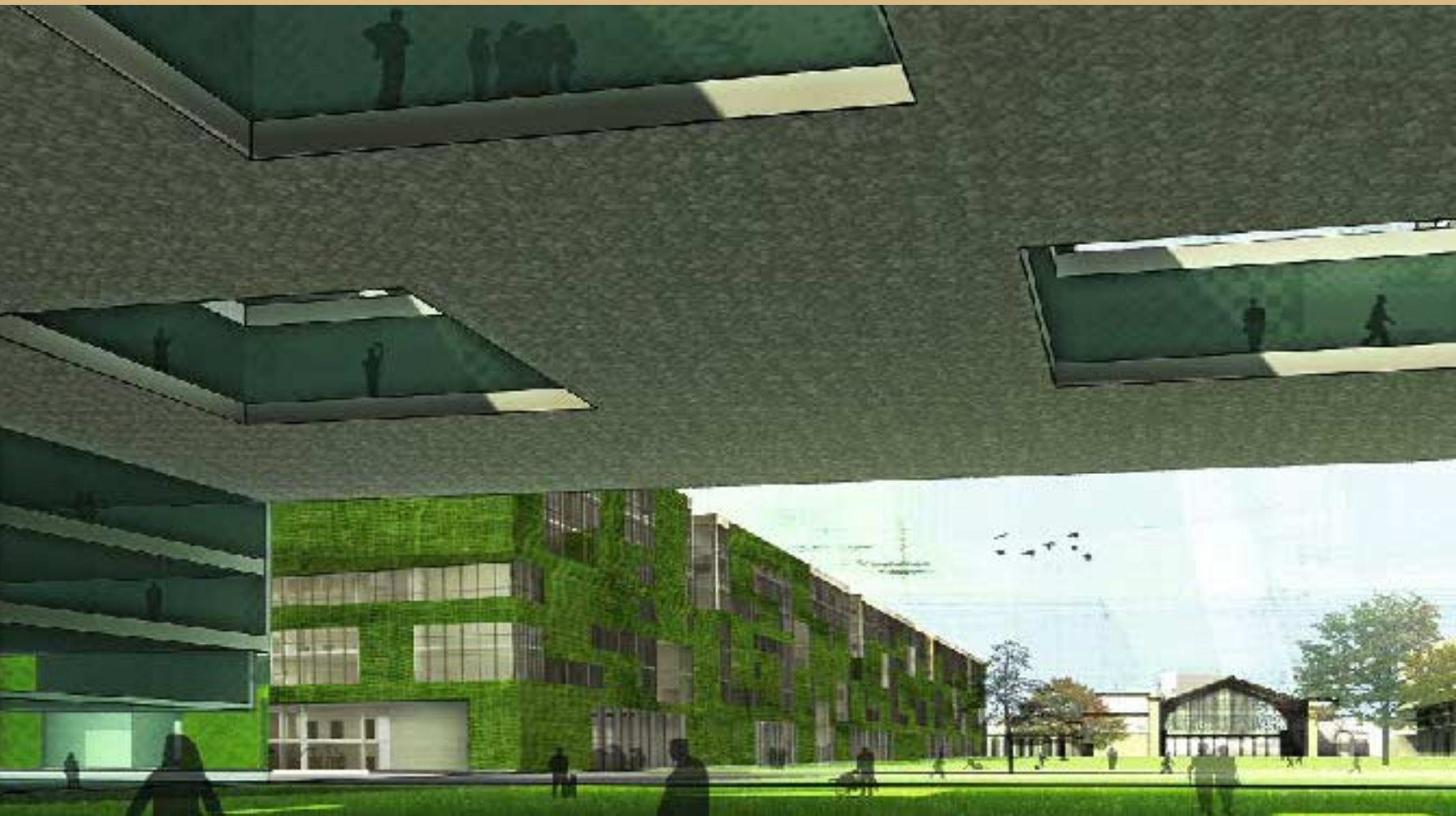
will be more than the sum of its parts. The first intervention concerns the railway lines themselves. Team 0708 suggested taking the rails and station functions underground in order to create a huge public park. “The railway splits the city,” he says. “We needed to create a connection.” That connection is continued through the new urban precinct – with public functions on its lower floors, the aim is to ensure the quarter is highly accessible and open to walk-through.

Urban renewal

The second intervention concerns redevelopment of the town square in front of the station building. The Eiffel Hall itself will be renovated as an attractive public space, a worthy gateway to the new quarter. The final intervention is a full renovation of the 22-block urban area across the street from the new government building. The historic Terez quarter has fallen into a state of decay. Its fin de siècle architecture is run-



Designed by the studio of Gustave Eiffel, the railway station building will be renovated as the gateway to the new precinct.



“A comprehensive approach to urban renewal is needed here.” Péter Janesch

down and neglected. The ground floors of its buildings are heavily underused – only a few low-profile discounters and other retailers serving occasional customers. Traffic and parking is a problem. “A comprehensive approach to urban renewal is needed here,” Péter Janesch believes. “If we create mixed-use zones with an emphasis on pedestrian traffic, liberating them from parked cars, life will return to the quarter. It will be valued differently.”

The flow-on effects are clear – more investment, the renovation of buildings and so on.

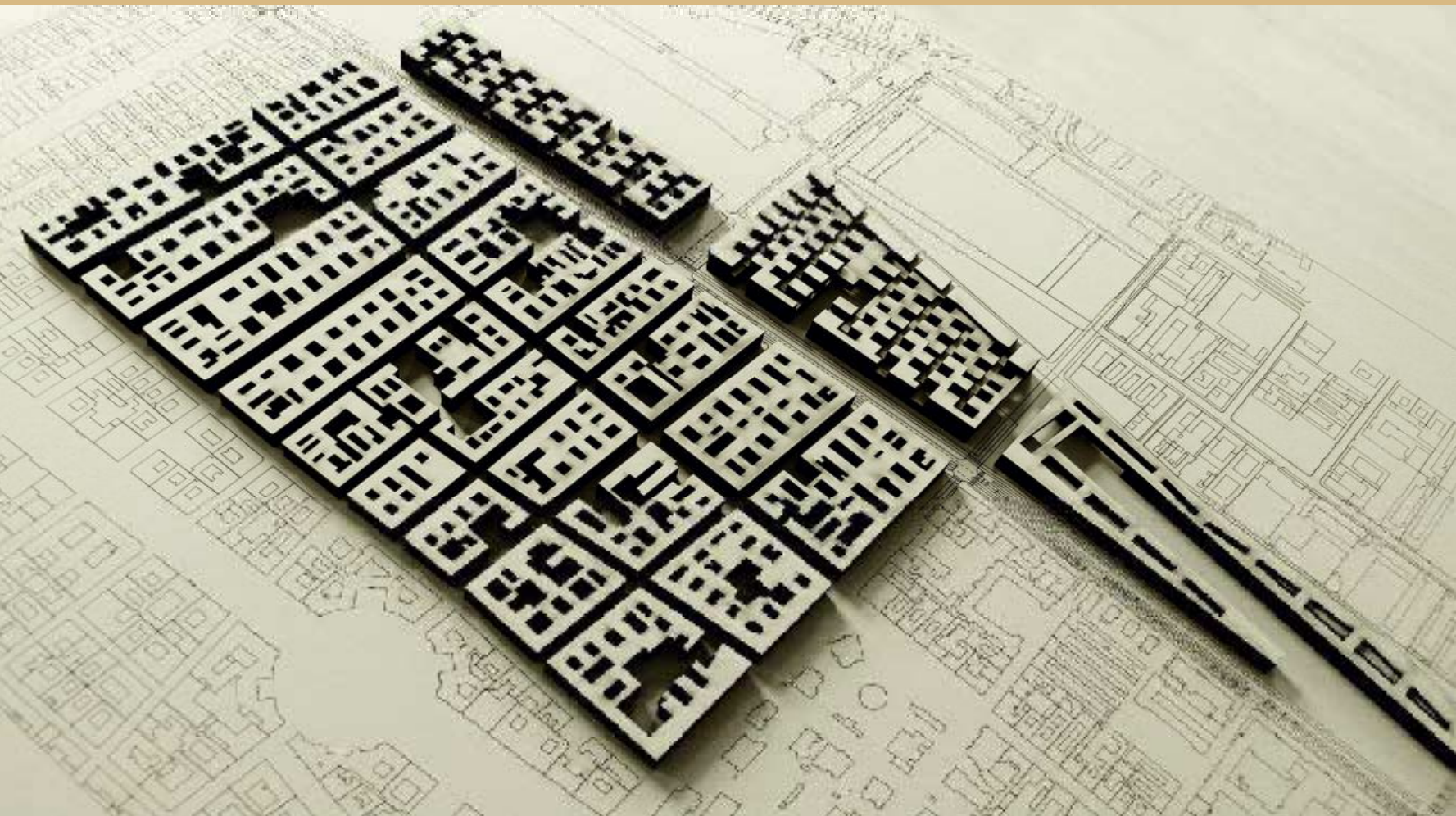
“The infrastructure – the hardware – is the responsibility of the community, represented by local government,” he says. “The software follows.” By creating appropriate conditions, thriving urban life is expected to evolve on street level, increasing the value and quality of apartments on the upper floors. However, it can take some years before such measures are effective. “But it is clearly worth the effort.”

Opportunities to transform

Péter Janesch knows it isn’t simple to ease traffic and take parked cars off the roads. “Everyone hates traffic in the city, even those who drive – it is always preferable to walk through a dedicated pedestrian precinct than slipping in and out between parked cars.” It is a common problem in most cities – the paradox of a car being faster between A and B against the reality of traffic jams. Thinking this through led



New garages take the place of street-side parking – pedestrians are the winners.



The new building's site – at the top of the picture – must fit within its surroundings, hence the proposed interventions to accompany the project.

Péter Janesch and his team to design the new government buildings as an opportunity to transform Budapest's urban landscape. The various measures, however, come at a price – the USD 225 million budget for the project is only one-third of total costs



The historic Terez quarter will substantially profit from the planned revitalization project.

over 25 years – the other two-thirds come from maintenance and leasing, respectively. The government plans to sell previously used buildings to private investors to help cover a fair proportion.

Politics, politics ...

Yet, despite it looking good on paper, there are still discussions within the Hungarian parliament about the project's viability. "A lot is politically-driven," Péter Janesch admits. Although each administration since 1989 has planned the establishment of a government quarter, there is opposition critical of the investment required for its realization, describing the project as building a "new aristocracy". As a result, the new ministries precinct, and by default all other proposals, are currently on hold – due to unclear definition of roles and cost-sharing, interest from private investors has diminished, and indeed, in the end, only one

expression of interest has been received. For example, the expectation of additional traffic, a consequence of the density of government administration centered on a single location, cannot be handled by existing road infrastructure, only in a much wider context. "This lies outside the sphere of influence of investors, who don't have the political means for controlling larger-scale urban processes," he explains. "Taking on such risks is not for the serious player."

Intervention as investment

Whether the project will be eventually realized, Péter Janesch can only answer with a shrug. "The situation was rather strange," he remembers. "We had won this international competition, but we weren't only celebrating our selection, but were also mindful of the long road ahead." This was no football tournament – "there you win, you go home, you celebrate. Here you have



Seats of government – objects and symbols

The desire to build a new seat of government is a radical idea which takes much time and planning to be realized. In the case of Brazil, a decision was taken as early as 1891. However it was not until 1956 that construction began on the new capital, in the geographic center of the country; in 1960 Brasilia was inaugurated. Urban planner Lucio Costa envisioned the new city as “progress” – for him, the form of an aeroplane represented this idea best. Oscar Niemeyer was the architect responsible for building the city. His cathedral and parliamentary buildings are iconic structures in 20th century architecture.

Many countries search for an appropriate symbol to represent the values and cultural integrity they stand for – for example, Germany, against its historic backdrop. In 1963, architect Sep Ruf designed the new seat of government in Bonn – the idea “transparency”, the building an objective representation of same. After unification in 1990, the question stood before the nation again. This time Axel Schultes and Charlotte Frank were the designers. Their “Band des Bundes” stands in Berlin as a symbolic bridge between East and West along the length of the city’s river – reconnecting what was lost, representing hope for a common future. Meanwhile, in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia, renowned architects Norman Foster and Zaha Hadid are busy working on that city’s new government precinct. As in Budapest, the plan is to have all ministries, currently strewn across the city in outdated buildings, brought together in the one location by 2012.

“We need to find an equilibrium between the building’s quality and its surrounding environment.” Péter Janesch (pictured above)

to win again and again. First, the project has to be carried out, and second, it has to be realized well.” In Teamo708’s case, there was the pressure to continue working, but then in the blink of an eye, the project’s suspension. Now, however, batteries recharged, he is hopeful the project will be resurrected. The government has signaled that the project is by no means off the table: “During the process of preparations several issues have been raised ... which proved to be time consuming, ... postponing but not cancelling the construction of the new government quarter,” a report announced. The team, therefore, has a green light to work on the concept in detail.

“It is complicated,” the architect admits. “There are many stakeholders to work with – government, city, district, railway company,



With the railway lines underground, the station building will be free for other uses.

investors, community.” Nevertheless, for this architect who thinks in systems, it is worth the effort. “The construction costs are high, yes, but more than compensated by the lower operating costs and revitalized economic growth it will bring to adjacent quarters,” Péter Janesch says. “The intervention is long-term. And that makes it a good investment.”



The quarter proposed for the new government complex is potentially one of the most valuable areas of Budapest.