

6. The Jewish District (Budapest, Hungary)

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Introduction

The so-called Jewish District is a historical neighborhood in the center of Budapest. Recently it has also been known as the “Party District” or “Ruin Bar District” referring to a phenomenon that emerged around 2000 when courtyards of dilapidated empty buildings signed for demolition were turned into combined hospitality and cultural venues. Ruin bars bringing life to the run-down district still in need of revitalization a decade after the fall of Socialism became very popular among locals and tourists, and since the 2010s grew into a mass phenomenon. The district is now in the focus of interest of investors, and its economic, social, and cultural profile has changed to a great extent, including problems such as gentrification and overtourism. The preservation, renovation, and uses of the historical building stock lead to questions about heritage values and processes as well as the roles of various stakeholders in this respect. The case study chosen from among the inhabitants of the historical buildings in the Jewish District, Szimpla Kert, is one of the first ruin bars, with a clear vision about the district as a livable place where social diversity, inclusiveness, empowerment, and cultural heritage is respected and sustained.

1 Timeline

- From the first half of the 19th century – formation of the Jewish District.
- 1841 – the house under 14 Kazinczy Street, where Szimpla operates now, was built.
- 1944 – a large part of the district, including Kazinczy 14, is part of Budapest Ghetto.
- Between 1945 and 1989 – buildings in the district were deteriorating.
- The 1990s – plans by the local municipality to revitalize the district, demolition of some historical buildings.
- 1996-1999 – the first inventory of the built heritage in the district, the beginning of heritage activism.
- 2001 – The first ruin pubs opened, including Szimpla Kávézó (Simple Café) on Kertész Street.
- 2002 – The Jewish District became the buffer zone of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Budapest.
- 2002 – Szimpla Kert (Simple Garden) was opened on Király Street.
- 2004 – the ÓVÁS! Civic Association was officially established.
- 2004-2005 – The National Office of Cultural Heritage declared a large part of the 7th district (so-called Jewish Quarter) a protected area and several buildings protected monuments.
- 2004 – Szimpla moved to 14 Kazinczy Street.
- 2010 – Tourism in the Jewish District reached a mass scale; a boom of Airbnb and hostels
- 2015 – Szimpla established its Office for Communication.

2 Story

2.1 History of the Jewish District

The inner part of the 7th district of Budapest, also called Jewish District, is the result of a long historical development rooted mostly in the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. Merchants and artisans who were not allowed to settle down within the city walls of Pest, started to build their dwellings in this area (Perczel 2007, 17). Though it was a multiethnic and multireligious neighborhood, the most significant group was constituted by the Jews: before the second world war, 30% of the population was Jewish (Locsmándi 2011, 184). Many of them built houses that had small workshops or factories in the courtyards and on the ground floors. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the district was a typical commercial neighborhood spotted with characteristic Jewish buildings, such as synagogues, schools, and baths.

During the second world war, a large part of the district was turned into the Jewish Ghetto. Many of the Jews of Pest fell victim to the Holocaust, and from among those who survived, many decided to leave the country after the war. All these events, as well as the Socialist nationalization of the buildings and enterprises, largely damaged Jewish culture, even though one of the largest Jewish communities in Central-Eastern Europe still lives here (Egedy and Smith 2016, 96-97). After the houses became state property, they were not maintained appropriately anymore, and a decline in the inhabitant's social status accompanied the deterioration of the buildings. By the 1980s, the former glory of the district significantly faded.

2.2 The Jewish District after 1990

The collapse of Communism in Hungary in 1989 opened the way for the privatization of real estate. In the second half of the 1990s, the local municipality came up with plans to redevelop the district by significantly changing the existing housing stock, including several demolition orders (Polyák 2006). Many new owners were speculators who were not interested in renovating the historical buildings but demolished them and erected new, usually cheap, and low-quality ones instead, which did not match the streetscape (Csanádi et al. 2011, 205).



Figure 1 Old and modern buildings at the intersection of Kazinczy and Wesselényi Streets. Photo: Dóra Mérai.

Speculative investors purchased several properties and waited for an increase in real estate prices, and these buildings were left empty for years, even after their privatization (Smith et al. 2018, 535). The general bad condition of the old building stock inhabited by the residents was combined with serious social problems, while, due to the demolishing trend, the district started to lose its former architectural and aesthetic character.

This was noticed by a small group of heritage experts who launched a project to survey and document the historical building stock, and they discovered that Jewish intangible heritage had survived there in a previously unknown and significant extent (Perczel 2005). They turned to the National Office of Cultural Heritage and UNESCO in order to protect, preserve, and present the heritage of the district, and in 2004, they established a civic organization called [ÓVÁS!](#) (the word meaning both Veto and Protection). In 2002, a large part of the area labeled as the Old Jewish Quarter of Pest became the buffer zone of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Andrassy Road. The National Office of Cultural Heritage declared the Jewish Quarter an area of heritage significance in 2004, and 2005, a large set of buildings were certified as protected monuments. However, the protected status did not prevent the demolition or significant reconstruction of buildings either, even if the process slowed down. What is more, the UNESCO World Heritage site status was associated with the rapid development of tourism and fueled speculative expectations. By 2007, almost 40% of the 19th-century buildings were destroyed, and, though now there are many more tools in the hand of heritage protectionists, they still do not see the situation as satisfactory (Perczel 2007, 13).

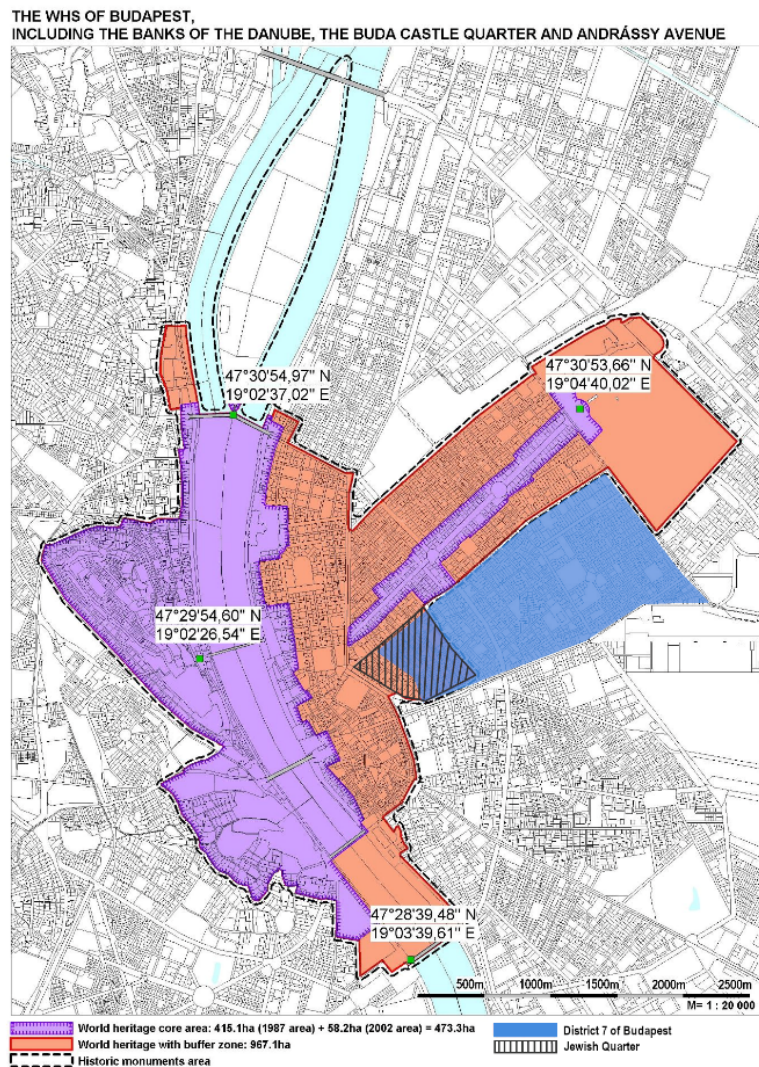


Figure 2 The UNESCO World Heritage Site (purple) and its buffer zone (brown) in Budapest, and its relation to the 7th district (blue) and the Jewish District (striped) within.

Source: whc.unesco.org, edited by Kyra Lyublyanovics

2.3 From Jewish District to Party District

Parallel with these processes, a new phenomenon emerged that brought international fame for the district and placed it as a “must” to the tourists’ map: the ruin bars.

RUIN BARS

Ruin bars emerged after 2000 in the courtyards of dilapidated empty buildings signed for demolition, sometimes even under obscure legal circumstances. They were established by artists and intellectuals based on their private capital, as venues for an alternative, non-conformist, non-consumerist underground culture. Ruin bars, such as Szimpla, Szóda, Sirály, Mumus, became very popular among the locals. They organized concerts, art exhibits, theater plays, literary events, and Sirály even operated a small library.

A new sub-culture emerged, which also gave space to initiatives connecting to the Jewish culture. Ruin bars brought life to the district and used the special atmosphere of the dilapidated buildings for their benefit: this provided the essence of the aesthetics and atmosphere. Another advantage of the historical buildings was their spatial organization, with wings around inner courtyards, the latter being perfect spaces for small communities to gather (Lugosi et al. 2010).

The first ruin bars rented the places for a nominal cost (Lugosi et al. 2010, 3086; Molnár 2019a). Soon, both the municipality and private real-estate owners recognized the potential in the growing popularity of the bars and the entire district. The municipality pushed out the ruin bars from their properties in order to be able to sell the latter. Renting the buildings to such bars was an easy way to benefit the speculators who had no resources to invest in the renovation or were stopped by the success of monument protectionists (Marques and Richards 2014, 107). This temporary reuse without renovation saved a part of the historical building stock in a period of uncertainty. Buildings occupied by ruin bars were not demolished or altered in the years of most intense speculation, and this was a solution to keep a fair level of maintenance (Perczel 2019).

The ground floors of the buildings were empty. There was no life at all. When the first ruin bars opened, Szimpla and Szóda, we were thrilled, they brought life here. It was good for the district; we felt that these were positive changes. They were able to move into the houses which were not allowed to be demolished any more due to our initiative [ÓVÁS] and the interference by the UNESCO. (Perczel 2019)

Tourists very soon discovered ruin bars, and the district became a target for foreign visitors. Nightlife intensified to an extreme level in the district, and a huge market evolved for tourist accommodation, a new field for developers. Airbnb and hostels became a mass phenomenon in the Jewish District as well as in the nearby areas by the early 2010s (Pinke-Sziva et al. 2019, 6). Property and rental prices skyrocketed, and ruin bars also had to generate substantial revenues to pay the market rents, so they had to switch to a more economically sustainable model. A second wave of the ruin bars appeared in the summer of 2010, and these were more for-profit enterprises compared to the pioneers in this field (Csanádi et al. 2011).



Figure 3 A cluster of modern pubs in Gozsdu Court. Photo: Dóra Méráí

The character of the district has changed since then, and it is called by its new name now as the “party district” of Budapest (Smith et al. 2018, 532-533). Overtourism became a serious problem, similarly to other capitals in Europe, and the original inhabitants are moving out because the side-effects of nightlife are unbearable for them. Gentrification seems to be an unstoppable process, and the local municipality is not able to handle efficiently any of these problems (Csanádi, Csizmady, and Olt 2011).

Meanwhile, the concept of ruin bar changed too, and the old ones – even those established around 2010 – are closing one by one year by year. There are only a few places still fighting to keep their original mission and character and to keep the district as a livable place. Among these, Szimpla is the most influential one, a bar successfully operating in a protected monument building for 15 years now, that became a world celebrity and a serious stakeholder in the discussions about the future of this historical district of Budapest.

3 Policy context

Right after the end of the Socialist era, the local district municipalities got a significant autonomy within Budapest in terms of urban development. The districts were authorized to develop their planning documents and building codes, and they also received the duty of post-Socialist rehabilitation of the neglected urban space (Polyák 2006; Kovács 2009; Locsmándi 2011, 144; Smith et al. 2018).

It is the policy of the local municipality that determines the level and character of urban regeneration in the district. In contrast with the districts that apply an active strategy or provide limited support, the 7th district chose a “hands-off approach” or “non-planning” strategy, which was a passive attitude that relied very much on the market. The local municipality did not think strategically about the development of the district before investors appeared in the late 1990. For about

a decade, the demolition of historical buildings and the erection of new buildings were based on ad hoc decisions, and the legal and planning framework of urban development was missing (Kovács et al. 2013, 26, 31-32; Smith et al. 2018). This was a serious problem in a situation that was chaotic in terms of ownership and responsibilities.

Many buildings quickly got to private ownership, often under questionable circumstances. Developers took over the control soon, and they started to move out of the residents, which paved the way to the process of gentrification (Locsmándi 2011, 171-172, Kovács et al. 2013, 32). The district adopted a local planning and building code, but it was highly open for negotiations (Locsmándi 2011, 146). The local development plan created in 1999 contained several demolition orders (Polyák 2006). This, combined with a high level of corruption, quickly lead to serious damage in the urban fabric and the escalation of social problems.

Changes in the official heritage status of the area and specific buildings from 2002, 2004, and 2005 forced the municipality to deal with the issue but did not stop the demolishing for a while, and neither did it solve the problem of conservation and substandard living conditions in the historical buildings. These later served as the basis of arguments by the municipality on social development and slum-clearing (Polyák 2006, Csanádi et al. 2011, Perczel 2019). Buildings with apartments purchased by their former tenants represent another special problem: the residents should take care of the renovation with the help of city- and district-level financial support programs, which do not prove to provide sufficient help (Kovács et al. 2013, 26; Bodó 2019). As a result of these processes, in the Jewish District, 20-40% of the buildings have been renovated between 1989 and 2013, while in other districts of the city center, this is even more than 75% (Kovács 2013, 26, fig. 2).

In 2015, the district municipality issued a long-term Settlement Development Concept for 2014-2030 and a mid-term Integrated Settlement Development Strategy for 2014-2020 to address all these issues. They defined the vision of the municipality about the district as an area providing high-quality life conditions, urban services, and favorable environmental conditions for various generations, with a touristic offer based on its rich built and intangible heritage. Cooperation, climate consciousness, and solidarity are defined as the main values. To deal with historical building stock, they intend to maintain the financial support framework for renovations and to establish a support program developing suitable technical solutions. The document accentuates the importance of the historical cityscape and the variability in the functions and puts emphasis on keeping the dwelling functions to avoid a "Skansen" effect. Development areas include the elaboration of a methodology for protecting the complex heritage and for the energetical renovation of historical buildings.

The Strategy defined the mid-term goals for development as improving living conditions and reducing the conflicts by respecting the historical architectural environment, promoting tourism and creative economy, and increasing the cohesion of the local society. The planned interventions in the Jewish District include the renovation of public spaces with participatory planning, the renovation of houses, mostly protected monuments, and the rehabilitation of Jewish memorial

sites. The interventions are partly tasks for the municipality, partly require the development of a partnership with the private sector, condominium owners, and cultural and church organizations. The municipality also aims to develop the local identity by educating the new residents and visitors about the history and culture of the district.

The Settlement Image Decree and Settlement Image Manual accepted in 2017, and a new Local Building Code from 2018 regulates the construction activities in the district. The aim is formulated in accordance with the strategic documents: the sustainable and organic development of the historical district and the protection of its values. It is, however, not clear what they define as values besides the legally protected sites and how decisions are made upon them. Owners and developers have a reporting obligation towards the municipality, and in the case of constructions and demolitions, special local permission is needed in addition to the regular permissions, but the actual choices are very much upon the discretion of the designing architect and the chief architect of the municipality.

The local development strategy also recognizes the danger of the domination of low-quality hospitality industry and suggests a strict control over the profile of new businesses in the Jewish District. Ruin bars have been in focus due to their conflicts with the residents since their popularity rose. The Hungarian legislation favors the entrepreneurs in these situations, so the municipality was forced to handle the problem (Smith et al. 2018, 537-539). After several attempts to restrict the opening hours by a municipal decision, finally, a referendum was held in the 7th district on the issue in 2019, which, however, was unsuccessful due to the low number of participants (Szabó 2018). Another method tried by the district leadership was to change the profile of the area. The local government initiated the project “The Street of Culture” in 2010 with EU funding aimed to renovate and re-profile Kazinczy Street, one of the core areas of nightlife.

Local elections held in 2019 November created a new situation since the leadership of the district and the capital was taken over by the political opposition after a long period. The expectations towards the new team are to take up an initiating role, to play a more significant role in managing the conflicts, and to move the district closer to the strategic goals by developing strong partnerships between the main stakeholders.

4 The social and economic transformation of the Jewish District: a space of multiple conflicts

Ruin bars emerged and flourished in the niche that appeared due to the tensions between urban decay, protected heritage, and private investment (Lugosi et al. 2010). Starting from the use of dilapidated buildings, the area became a creative hub, now dominated by restaurants, bars, design shops, galleries, museums, and festivals. In the small area of walking distance, there were 180 restaurants, 31 ruin bars, 25 hotels, 15 galleries, 22 design shops according to a survey in 2014 (Marques and Richards 2014, 105), and these numbers have surely increased since

then. The growth of the global tourism industry, especially fast tourism favored by low-cost airlines, contributed to the international success of the hospitality industry in the district, and ruin pubs defined it as a primary target for tourists within Budapest (Smith et al. 2018, 537).



Figure 4 A shop for tourists on Király Street. Photo: Dóra Mériai

Urban rehabilitation and the success of the hospitality industry caused rapid demographic and social changes in the district. The increasing economic value of the neighborhood determined the process of gentrification. It forced out low-income residents due to the increased cost of rent and higher cost of goods as well as to the laissez-faire urban development policy of the district municipality. Younger families with a background in creative industries are replacing households with elderly people and from lower social classes. The popularity of the district among tourists led to a boom of short-term rental services. Proliferation of services like Airbnb and Booking.com catalyzed the process. Around 2,000 apartments are rented out in this form in the 7th district, about a fifth part of those in the entire Budapest (Molnár 2019b). Many houses have hardly any registered residents, and even those often stay for a few years only, then move on. Traditional neighborhood communities have been dissolved, social ties damaged, and this process is irreversible now (Settlement Development Concept for 2014-2030, 10; Pinke-Sziva et al. 2019, Smith et al. 2019). As one of the local shop owners says,

Only Airbnb is here; everyone moves away from here... It has a very bad effect on the traditional residents of the street, many who rented here move away... It is a bit painful to see that three or four families move away from this [Kazinczy] street every year because it is impossible to live in these houses due to the Airbnb guests. (Rácz 2019)

Tensions and conflicts have emerged between, but also within the main groups of stakeholders: residents, real-estate developers, hospitality enterprises, heritage protectionists, and the local government.

Developers versus residents. In the period of post-Socialist privatization, developers faced problems when evicting the inhabitants, and the process was problematic both in legal and ethical terms. Urban rehabilitation in the district was focused on physical renovation. It was determined by the interests of the real estate developers; the interests of the residents were barely considered. Residents in those buildings which were not sold to developers are not able to finance the renovation of the old buildings; their living conditions are below the modern standards. Inequality increased: the district is a mixture of luxury apartments and slums often within the same streets.



Figure 5 A former apartment house turned into a hotel and business hub by investors (left) and another one still inhabited by residents who lack the funding to renovate it (right), both on Király Street. Photo: Dóra Mériai

Developers versus heritage protectionists. Developers were not very much interested in heritage values unless they could monetize them; both they and the municipality saw potential in the UNESCO label in this respect. Investors were often speculators who did not buy to develop but to wait for the prices go up and did not spend on maintaining the historical building stock which was quickly deteriorating. They also started to demolish the old buildings and build new houses which did not match the historical streetscape. Damaging the buildings took other forms too, for example, by keeping the façade but demolishing the structure behind it or adding new floors on the top of old buildings. Heritage specialists and civic activists stood up against these trends and were successful in stopping some physical changes in the building stock but not others. There seems to be no compromise between the two parties.

Hospitality entrepreneurs versus the local government. Enterprises contribute to the local budget with significant sums, but they are not satisfied with the service they receive in exchange: the cleanliness of public areas, public safety in the streets, and the presence of petty criminals disturb their clientele and employees. They would expect a more pro-active attitude on behalf of the municipality in solving the infrastructural problems too (Molnár 2019a).

Heritage protectionists versus local government. The local government has argued for the modernization of the district, and they have seen the construction

of new buildings and the reconstruction of historical ones as a part of that. Heritage activists (lead by the NGO ÓVÁS!) have been fighting against these processes to preserve the values of the area. The protected status achieved by heritage activists was first seen by the municipality as an obstacle to the revitalization endeavors intended to address the social problems in the district and as a factor to alienate developers (Polyák 2006). The “price” for protection was that the local government could not develop some areas, and around 3,000 residents stayed in their comfortless apartments, which indicates a conflict between the **residents versus heritage protectionists** too.

Residents versus the local government. The absence of strategy on behalf of the municipality resulted in the unequal development of the district. Many buildings are still dilapidated, and streets are neglected. The local government cannot control the damage of nightlife and overtourism on the quality of life in the district. Residents would expect a more efficient strategy from the municipality in this respect. The civic initiative called Élhető Erzsébetvárosért (For a Livable Elizabeth Town) pushed the district government to organize a referendum on the opening hours in 2018, and they entered the scene of local elections too with their own candidates in 2019 October.

Residents versus hospitality entrepreneurs. The biggest problem is the late-night noise, littering, and the misbehavior of visitors (Smith et al. 2018, 535-536). Drugs, prostitution appeared in the streets. Residents in houses with Airbnb flats suffer from the movement of tourists with suitcases. This conflict also appears in terms of locals versus foreigners, even though many foreigners are owners and residents in the area. The residents do not benefit from the success of business in the area in terms of their quality of life.

Aforementioned groups of stakeholders are not homogeneous, but there are conflicts even within them. For example, there is a conflict between the “socially-responsible” (first generation) bars, such as Szimpla, and the new ones that exploit the model to make as much profit as possible with little concerns about the consequences for the neighborhood:

There are many bars which are profit-oriented: they are going for volume, they are going for tourists who drink a lot, who drink to be as drunk as possible. And then the residents of the 7th district have a very negative image about all the bars. It is bad for both the residents and the businesses, and it spoils the reputation of the industry. (Molnár 2019a)

5 Heritage in the Jewish District

5.1 Built heritage

Discourse on heritage in the Jewish District started in the second half of the 1990s when the first heritage professionals launched an inventory work to act against the demolishing and rebuilding plans of the district government. Research and public discussion focused only on built and tangible heritage. The success of the combined professional and civic campaign also affected these: in 2002, the Jewish District became the buffer zone of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, then, in 2004, became

a heritage area also protected by the Hungarian law (Perczel 2019). Mostly due to the protection campaign in 2004 and 2005, currently 65 buildings in the Jewish District have official monument (műemlék) status: 63 at the national level and 2 within the district (Perczel 2019). One of the latter, a one-story building with a garden at 8 Nagy Diófa Street, was assigned for demolition, but the residents objected, so the district issued a heritage protection decree about this house (Perczel 2019). The civic association ÓVÁS! is an important supporter of such bottom-up initiatives and played a crucial role in achieving protected status for various sites and buildings. Supported by a massive civic basis, they also have an important monitoring role. In 2006 they were the ones who turned to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee and signaled that the developments endanger the built heritage in the district. The Committee sent a mission to examine the situation, and, based on the report, expressed its concern and laid down some suggestions for the local and national government (UNESCO World Heritage Committee 2008).

5.2 Jewish heritage

The ÓVÁS! association, had a leading role in recognition of the area as a “Jewish District.” They promote the research and presentation of the intangible heritage as well, which is the target of their more recent projects but focusing only on the Jewish past (Török 2013; “Kik éltek, kik építettek itt?”). Jewish intangible heritage has been explored by other projects as well in the framework of Jewish studies (Frojimovics et al. 1998).

As I went from house to house, the inhabitants told me that only Jews had lived there before [WWII], only the janitor was Christian or the servants. In every third or fourth house, there was a Jewish, kosher slaughterhouse, bakery, meat smoker, and on the upper floors, there were prayer rooms and synagogues. (Perczel 2019)



Figure 6 The Big Synagogue in Dohány Street. Photo: Dóra Méráí

JEWISH BUDAPEST

From the mid-nineteenth century, the district hosted one of Europe's largest Jewish communities. The bulk of the Jewish inhabitants of Budapest disappeared due to the Holocaust and the emigration afterward, but after 1990, Jewish presence became more visible in the district. Today 45-90,000 Jews live in Hungary, and 80-90% live in Budapest, not exclusively in this district (Egedy and Smith, 2016).

There is a Jewish religious community today visible through their buildings, practices, cultural institutions, and characteristic representatives in the streets. However, there is another type of Jewish community among the residents, who do not necessarily practice their religion, and who have preserved their identity at a varying level. They are important carriers of local intangible heritage and are being pushed out these years by the new developmental trends.

The third form of defining the Jewishness of the district in terms of heritage is Jewish heritage tourism that emerged after 2000. This process also contributed to the concept of the Jewish District of Pest and fits into the European trend of creation and heritagization of Jewish spaces, such as in Prague or Krakow (Gruber 2009, Gantner 2014, Walkowitz 2018). Jewish thematic guided tours and online applications are offered in this part of Budapest, Jewish cuisine flourishes, and there has been a Jewish Cultural Festival organized every summer since 2015.

Jewish heritage tourism is closely interlinked with the cultivation of Jewish memorial sites and the memory of Holocaust victims and the Ghetto both by the Jewish religious community and by the heritage protectionists, professionals, and activists. The last intact remain of the Ghetto wall located at 15 Király Street was demolished in 2006 despite the protest of the residents. The ÓVÁS! association achieved that in 2010, the wall was rebuilt, and a memorial plaque was placed there in the framework of a ceremony, which has been a target of Jewish heritage tourism ever since then.

5.3 Intangible heritage

The problem of built heritage and intangible heritage in the district often appears in an artificial separation, especially in the public discourse, where mostly built heritage is the focus of concern, while layers of intangible heritage other than (old and post-2000) Jewish traditions are not recognized at all. Together with the residents, the intangible heritage of everyday life in the district also disappears, especially those of low-social-status and marginalized groups, but also traditional professions.

Disappearing crafts should be brought back and re-established, such as clockmaking, goldsmith- and leatherwork, and their representatives should be helped to pursue these professions for which there is still a need. People are pushed out from the market because they have the knowledge, but they do not have the management skills to commercialize that... When this district was a Jewish District, it was about professions, and it also had its cultural side. There was a very rich life here. (Bodó 2019)

Since built heritage is more than just the architecture, but includes all kinds of intangible aspects, such as the uses of spaces and buildings, the related practices, communities, and ideas – all of which change together with the ever changing social environment –, the heritage profile of the district has significantly transformed since the 1990s. A new layer of heritage evolved with the appearance of ruin bars, their unique atmosphere, and the related groups and their activities, which is also disappearing now with the process of gentrification in the area. It is not just the original residents of the houses that are pushed out, but also the first, special, local, and unique wave of the 21st-century hospitality industry – paradoxically, due to its immense success – as a result of which the area loses its unique appeal. Only a few actors have recognized the danger of this process in the Jewish District and developed a strategic way of thinking and acting about it, and the most visible of whom is Szimpla.

6 Szimpla

Szimpla is the oldest ruin bar in the Jewish district now, and it is conscious about the heritage they curate both in tangible and intangible terms. They also have an understanding of how heritage can contribute to creating a better life in the neighborhood, and they connect various groups of stakeholders in the district and beyond who share their vision.

6.1 The story of Szimpla

The history of Szimpla started in 2001 when Gábor Bertényi, Márk Gauder, Attila Kiss, and Ábel Zsendovits established a small bar on Kertész Street in the 7th district of Budapest. The founders were not professionals in the hospitality industry; they had degrees in social sciences and art. This background brought new aspects to hospitality practices in Budapest: they aimed to establish a cultural and community center with a variety of cultural and social programs (Molnár 2019b).

In 2002 they opened the first Szimpla Kert, an open-air venue in an inner courtyard on Király Street, which in 2004 moved to 14 Kazinczy Street, a dilapidated nineteenth-century house that is now a protected monument (Somlyódy 2007, Molnár 2019b). Step by step, they made their home in the building, which became an iconic feature of the world-famous bar.



Figure 7 Façade of Szimpla Kert on Kazinczy Street. Photo: Dóra Méri

Szimpla was very popular among Budapest's residents and tourists from the very beginning at each of its venues, but the real international fame came in 2012 when Lonely Planet included it to the list of best bars in the world (Ruinpubs.com; Velkey 2016). As a result, Szimpla and ruin bars, in general, became a primary target among foreign tourists, and the number of visitors has been growing ever since then (Molnár 2019).

Popularity and economic success had its price. Overcrowdedness, the growing level of noise and garbage, and criminals attracted by tourists damaged the relationships between the ruin bars and the local communities. Szimpla and other ruin bars had to elaborate a new strategy on how to keep their economic sustainability, preserve good relations with the residents, and preserve their core values. As Bence Molnár, the head of the Office for Communication of Szimpla put it:

The original concept was not just a bar. It was opened by people who wanted to have a place for community meetings and cultural programs. Of course, the founders considered making a profit; economic sustainability was part of the concept from the very beginning. However, the idea of having a community place open to everybody was an essential part of the concept as well. The mission has not changed since then. What has changed is the popularity and the number of people who are coming here. (Molnár 2019b)

The owners opened further venues in Budapest and elsewhere in Hungary, but none of these became as successful as Szimpla Kert in Kazinczy Street. The latter inspired a family-oriented café in Vác, a small town north of Budapest, two places in Berlin, and Szimpla Szentgyörgy in Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania.

6.2 Values and mission of the enterprise

The vision of Szimpla from the very beginning was to be an organization that gathers creative people, hosts cultural events, welcomes civil movements, and gives space to everyone to meet and share cultural experiences. On its website (szimpla.hu), Szimpla defines itself as a “post-modern culture center,” a “cultural reception space,” and a “civic base.” They also emphasize the importance of social responsibility: “We are committed to local communities, livable cities, and the environment” (Szimpla. Guide to Budapest & Hungary). Bence Molnár communications director explains the priorities of the enterprise as follows:

We organize art; we target people who are interested in new things, original things, creative things in music, fine arts, and any kind of interactive cultural program. With the civil movements and fairs, we are trying to pick directions that we feel are very much needed. (Molnár 2019b)

Though Szimpla is one of the most popular bars in Europe, selling food and drinks for them is only a means to ensure the financial background for their cultural events and community services, and they put the latter on the top in the hierarchy of the enterprise’s values. Their website talks about a “Szimpla lifestyle,” which “...is brought to life by culture, creativity and constant change day by day ...” Szimpla defines its mission as

Shaping our environment, making it more livable and human-friendly by searching for the cultural treasures of Hungary and the world, by introducing and managing creative talents and their products, and by implementing and operating models that help sustainable development in many ways of life. (Molnár 2019b)

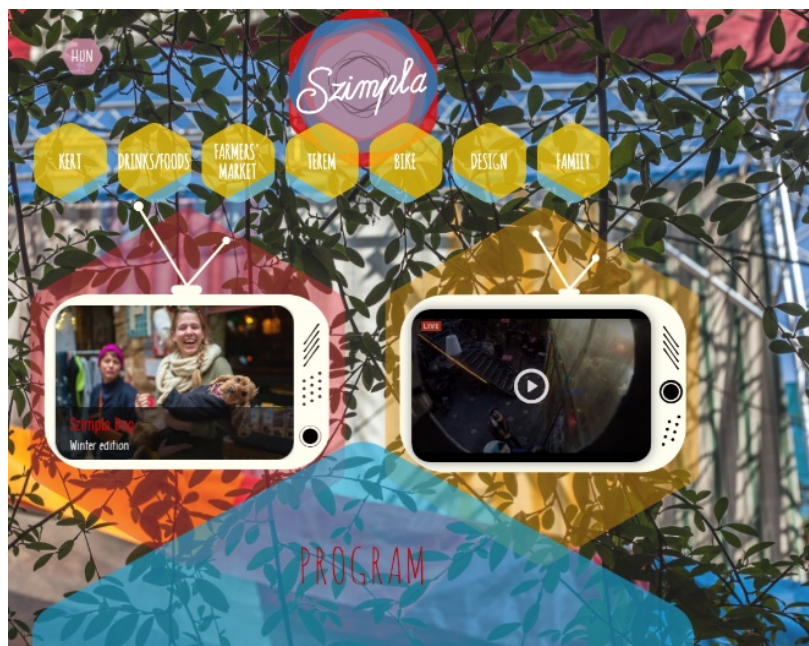


Figure 8 Szimpla's home page. Source: szimpla.hu

However, with economic success and changes in the local urban context – not independent from the former factor – it became a challenge for Szimpla to preserve its core values and mission. The bar started to attract crowds of people thirsty for amusement who do not share Szimpla’s values but go there to see a place on the

tourists' "must visit" list of instagrammable sites. To promote its values more efficiently, the owners established a Communication Office in 2015, which is focused entirely on social and cultural programs and the communication with the public; more than 20 employees work now in this field. Profitability is still essential for Szimpla; it is a for-profit enterprise. However, profit does not always determine the behavior of the organization. Bence Molnár emphasizes their priorities:

Our task is to preserve our core mission. That is why we do not follow the mainstream; we do not always serve the public needs, but rather give what we think is essential to give. We want people visiting Szimpla to go with some valuable experience, something that changed their minds. (Molnár 2019b)

In practice, it means that Szimpla established a face-control at the entrance and refuses inviting guests whose only intention is to get drunk, for example, intoxicated bachelor parties, so that their reputation is not ruined by misbehaving visitors (Molnár 2019a). Szimpla is selective when it is about customers' safety and business ethics, but otherwise, it follows the principle of openness and inclusiveness, even with some proactive elements. They try to attract various layers of the local community, for example, by offering a 50% reduction from the price of every drink to pensioners.

With the art, we are trying to give opportunities to the upcomers, the new ones, the young ones, the creative ones. Target audience does not exist in Szimpla, we are open for everyone, for every age, for every gender, for every financial status, so we do not select specific target audiences for our programs. (Molnár 2019b)

Szimpla is open towards innovations and applies the most advanced technologies in its logistic and financial operations. However, if technologies might damage the image and atmosphere, they sacrifice convenience. They also avoid industrial technologies in interior design and furnishing.

Szimpla is a non-partisan place; it does not host events in support of political parties. At the same time, the place promotes certain social and political values such as individual rights (including civil rights and human rights), democracy, secularism, internationalism, freedom of speech, and orientation towards an open and inclusive society. International culture and livability for everybody is an integral part of the Szimpla identity:

"We are not Jewish or Hungarian; we are international-eclectic. Our vision is a liveable city, and we contribute to it as much as possible." (Molnár 2019a)

6.3 Activities

Szimpla Kert implements its core values and mission through a variety of activities which cover three main areas:

Culture and art are their essential activities. Szimpla has its own theatre company and movie screenings. It hosts music concerts, art exhibitions, art workshops. There are many regular events, such as Hungarian folk dance every Monday night, free concerts every Tuesday, Szimpla Open Stage every Friday. Szimpla does not only organize its own events but also offers its premises free of

charge to other organizations for educational and cultural events which are aligned with their core values (Molnár 2019a).



Figure 9 Nighttime and daytime in Szimpla: party and Farmers' Market. Source: Szimpla Facebook and szimpla.hu

Sustainability is promoted by organizing Szimpla Farmers' Market on Sundays, a flea market, and the Szimpla Bicycle workshop. The Farmers' Market connects thousands of urban customers with about 40 farmers offering their products since 2010. The Szimpla Design Shop upcycles products redesigned by Szimpla. Szimpla organizes every month the "Szimpla Bike Circus" where one can buy second-hand and new bikes, spare parts, and equipment. They provide with space the "RideKálmán" bike shop which repairs bikes and donates them to those who cannot afford to buy one. Kálmán Rácz, the owner, explains the nature of this cooperation:

The basis of our cooperation with Szimpla is their moral support that they stand behind this cause. It is also very important that they provide me with this space, in the heart of Budapest, in one of the inner districts. I also give them something: I help them run their bike rental service, I keep their bikes running, and I continuously renovate them. These are bikes built by me, so these are the best bikes to rent in Budapest, or at least the fastest ones. They have such a team... if all Hungary were like this, it would be a cool place. (Kálmán Rácz, 2019)

Urban activism includes actions aimed to turn Szimpla's narrow or broader environment into a more livable space. For example, the enterprise spends monthly about 900 euros to clean their street (Molnár 2019a). They promote various causes in the online and social media that relate to the infrastructural development, safety, and heritage of the district. Szimpla also addresses social problems above the local relevance: they initiate programs to integrate homeless people back to society, help children associations and animal shelters (Molnár 2019b).



Figure 10 Information board outside Szimpla calling people to sign a petition to make Kazinczy Street a car-free zone. Photo: Dóra Mérai

Supporting civil movements is one of Szimpla's priorities. Their approach is "to help where our help is needed, and we can make changes." One of their most famous projects is the Kazinczy Living Library initiated in 2015 during the peak of the refugee crisis in Hungary. The Living Library was set up as a space for interaction and debate to promote respect, dialogue, and to challenge stereotypes and discrimination between different social groups. Another example is a meet-up they hosted for non-Hungarian residents of Budapest in 2019 October to inform them about their rights regarding the upcoming local elections.



Figure 11 VOTE - Hungarian municipal elections 2019. Source: @votelocalHungary

Depending on the season, about 100-110 employees keep Szimpla running. About 60 work on the bar, 20 organize events and communicate with the public, and 8 provide the maintenance of the building (Molnár 2019b).

6.4 The building, heritage, and adaptive reuse

The house where Szimpla is currently located in a typical historical building in the district. It has been repurposed several times since its erection in 1841. It was designed by Mihály Pollack, the most prominent architect of Neo-Classicism in Hungary as a single-story U-shaped urban dwelling house. In 1911 Sándor Héber purchased the house and moved his successful oven factory to the courtyard. He lengthened the wings of the building and covered the courtyard with a glass roof (Perczel 2007, 187-188). The factory operated until the second world war when the Jewish owner was deported, and the building became part of Budapest Ghetto.



Figure 12 Plaque on the façade of Kazinczy 14. Photo: Dóra Mérai

The house stood empty from the end of the war, except for about two decades from the 1970s, when it served as an apartment house for a few families. In the 1990s, the local authorities decided to demolish the dilapidated building but postponed the implementation of their plans due to the activity of the ÓVÁS! Civic Association. The building was put under local protection (Perczel 2007, 187-8). It was finally sold to a private investor who turned the yard into a parking lot. When Szimpla made an offer to rent the house, the owner chose this more profitable option, and the ruin bar has used the premises since 2004 (Somlyódy 2007; Molnár 2019b). Szimpla does not renovate the building but takes care of its proper maintenance and safety; it is preserved in the form it survived the Socialist era until the bar is there. In 2005 the National Office of Heritage Protection declared it a listed monument.

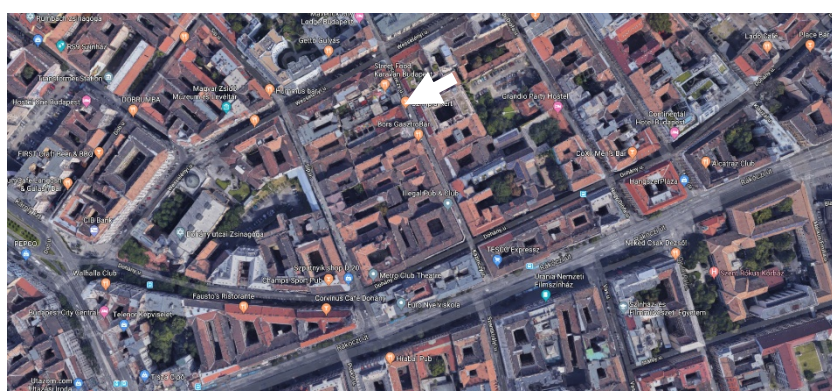


Figure 13 Bird's-eye view of Szimpla and its neighborhood. Source: Google Maps

Operating an enterprise which accommodates crowds of visitors in an old building purposed for other functions is a challenging endeavor. The managers of Szimpla constantly face the problems related to the peculiarities of the house. However, they appreciate the size and ground plan of the building, which creates a “an adventurous” atmosphere. They apply various technological solutions to counterbalance the disadvantages (Molnár 2019b).

The building is not very convenient and functional for a business like ours, but we must operate here because it is an iconic building. It looks mysterious, and it is easy to fill it with stories. (Molnár 2019a)



Figure 14 Interiors of Szimpla. Photo: Dóra Mérai

The building has become an essential part of corporate history and heritage. Abel Zsendovits, one of the founders of Szimpla, acknowledges, that the location and “spirit” was a crucial element of Szimpla’s success (Egorova 2014). Today Szimpla can host up to 700 visitors at the same time, so thousands go through the place every day. They are served by nine bars with a different profile set up at various points of the courtyard and the former apartments. Guests are seated in the gateway, the inner courtyard, and the rooms on the ground floor and first floor, as well as the space of the former factory. The spatial arrangement of the flats can still be recognized. The staff’s offices are in the attic, while the cellars are the service area for catering. Szimpla also rents spaces in the neighboring building since the operation outgrew the original premises (Molnár 2019b).

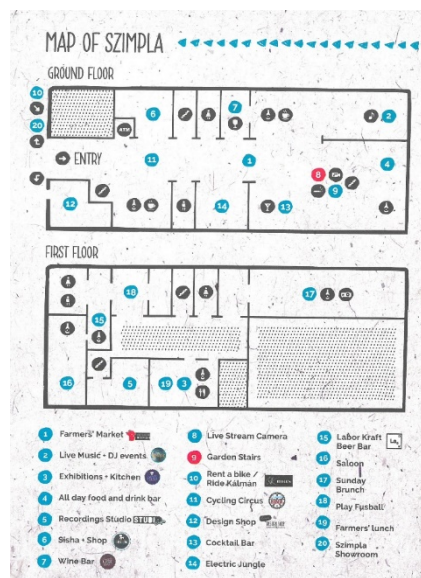


Figure 15 Ground plan of Szimpla: Source: Szimpla. Guide to Budapest&Hungary

The façade of Kazinczy 14 is untouched and dilapidated, but Szimpla made some changes inside with the permission of the chief architect of the district and the Disaster Management Department (Molnár 2019a). These were aimed to ensure the structural and operational safety of the building and the movement of people and goods. However, the added interior constructions and decorations are all mobile, and they can quickly be removed without any trace. The interiors formed gradually, organically, and they are constantly changing. They highlight the beauties of some original details, such as the staircase with its 19th-century cast-iron rails featuring winged figures (Perczel 2019). There are many plants in the courtyard and canvas roofs to reduce the outgoing sounds towards the neighborhood.

The furniture matches the building: they used second-hand items and various found objects such as a Trabant car, old computers, lamps, and other trash or treasure-like objects. They also collected some iconic objects from Budapest, and many pieces have their own stories. These are combined with artworks, such as paintings and holograms. It was a conscious choice to give a new life to old furniture from the time of opening the very first Szimpla. The owners found this kind of interior cozier and more attractive; they were dedicated to avoiding conscious design. Soon this style emerged as a design trend favored by an urban professional layer and was followed by many other bars (Gábor Bertényi in Somlyódy 2007).

The whole place is a statement about sustainability because we are reusing the building for a completely different purpose. It is also protecting what we already have, show it in its originality, but giving it a function, which let people perceive other things from the building. The whole thing is about recycling; we recycle the entire building. But within the building, we recycle what we find, and people find us with their things. People like how we reuse things. (Molnár 2019b)

Though the first Szimpla came into being by the temporary reuse of an old building, Kazinczy 14 was occupied and technically modernized already as the long-term home of the enterprise. However, the aesthetics of temporary use were preserved, and all developments and modernization are invisible, behind the curtains. By this, it is not just the building that is preserved and presented as heritage – maintained continuously by an entire technical team – but also the way of use, the intangible heritage of the ruin pub culture in the Jewish District of Budapest and of Szimpla itself. They preserve the tangible heritage of Szimpla as well, e.g., the two original second-hand movie projectors of the former Szimpla Kertmozi. It is used only occasionally, and its maintenance is costly, but they keep it because it is part of the Szimpla heritage (Liptay 2019).

Keeping the ruin aesthetics is, however, problematic from the point of view of the building on the long run since renovations from time to time are part of the normal lifecycle of a building, as it was the case also with Kazinczy 14 before the second world war. Today the façade presents most visibly the risks of Szimpla's approach: large parts of the plaster are missing, and the decorative details also threaten with the danger of disappearing with time. Since careful maintenance takes place in the background, the visual message of the building is also questionable in the perspective of desirable heritage conservation trends in general. Paradoxically, freezing the time from the point of view of built heritage is due to the dynamic

creation of intangible heritage in this case, since keeping the idea of a ruin pub in a long-term home means preserving the building without any renovation.

Szimpla first presented its premises and activities on the European Heritage Days in September 2019. Previously they did research to recover the past of the house from documents and images and the profession of the former inhabitants. They also organized a small pop-up exhibition on the 15th anniversary of Szimpla in this building, where they presented materials from the past of both the house and the enterprise. The importance of intangible heritage was also recognized: the guide emphasized that the area was historically characterized by the dense presence of hospitality industry, crafts, and commerce, and placed Szimpla and the ruin bars in that context (Liptay 2019).

6.5 Communications and PR

The communication of Szimpla in the first years of its existence relied on personal networks. The personal and online network of the guests and the means of word-of-mouth is still essential. For four years now, however, the enterprise has a team of professionals who organize and communicate the programs towards the visitors, residents in the neighborhood, journalists, and the digital space. They follow Szimpla's appearances on the travel, gastronomy, and other blogs and respond to the praises and complaints. This team includes a manager dealing with clients with special requests (e.g., reserving a separate room for an event). Szimpla has a photographer and video producer, and they make sure that only professional images appear in their communication. The Communication Office does not generate revenues; its task is "to make sure that the social part of the enterprise exists and to keep it vibrant and up to date" (Molnár 2019b).

Szimpla actively uses the online channels of communication, most importantly, the website and social media (Table 1). Social media, especially Facebook, is also used to communicate with the residents. The latter can complain or raise issues there, and the enterprise tries to solve all the reasonable requests (Molnár 2019a, Bodó 2019).

Table 1 Szimpla's social media channels as of November 14, 2019

SM channel	Followers	Kind of information
Facebook	108,524	Up-to-date information on the programs and Szimpla in general.
YouTube	1,410	Everything that is Szimpla music. Concerts, live recordings, tunes, videos, Studio, Garden Hits, music fans, and musicians' united forum. It has 744,294 views.
Soundcloud	337	More than 400 records of concerts in Szimpla
Tumblr		Short posts about the events and promotion of new products.
Instagram	17,200	Photos of the events and products
Twitter	760	Mostly copy-pasting from Szimpla Instagram (@szimplakert)
Flickr	2	Over 400 photos from events and everyday life of Szimpla community
Blogspot	108	Images and stories related to Szimpla's activities

6.6 Financial model

Szimpla Kert is a private enterprise, owned by Szimplacity Ltd (SzimplaCity Szolgáltató Korlátolt Felelősségű Társaság). It is a financially successful enterprise that can sustain its core mission. Moreover, it is still growing (Molnár 2019b). The enterprise was financially successful from the very beginning, and since then, they multiplied the income. Attila Kiss, one of the founders of Szimpla, recalls the first success:

From a business point of view, the first enterprise far exceeded our expectations. We worked hard; we were there day and night. We expected to make 30 to 40 thousand forints a day so that we can get our investments back in a year. We had 'survival' scenarios, but on the second day, we had to throw them away. We made hundreds of thousands of forints ..." (cit.: Somlyódy, 2007)

The net turnover in 2005 was 95 million forints and grew to around 150 million in 2006 (Somlyódy 2007). In 2018 it reached 1.6 billion, that is c. 4,8 million euros (Céginformáció.hu). The enterprise uses a significant part of the income to support its cultural and civic programs (the entrance is always free) and to reinvest into the building. By 2007, Szimpla spent 11-12 million forints on culture per year (Somlyódy 2007).

The sites of the first two Szimpla were in municipality ownership. The courtyard of 25 Király Street was rented by them for a small amount, but by next year the plot was sold, and the new owner moved out Szimpla. They found a new place in another asset of the same company, in 14 Kazinczy Street (Somlyódy 2007). The advantage of using a privately-owned site is the high level of autonomy and immunity to political changes. The disadvantage is that only a commercially successful organization can pay the high rental prices in the district, but Szimpla has no problem in this respect.

6.7 Impact

Ruin pubs multiplied in less than a year after the establishment of the first open-air Szimpla in 2002. The managers of Szimpla organized free courses on how to run such bars (Somlyódy 2007). Since then, Szimpla became a role model for similarly oriented cultural and hospitality innovators. With a few other pioneers, they established a phenomenon which is known now as ruin bars. The district, in addition to the label "Jewish District," developed a new identity as a "ruin bar district" or "party district." Ruin bars contributed to the "creative" atmosphere and increased the number of hospitality venues (Smith at all, 2018, 535). However, the phenomenon also contributed to the emergence of many problems, which were discussed above.

Szimpla did not only establish a model for how to design a ruin bar but set up the standards also for hospitality service. Started by amateurs, Szimpla professionalized the ruin pub industry. Now there is a team of experts in marketing, public relations, information technologies, project management, and, of course, the hospitality industry. The quality of services is paramount. Szimpla also tries to change its environment, and they are a socially responsible enterprise.

Their position is that hospitality services have a responsibility for their clients and their behavior in public spaces:

We have big plans for the district. We want to create an alliance with the other bars. We want to make the neighborhood more livable, more attractive <...> We care about the experience of other customers. We have many guests; we can afford not to keep profit in mind when we turn off the guests. We are lucky because people are listening to us; we are a role model for many. (Molnár 2019a)

7 The model

Ruin bars, among those Szimpla, emerged at the turn of the twentieth century in the courtyards of dilapidated empty buildings signed for demolition. The founders of the ruin bars took advantage of the dilapidated housing stock and with minimal investment, turned them into successful hospitality enterprises. They turned the dilapidated character into an aesthetic feature and economic asset.

Ruin bars appeared and flourished in a special environment characterized by multiple conflicting interests of stakeholders, such as developers, the central and local government, heritage protectionists, and the residents. The laissez-faire approach of the government and a deadlock in the urban development created a moment of opportunities for bottom-up initiatives which were able to adapt quickly to the changing environment. It was fueled by the public desire for non-conformist, non-conceptual spaces where culture and entertainment can be combined.

The main characteristic features of ruin pubs are (based on Lugosi et al. 2010):

- Entrepreneurial and opportunistic character
- They relied on personal investment, networks, financing.
- They were temporary and flexible in their manifestation and space (but professionalized later).
- Importance of adaptive reuse of heritage, space, and objects. The reuse of unusual premises and objects adds to the novelty and creativity.
- A strong relationship and organic cooperation between the commercial element and cultural character

Ruin pubs re-appropriated and repurposed disused urban buildings. The spontaneous reuse fits the western European urban trends, but it is unique because it took place in the historical city center of the capital, in urban dwelling houses.

The success of ruin pubs had its disadvantages. It catalyzed gentrification in the district, lead to the mushrooming short-term hospitality services, overtourism, and overcommercialization of the district. It increased the gap between the old cultural traditions (e.g., Jewish heritage) and the modern use (global entertainment).

The bottom-up hospitality process has been developing organically, but its own success can be deadly. Thirsty for authenticity, the flocks of tourists impact the environment, globalize and kill its character (or turn it into a quasi-authentic experience). Bottom-up grassroots initiatives with a social, community, and

cultural mission, such as Szimpla can be engines of urban development even without governmental support. However, now, the local government should take a more active position in securing an economic and socially sustainable development in which heritage protection and reuse are the crucial elements.

The Szimpla case demonstrates that hospitality organizations can be financially sustainable even if they do not focus on profit as their strategic goal but rather on public good and social entrepreneurship. Socially responsible hospitality enterprises pursuing ethical business can build an economically sustainable model and contribute to a better environment.



Figure 16 Plaster on the wall in Szimpla with the visitor's graffiti notes. Photo: Dóra Mérai

8 List of interviews

Bodó, Zoltán – resident of Kazinczy Street, founder of the Facebook page Színes Erzsébetváros (Colorful Elizabeth Town)

Molnár, Bence – the head of the Communication Office at Szimpla Kert

Perczel, Anna – architect, urbanist, and president of the ÓVÁS! civic association

Rácz, Kálmán – the owner of the bike shop called RideKálmán

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