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Livia Szélpál
The Impact of Machine Politics on the American City: A Counterpart to the Hungarian Socialist Urban Model?

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I look upon the size of certain American cities, and especially on the nature of their population, as a real danger which threatens the future security of democratic republics of the New World; and I venture to predict that they will perish from this circumstance, unless the Government succeeds in creating an armed force, which, while it remains under the control of the majority of the nation, will be independent of town population, and able to repress its excesses (Alexis de Tocqueville 1839: 289).

Introduction

“If my worst enemy was given the job of writin’ my epitaph when I’m gone, he couldn’t do more than write: ‘George W. Plunkitt. He has seen His Opportunities and He Took ‘Em.’”^[1] This quotation is from the unusual reminiscences of George Washington Plunkitt, a Tammany Hall boss of the late nineteenth century. Plunkitt delivered a series of lectures on his peculiar views of practical urban politics to a reporter, William Riordan, who later collected the interviews into a book. Plunkitt was only one of the bosses who earned reputation and money from the returns of political machine. The power of the bosses and the political machine has been a dominant characteristic feature of the American urban milieu from the second half of the nineteenth century. The interconnection of the logic of business and politics was apparent in the mechanics of the machine politics. The bosses’ power was partly a result of their professionalism, as Glaab argues; they made the study of politics and political organization a full-time job. Plunkitt, who made a fortune in real estate business as a Tammany official described politics as a regular business almost the same as the grocery or dry goods business and, as he declared, one only has to be trained up to it just like in other professions.^[2] This statement, however, is only one side of the overall picture. In the complicated and often badly designed formal structures of the city governments with mayors, councils and special commissions in the background - supposed ideally to check and balance one another – there was not only *opportunity* but also *need* for effective control in an informal and quasi public way.^[3] This informal control was provided by the bosses and their machines. The play with jobs and contracts enabled the political machine to become a vehicle for business to keep its power even in the Industrial Age and at the same time to take the role of an informal government which gets the streets paved, provides the lightening, heat, telephone and transportation services and sustains the fire and police forces. The political machine, which ruled the nineteenth-century big cities of the U.S. and had the hegemonic position of a one party system, created a certain kind of urban milieu and built environment shaped by party politics which had distinct strategies for finding the delicate balance between economic wealth and social welfare.

This paper focuses on the institution of the political machine and its impact on the urban development and the physical character of the American city in the second half of the nineteenth century. The underlying assumption of the paper is to provide, firstly, a historical perspective of the boss system and the political machine then, secondly, analyzing the way how this centralized

regime politics affected the city as a planned environment with political implications. The ambition of this study is also to compare the American urban model during the Industrial Age shaped by the political machine to the Hungarian socialist urban development during the postwar period of reconstruction with the comprehension that a deeper investigation of this complicated and unconventional comparison would be the next step of a further study. Despite the great differences between the two radically distinct party politics and eras of urban development in different contexts; the present study aims to highlight that there is a visible connection between the one-party politics and partisan organization of the physical aspects of urban development. Thus, in general, the dominant forms of political party government actually influence crucial aspects of the city's physical layout, residence patterns, neighborhood development and other dimensions in an effort to reinforce the mass political base and governing ideology of the party system.

Generally speaking, during times of urban transition followed by intensive city building process, the physical development of cities is greatly influenced by the dominant form of political organization. This is especially likely when the dominant political institutions are one-party mass-based organizations that need to find ways of reinforcing their control over voters. Lack of political competition and the constant search for low cost ways of strengthening voter loyalties are pursued as means of maintaining the organization. Thus, the U.S. boss system demanded payoffs from business as well as the need to control immigrant voters through petty rewards and by exploiting ethnic rivalries. The present study aims to show that machine bosses favored three major practices in their urban development.

Firstly, the boss system tended to finance huge public projects that would create lots of opportunities for bribes and kick-backs from contractors looking for public work. Ironically, therefore, the machine politics is associated with the assumption that these grand projects helped the urban development by forgetting the self-interests of the machine. Secondly, there was a bias for market centered development in which the private sector had a lot of impact on how, when and where to build. Giving the private sector these privileges enabled the bosses to maximize bribes and other payoffs. This, in turn, led to the fact that private sector commercialism had a great impact upon the industrial city, especially in the form of the later discussed checkerboard pattern. Thirdly, the interest of the boss system was to encourage dense concentrations of immigrants in compact neighborhoods. This was to facilitate the control of their political loyalties easily by segregating them into distinct ethnic enclaves and it made way for easier contact by ward bosses and precinct captains who could answer to the needs of immigrant families and satisfy them directly via distributing petty rewards such as jobs. In contrast, the Hungarian one-party system was explicitly socialist and was driven more by ideology than the need to reinforce voter loyalties through distributing petty rewards. Instead, the socialist regime diffused the working class in residential areas situated mostly on the periphery of the city in the newly built big housing estates where everybody seemed to be treated similarly. In contrast to the U.S. political machine, not the loyalties rather the class ideology was to reinforce the political position of the party.

1. The American Industrial City in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth-century city made its mark on the American urban development as an enterprise of industrial capitalism with land speculation shaped by market economy. The urbanization of the U.S. entered a new stage in the 1860s, as Blake McKelvey argues, one in which the reorganization and reconstruction of old cities overshadowed the continued development of new towns.[4] What were, however, the prominent characteristic features of the industrial cities in the U.S.?

In the post-Civil War period, most American cities increased dramatically in size and in the number of their population. In every town, enterprising promoters and business leaders took the role of promoting the rapid extension of rail lines and the equally rapid settlement of the Great West that gave impetus for mushrooming cities with their new industrial functions and ethnically mixed character of their population.[5] The transformation in the American economy wrought by this urban industrial growth, as McKelvey argues, was matched by an equally dramatic transformation in the physical character of the cities. Old European patterns, as embodied in the

colonial ports, with the invention of the horse cars or steam railroads changed pedestrian towns into cities with clearly distinguished commercial and industrial districts. The successive waves of immigrants with their need for cohesive settlements further segmented the larger cities into distinct ethnic neighborhoods.[6]

As cities grew, their natures and functions changed in many ways. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the greater cities were ports reflecting the commercial character of the American economy at that time. By the time of the Civil War, however, the situation transformed the character and function of the urban milieu. Maritime trade, as Glaab argues, was still a crucial part of city economics; but new cities had appeared deep in the continental interior which adjusted them to the condition of capitalism. This resulted in the geographical and socio-economic division of the core and the periphery both in the country and in the cities. Manufacturing had begun to influence the shape of the cities which manifested itself either in the form of urban rivalry or in the spatial form of the cities.[7]

These new cities in the continental interior, like Chicago, were no longer handled as public institutions but private enterprises with new infrastructures of road construction and transportation facilities.[8] Until about the mid-nineteenth century, the population of the great American cities were still compact; one could walk through all the neighborhoods even in a day. With the advents of the technological advancement in the urban transportation services, the working place and the residential districts became separated, thus, the *walking city* ceased to be existed and gave its place to the modern American city with its railroads, horse-car railways and later the cable cars. This new urban way of life entailed the appearance of the *downtown* which became the financial and commercial district where people came from some distance to work or to shop.[9] Within the period of 1860 and 1890, the cityscape of most American cities changed with the images of the factory, railroad, *skyscraper*[10] or the appearance of the *slum*. The expanded population absorbed in a more concentrated use of residential space near the sites of work which caused a significant increase in population density.[11] In accordance with the claims of the *laissez faire* policy, the city government became a private infrastructure with less power to the municipal authority.[12] In the post Civil War period, the federalist system of divided power between the national government and the states made the American cities dependent upon the state governments as their corporations with only a limited power over the market place and the capital.

The industrial period, as Kantor argues, differs sharply from the mercantile era in respect to market and popular control systems. A peculiar form of popular control structure in mediating business developed in the form of machine politics. This meant that after the Civil War, the political machine as “dominant business interests capitalized on the disorganized character of urban popular control systems to secure political influence over development.”[13] Consequently, this regime politics played an important mediating role in governing the cities because a regime, as Kantor quotes C. Stone, was not only an informal group that came together to make decision but “an informal yet relatively stable group *with access to institutional resources* that enable it to have a sustained role in making governing decisions.”[14] This means that every political machine had a well-established economic basis which was used for economic reasons, too. The next subchapter aims to highlight the logic and functional character of the machine politics.

2. The Historical Perspective of the Machine Politics in the Industrial Age

The machine style politics to a certain degree is present in every political system in the forms of political cliques or material incentives. A machine is a hierarchical organization controlled by a single leader or boss. Between 1870 and 1945, the political machine governed the majority of the big American cities. The boss rule reached its peak in the 1920s, before that the reform movements of the progressives wanted to diminish its power. In reality, the municipal government and the machine politics existed side by side and overlapped each other in many ways. Even today it exist in an alternative form in the U.S., though with the death of Chicago boss Richard J. Daley in 1976 “marked the end of the era of the classic machines, which relied on patronage and material incentives to keep their organizations intact.”[15]

As for the origins of the machine politics it is connected to the changing electoral politics of the

U.S. The second half of the nineteenth century was also the period when the electoral politics of the U.S. cities changed significantly. The white male franchise had been extended prior to the first heavy waves of immigration from the British Isles in the late 1840s. Successive waves of immigrants quickly transformed the ethnic base of voters from native-born whites to a complex ethnic mix. This meant that many cities, as Eric H. Monkkonen argues, were overwhelmed by immigrant populations of poor, mainly Irish Catholics and a broad range of Germans by mid-century. This process resulted in the intense and active hostility of the native-born and immigrant Protestants toward the Irish. This was also the same case with the Germans; though they were Protestant by religion, their linguistic separation and national identity resulted in their distinct, oppositional voting. Many voting studies, as Monkkonen relies on them, have documented the power of this "ethno-cultural" voting throughout the nineteenth century. Surprisingly, though the local commercial and new industrial elite had its well-established economic basis, refused to yield political power and city politics remained factional and gave place to the boss system.[16] According to Monkkonen

the relatively small stakes involved in municipal elections only partially explains this apparent lack of elite resistance to the immigrant accession to political power. Until about the 1890s, all city voters could agree on one thing, that the role of government had to be fiscally limited. Working-class voters in particular wanted a limited and inexpensive government, often opposing such things as city-run employment bureaus (Monkkonen 1988, 116-117).

A political scientist, Robert A. Dahl established a schematic, four-period model of American urban political change of regimes, which includes policy, politicians, and changing political constituencies and structure.[17] The Dahl-model can provide a historical perspective to regime theory and serve as an impetus and starting point to other theoretical models. In Dahl's model city, governments evolved from early domination by (1) "patrician elites" to (2) ones run by immigrants and bosses, who in turn were followed by (3) reformers, and finally by (4) modern professional politicians, often "*explebes*," that is, of working class origins.

The Dahl model describes that after the Civil War, with large influxes of immigrants into the city, there was a shift to government by the political machines which was indeed an era of mass-based politics. These machines were run by bosses who were immigrants themselves, or who catered to the immigrants who gained power from the old elite. William M. Tweed[18] is an example for the boss. He was born in 1823 and joined Tammany Hall in 1859. Finally he became a major power broker in New York City's Democratic machine until his criminal trial in 1873. Tweed never actually held the mayor's office though he was probably one of the best known bosses. Surprisingly, he was not an immigrant, having been born in New York City. Recent studies discovered that he did not even have clearly ethnic origins, though he was probably of Scottish descent. Nor was he from the impoverished working class; he came from a family of relatively prosperous craftsmen and he was a carpenter by profession. [19] This is another bias that is connected to the boss system that the immigrant origin was a prerequisite for the boss status. Rather the boss was the man who knew how to get results; he provided an alternative to the decentralized municipal authority. He could be poor or wealthy when he seized the power; the fact is that mayors and managers came and went, but the boss maintained a permanent hold on power.[20] As Boss Plunkitt defines his job with his own words:

There's an honest graft, and I'm an example of how it works. I might sum up the whole thing by sayin': "I seen my opportunities and took 'em." Just let me explain by examples. My party's in power in the city, and it's goin' to undertake a lot of public improvements. Well, I'm tipped off, say, that they're going to lay out a new park at a certain place. I see my opportunity and take it. **I go to the place and I buy up all the land I can get in the neighborhood. Then the board of this or that makes its plan public, and there is a rush to get my land, which nobody cared particular for before.** Ain't it perfectly honest to charge a good price and make a profit on my investment and foresight? Of course, it is. Well, that's honest graft. (...) I've told you how I got rich by honest graft. Now, let me tell you that most politicians who are accused of robbin' the city get rich the same way. They didn't steal a dollar from the city treasury. They have just seen there opportunities and took them. **That is why, when a reform administration comes in and spends a half million dollars in tryin' to find the public robberies they talked about in the campaign, they don't find them.** The books are always right. (...) All they can show is that the Tammany heads of departments looked after their friends, within the law, and gave them opportunities they could make honest graft. (...) If I have a good thing to hand out in private life, I give it to a friend. Why shouldn't I do the same in

public life? (Glaab 1963, 378- 380), (emphasis mine).

Well, this is only one side of the overall picture. Boss system or the political machine, as Robert K. Merton argues, violates the moral codes that votes should be based on individual appraisal of the qualifications of candidates and of political matters. Bribery and “honest graft” obviously offended the proprieties of property.[21] The boss must be known as the people’s friend but he was not a Good Samaritan, at all. He got his votes from the immigrant workers in the neighborhoods often by bribes or by his own virtue which strengthened his monopole position in the machine. Usually, he started his career as an ordinary precinct worker and if he could get enough voters to the polls, he could become a precinct captain. Then if he demonstrated his ability to swing his precinct at every election by a substantial majority, he could soon become a ward leader, the boss.[22]

By the early 1840’s the Tammany organization was already a considerable power in the governance of New York City which offers a clear example to machine politics. It traced its origin to a Jeffersonian political club established in the 1790s as the Society of St. Tammany. The name of Tammany can be traced back to that of a Delaware Indian chief. Many such clubs appeared in the U.S. during this period and intended to gain the power of the Federalist elite. The club continued to play a popular political role from the 1820’s and 1830’s by supporting proposals like the abolition of imprisonment for debt. During the depression era of 1837-42, the club distributed fuel, clothing and food in the poorer districts of the city. With the heyday of the modern national party system, the Tammany grew into the main agency in New York City for the Democratic Party which gave it increasing popularity; its charitable activities and patronage system among the poor and the newly arrived Irish immigrant also contributed to its power. Thus, Tweed did not invent the boss system; the system was just one consequence of the rapid urbanization and industrialization.[23]

In short, by cooperating with one another, each of these bosses, as Kantor argues, could act as brokers in ethnic, economic, social, and political relations of the cities. [24] Therefore, the boss was not only a politician and a party-leader; he had to perform many duties to “his people” for sustaining the machine system.

2.1. The Boss and the Machine Politics

There are many definitive positions about the structure, work and impact of the machine politics on the American urban development. One of the definitions is provided by Alexander B. Callow who describes the “city machine” as an organization “involved in politics as business, the business of gaining political power by offering services to a number of diverse groups and inducements of power prestige, and profit to its followers.”[25] Raymond E. Wolfinger, however, makes difference between the terms of machine politics and political machine by arguing that

“Machine politics” is the manipulation of certain incentives to partisan political participation: favoritism based on political criteria in personnel decisions, contracting, and administration of the laws. A **“political machine” is an organization that practices machine politics**, i.e., that attracts and directs its members primarily by means of these incentives. Unfortunately, the term “machine” is also used in a quite different and less useful sense to refer to the **centralization of power** in a party in a major political jurisdiction: a “machine” is a united and hierarchical party organization in a state, city, or county. Now there is no necessary relation between the two dimensions of incentives and centralization: **machine politics (patronage incentives) need not produce centralized organization at the city level or higher.** (Wolfinger 1972, 374-375), (emphasis mine).

Joseph L. Bernd criticizes Wolfinger’s definition in three points that is worth to mention. Firstly, Bernd contradicts Wolfinger’s last statement which declares that machine politics does not have centralizing function. As Bernd says “I think it would be preferable to regard centralization of power as a measure of a political machine rather than to consider it ‘unfortunate.’”[26] Secondly, Bernd argues that one cannot think of the incentives of the machines as purely economic with no taint of policy interest. Thirdly, he comments that Wolfinger speaks only about city machines, while there are examples for numerous small county political rings.[27]

Robert K. Merton demonstrates that the machine is an alternative form or response to formal government and it is disciplined and centralized in itself, thus it was an alternative to the decentralized, dispersed, overlapping pattern of municipal government. Consequently, the boss and his organization served to fulfill neglected social functions that society would not or could not satisfy. According to Merton, the machine emerged and responded to the needs of three groups: (1) the deprived classes, (2) the businessman, (3) the racketeer. Merton provides the classic model for the manifest and latent functions of the machine. Thus, the machine (1) gave personal and humanized help and assistance to the poor, particularly to immigrants, (2) provided businesses including also illegitimate ones to survive and prosper, and (3) offered the opportunity for upward mobility to the immigrant groups. This functionalist explanation of the machine has been challenged in many points by many urban scholars. Steven Erie, for instance, argues against the idea that the machine gave way to social mobility to the masses of immigrants. According to him, patronage system functioned only to freeze the opportunities of the immigrants and held them in poorly paid public jobs and badly constructed neighborhoods by serving it as the maximum of their electoral coalition.[28] As I view it, the interest of the boss was not to provide the immigrants and his clients proper living conditions but to maintain their bad circumstances and to ease their needs only on the surface level especially during election times.

The political machine as an organization had two main characteristic features that were seemingly incompatible; they, however, run the machine. One was the absence of formal rules; the other was a disciplined system. The political machine functions in a parallel way with the municipal government; moreover, it had almost the same structural organization and many times overlapped each other. I would argue that it became also a cohesive force for the local community. Machine politicians, as I mentioned earlier, started their career as precinct workers. Then the next step was the position of the precinct captain who was responsible for the votes and the life of the smallest and most basic political unit of the city. The precincts and the precinct captains were the foundations of the political machine as an organization. A typical precinct (or election district) had about 400 to 600 voters and thirty to forty precincts created a ward. The precinct captains had to be both involved in politics and participated in the local community life; they were expected to know most of the voters by name. The next rung on the political ladder was the status of the alderman. The captains of the precinct were elected by and worked for the ward's alderman who served as the chair of the ward's party committee. Finally, the aldermen were under the control of the machine boss who was the head of the political machine.[29]

As for the function of the boss, Oscar Handlin speaks about generalizations; he argues that the immigrant skilled workers worked their way into the "vacant" places of society which resulted in the Irish triumvirate of *priesthood, police and politics*. [30] It was true, however, that later-arriving immigrants were shut out of the "benefits" of the political machine. In New York City, for instance, the Tammany Hall was run by and for the Irish. Although Jews and Italians represented 43 percent of New York's population by 1920, as Judd and Swanstrom argue, only 15 percent of the city's aldermen were Jewish and 3 percent were Italian in 1921. The black population was excluded from virtually all urban machines. In some city like Chicago, there were "sub-machines" run by black bosses, but they were subordinated totally to the white machine bosses.[31]

The first scholar who challenged Handlin's arguments about the immigrant life-style was Rudolph J. Vecoli who studied the milieu of the Italian immigrant families. According to Vecoli, the new urban environment did not pull apart the social and family relations of the immigrants from the Old World in the way and degree as Handlin stated and there were more really influential Italian bosses as it was stated in previous studies.[32] These relations like the patronage system with the *padrone* (boss) provided protection for the immigrants in the American urban milieu, though; they had to pay some money (*bossatura*) for his "services." [33]

Thus, in the process whereby a political party became a "coordinating agency," jobs in the city government became patronage, and contracts or franchises for public constructions became graft. Those men in the political organizations who could provide a cohesive force and allocate the patronage and the graft most professionally, with a view to winning elections, reached positions of power. They were called bosses and their function was to provide the city governments with at least the minimum of regularity and centralization.[34] In more general sense, "the functional deficiencies of the official structure generate an *alternative* (unofficial) structure to fulfill existing needs somewhat more effectively." [35] Thus the strength of the political machine comes from its roots in the local community and the neighborhood by recognizing that the voter is a person living in a peculiar neighborhood with specific personal problems and needs that are ignored by the municipal government or "not adequately fulfilled by culturally approved or more

conventional structures.”[36] As I view it, the machine occasionally answered to the needs of the immigrant workers such as widows’ pension, better working conditions, laws regulating hours and wages especially for women and children. The machine politicians supported these reforms or the legal recognition of labor unions not surprisingly mainly during election times.[37] The political machine, however, lacked the socialist ideological background and it was definitely not a humanitarian organization. It served its own purposes either political or financial and it never became active advocates of reform. The political machine always took precedence over principle for the sake of political success.

These different and challenging opinions about the origin, history and function of the boss and the machine politics reflect both the development in theory and the several biases about its existence in light of their organizational needs. One theory assumes that the boss and the political machine appeared as a response to overcome those problems that the official city government was unable to solve because of the federalist fragmentation of power. Other theory argues that the political machine offered the means of social mobility for the immigrant masses and, in spite of the self-interests of the bosses, the machine helped the modernization of the American city. Recent studies, like Steven Eries’s one reevaluated the role of the boss and the political machine by arguing that the machine did not provide social mobility for the immigrants not even to the Irish ones. In my opinion, the boss had a stake in sustaining the overcrowded immigrant ghettos in order to monitor and handle easily the compact pattern of immigrant residences that I intend to outline in the next subchapter.

3. The Impact of the Machine Politics on the American Urban Development

The built environment of a city and its architecture is a phenomenon of political economy. The flow of money makes building and construction possible and desirable and political economy leaves its imprint upon the architectural layout of the city.[38] The present study aims to show three major biases connected to the impact of the political machine on the urban development. Firstly, the boss system favored the market centered development and led to the enormous stamp of private sector commercialism in the industrial city, for instance, via the gridiron layout of streets. Secondly, the bias for huge public projects cemented the market centered development. Thirdly, the political machine was in favor of the compact neighborhoods with dense concentrations of immigrants to reinforce its political position.

3.1. The Market Centered Development in the Age of the Machine

The pattern of the Cartesian grid and public square was general throughout the new towns of the south and the Midwest in the Industrial Age. The *gridiron pattern*[39] spread across the country as an effective tool of land speculation since with each succeeding addition to the town new streets were laid out easily and the expansion of the city was not difficult to survey by the officials.[40] According to Lewis Mumford, the gridiron pattern successfully connected the social demands of the city with the spatial form. Moreover, the grid corresponded to the needs of capitalism in the forms of land speculation and city promotion. It gave impetus also to the westward expansion and provided space to the increasing population of the cities.[41] The perfect regularity, simplicity and geometric order of the grid, however, had many disadvantages. Firstly, it lacked imagination in planning having been different from the European pattern. It had both aesthetic and functional shortcomings without any regard to the situation and geography of the ground, the features of the surrounding country or the wind direction that became especially offensive if the city was on the bad side of a stinking factory.[42] Secondly, it ignored the needs of the spatial utility; the roads were too wide while the streets of the residential districts were too narrow. The houses in the residential districts did not get enough sunshine and air which was a characteristic feature especially of the tenement houses in the immigrant districts. Thirdly, the expansion of the grid gave impetus to land speculation and corruption at the municipal level.[43] Land prices increased day by day which was in close connection with the *township* system, thus, with every sold succeeding addition to the city new streets were made on the line of the gridiron pattern. The grid was an ideal tool for the “mania” for buying, selling town lots and creating new cities in the middle of nowhere. As Reps quotes one of the contemporary female visitors to the vast new Chicago:

I never saw a busier place than Chicago was at the time of our arrival. **The streets were overcrowded with land speculators, hurrying from one sale to another.** A negro dressed up in scarlet bearing a scarlet flag and riding a white horse with housings of scarlet announced the time of the sale. At every corner where he stopped the crowd gathered around him; and it seemed as if some prevalent mania infected the whole people. As the gentlemen of our party walked the streets, storekeepers hailed them from their doors with offers of farms and all manner of land lots, advising them **to speculate before the price of land rose higher** (Reps 1965, 301-2), (emphasis mine).

Land speculation caused that some lots changed hands even ten times in a single day with an ever increasing price. One has to take into consideration, however, that “most of this value was fictitious since it was not based on cash sales but purchases with extremely liberal credit.”^[44] The gridiron pattern of the newly built cities and the new forms of housing became the visible symbols of the machine era.

This cultural construction of economic life is present in the form of housing. Since the early nineteenth century, the economic principle reinforced that only those who can pay should have pleasant physical surroundings. Symbolically, *the machine* was represented at every level of society; in the forms of architecture, industry or politics and the machine process has created a standardized conception of lifestyle. Lewis Mumford gives a graphic account of the impact of the machine both *symbolically* and literary on the urban environment:

Yet in the very crassness and ugliness of industrialism after the Civil War, there was an element of health. **The new captains of industry** had faith in themselves and in the cause that they served: if they were brutal, they were nevertheless, according to their own lights honest, or at the very least forthright: **proud of their ability to master the new energies** that swiftly opening up the continent. In the raw new town of Chicago, that transcontinental railroad junction, once a wilderness of railroad yards, **they encouraged their architects and engineers to fashion new warehouses and skyscrapers out of materials** of the day, **in forms appropriate to the plain utilitarian functions they served** (Mumford 1995, 42), (emphasis mine).

Mumford established a periodical model of American urban architecture in his book entitled *Sticks and Stones. A Study of American Architecture and Civilization*, which describes American architectural styles even from the medieval period, and he comments the works of many American architects and illustrates the altering impact of the architecture upon American civilization. Mumford periodical model is important to this study with regard to the temporal scope of this research. According to him, the period between 1860 and 1890 can be regarded as (1) the *Defeat of Romanticism*, and then the period between 1890 and 1910 saw the rise of a new period in American architecture entitled by him as (2) the *Imperial Facade*. Since 1910 the (3) *Age of the Machine* has come.

In the period between 1860 and 1890, according to Mumford, the Iron Age reached its peak of achievement in the construction of great bridges and tenement houses; and Romanticism made a last stand. The American Romantic movement with the architect Henry Hobson Richardson, for instance, lacked the social and economic implications of the English counterpart.^[45] According to Mumford, the political rings, as he calls the political machine, destroyed many old buildings such as the case with State Capitol at Albany and a “new feudalism” started with the mode of building, solid, formidable, at times almost *brutal*.^[46] He considers especially the multiple-family tenement as a brutal invention of the modern industrial community as an answer to the acute housing shortage. The features of the tenement house construction were standardized in the so-called *dumb-bell tenement* which won the first prize in the model tenement house competition of 1879. The tenements which were designed after this pattern in the succeeding years were adjusted to the gridiron street-design with the narrow frontage, the deep lot and the maximum use of the space.^[47]

Thus, housing for the poor, whether in *cheap lodging houses*^[48] or public housing, should involved no excess expenditures or gratuitous physical amenities and, as it was emphasized by the contemporary official reports; it had to be disciplinary, instilling identity through enforcing desirable behavior.^[49] What did these tenements as the imprints of the *architecture of the machine* defined by Lewis Mumford look like?

The condition of the poor immigrant housing was designed as a market-based accommodation

and resulted that every *tenement house*[50] with narrow alleys was uniformed with of the same form and shape in the tedious immigrant neighborhood districts. The tenement house lacked the elements of individual identity that would constitute proper housing such as the separation of domestic functions, restriction of residence to family members, privacy for residents of different ages and sexes and the inability to pay for such facilities was the source of the problem in the first place.[51] The majority of the immigrants were unable to follow the suburban pattern of way of life because of economic reasons which resulted in the spatial segregation of social classes within the cities. The poorer districts of the bigger cities demonstrated an increase in density of population even after the general introduction of public transportation. By the turn of the century, the overcrowded immigrant ghettos with tedious tenements, dirty streets and littered alleys were usually near the waterfronts and factories around the downtown districts where the work and shopping places were located, while the middle- and upper-class neighborhoods situated farther from the urban center.[52] The accommodation of the increasing influx of the immigrant people required new methods of housing and stimulated innovations in construction. In the 1850's and 1860's, for instance, the older converted structures of New York City's housing were torn down and rebuilt as tenements. [53]

According to Glaab and Brown, the word tenement was used to apply to multiple family rental building, and New York law defined the tenement house as a unit occupied by more than three families. Later the word was generally used for any residential building in a slum. Within few years, badly constructed, three- or four-storey buildings, with closet like rooms and dark interior bedrooms had mushroomed throughout the lower part of the city. One example to imagine the bad living condition of these tenement houses is enough to prove their unbearable conditions; one of these barracks-like structures was located at Number 36 Cherry Street and was called Gotham Court. The building was five - storey high and thirty-four feet wide. The structure housed 500 people without provision for plumbing or heat. [54]

The first law concerning the housing reform defined the minimum standard for tenement construction in 1867. This law was, however, practically ineffective, and an amendment in 1879 which required a window in each bedroom just increased the proliferation of the dumb-bell tenements in the poor immigrant districts. The dumb-bell tenement structure, which was enacted by the Tenement House Law of 1879, got its name from the "indentation at its middle which, combined with indentation of the tenement built up against it on the adjoining lot, formed an air-shaft usually about five feet wide." The air-shaft provided a small measure of light and ventilation for interior rooms, and gave the plan of an individual tenement the appearance of a dumb-bell. [55] Reform movements inspired the New York's Tenement Law of 1901 which banned the construction of dumb-bell tenements in the future and required certain improvements such as courtyards varying in width with the heights of buildings, stricter fireproof buildings and ordained a separate bathroom for every family dwelling unit.[56] The housing reforms, however, entailed only changing the type of building and not addressing the problem of density of residence and providing greater space. All these facts correspond to the interests of the boss system to keep its voters in compact neighborhoods.

3.2. The Grand Public Projects of the Machine

Mumford compares the period between 1890 and 1910 - with a bit exaggeration and irony - to the imperial Rome whose rule was reflected in the architecture. He describes this period in American architecture as compensation; a transitory period from republic to imperialism by providing "grandiloquent stones for people who have been deprived of bread and sunlight and all that keeps man from becoming vile." [57] The main effort in architecture, as Mumford argues, was to give an effect of dignity to imperial enterprise, thus, the public buildings dominated the compositions, avenues and boulevards concentrated the traffic at certain points and the avenues were cut through the gridiron pattern of block in order to achieve this effect.[58] Ironically, he calls the City Beautiful movement as a sort of municipal cosmetic that reduced the work of the architect to an engineer as a city planner of the grid who can only hide with a pleasing front the ugly tenement houses, the monotonous streets and slums by believing in the civic reform enthusiasm that every city can be a fair.[59] This statement of Mumford alludes to the classic style of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition (1893) and to Daniel Burnham's plan[60] for the reconstruction of the Chicago downtown district (1909). Since 1910, in the Age of the Machine, city planning and architecture became a business enterprise and introduced the mechanical methods of production and mechanical forms into the fields of work that were done by handicraft

previously.

The political machine did not care about city planning in the way as the so-called reformers wanted; the machine took advantage of the fact that the mass electorate could be mobilized on the feeling of ethnic solidarity and the promise of some material rewards. As I view it, machine politics answered to needs of the rapid industrialization and urbanization and created a framework for urban development with huge public constructions of road buildings or sewer and water system which urban landscape was later corrected aesthetically with the more organized city planning. The old Boulevard in New York, for instance, which was built by the Tweed ring long before the land on either side of it was used for anything but squatters' farms, was almost totally destroyed by the construction of the first subways.[61]

The bosses, who managed to gain control of local government, get into the position to command resources that could be distributed to their loyal supporters.[62] Machine bosses built and maintained their organization on corruption and they frequently used their power to award multiyear contracts for streetcar operations and other utility services such as electricity, gas or road constructions, moreover, they controlled gambling and prostitution. They were engaged in public work projects including building of public buildings, sewer and water systems, streetlights or parks.[63] The bosses had at their disposal patronage jobs in fire, sanitation, and streets departments and even in private industry. Construction projects such as levee construction or road building could give the boss control over jobs in the city. Precinct captains served as supervisors on street crews. Ward committeemen generally hold administrative positions in the municipal government. Aldermen often owned insurance companies, saloons, pubs or run their own construction firms.[64]

Street railways, lightening systems and other public utilities were run by private companies which carried on their work under franchise granted by city councils. These franchises were special contracts with privileges that conferred a monopolistic position upon the favored company.[65] The franchise system of public utilities was driven by a system of broker politics. Thus, graft and corruption prospered for the sake of the contest over valuable contracts and the machine bosses was in a powerful bargaining position by virtue of their political roles as brokers.[66] This market system, as Kantor argues, "shifted urban politics from its formal democratic foundation to an informal one based on the buying and selling of political power." [67] This process resulted in the creation of a regime that had control over the American urban development with new rules of the game by playing upon ethnic, racial and neighborhood rivalries. As Kantor emphasizes the machine represented the individual demands of the immigrants, but not their demands as a class. [68]

3.3 The Impact of the Machine on the Immigrant Neighborhoods

One of the latent functions of this regime politics is that the machine provided assistance in the diverse forms of settlement houses, cheap lodging houses or "immigrant banks" in a way that was not just an aid but a manner so different from the professional techniques of bureaucratic institutions. The precinct captain, as Merton argues, was "*just one of us*," who asked no questions and did not interfere into private affairs with the detailed investigation of legal claims of the client. Merton recalls the Boston ward leader, Martin Lomasny who described this peculiar function of assistance as the following:

I think, said Lomasny, that there's got to be in every ward somebody that any bloke can come to – no matter what he's done – and got help. *Help, you understand, none of your justice, but help* (Merton 1973, 223).

This help, however, did not cease the origin of the problem which was the increasing poverty and the crowded urban space. What was, however, the impact of machine politics on the physical character of the immigrant neighborhoods?

The first tenement houses, as Jacob Riis[69] recalls, intended to provide a cheap shelter to the poor immigrants whose small wages limited their expenses. As industrialization went on with the expanding market economy and the city grew with the waves of immigration, the condition of the tenement house also changed as Riis quotes from a report on the condition of tenant houses in

New York:

Their “*large*” rooms were portioned into *several smaller ones*, without regard to light or ventilation, the rate of rent being lower in proportion to space or height from the street; and they soon became filled from cellar to garret with a class of tenantry living from hand to mouth, loose in morals, improvident in habits, degraded, and squalid as beggary itself (Riis 1970, 8).

Actually, as Riis argues, the police and the political bosses segregated the criminals in order to keep them out of the “better” neighborhoods and to concentrate them in certain quarters where they could be under some control and “milked for revenue.”[70] Riis’s work entitled as *How the Other Half Lives?* focuses on one of the serious problems of American society which was urban poverty represented by a core city slum in the Lower East Side of New York City where criminals lived in large numbers among the poor. In the period when Riis wrote his work on the slum, it led to Progressive campaigns against crime, vice and the political machine and corruption as an answer to the neglect of remedies for poverty. According to Warner, this misuse of Riis’s criminal slum resulted “on the demeaning philanthropic task of distinguishing between the deserving and undeserving poor.”[71]

Nevertheless, the lodging houses, as Riis argues, were the favorite recruiting grounds for collecting votes in election times by coming out strong on the side of the political boss who had the biggest “barrel.” As Riis witnessed, the machines rivaled with each other for the votes of the poor with bribery and offering material rewards for their votes. Sometimes, the political boss was the owner of the lodging house but more often the lodging house was under the protection of the local boss who stood by the proprietor of the lodging house at election times, in case the latter got into trouble when the fraud at the polls was discovered.[72] The political machine contributed to the bad housing condition of the poor since it only eased the increasing needs of the immigrants but it did not really solve their social problems. It even froze and standardized their chances for social uplifting and mobility which was reflected in its impact on the urban development.

3.4. The Consequences of the Machine Politics

In the period between 1867 and 1897, which is considered to be the heyday of the political machine, the indebtedness of the major American cities increased. It was caused by several reasons such as the market deflation in the general level of prices, the great expenditures of the public construction projects and the period was accompanied with two major economic depressions, 1873-78 and 1893-97. In the period after the Civil War, the debts of the fifteen largest American cities rose by 271 per cent which meant a growing burden on the city budget. The expenses of the local governments were accompanied with inefficiency and corruption.[73] This resulted to progressive reform movements in many cities against the corruption and high tax rates in the form of a general municipal reform. These reform aspirations were weak at first and machine politicians often referred ironically to the reformers as “goody-goodies” or “goo-goos” which words were derived from the notion of “good government” that the reformers wanted to achieve.[74] The need for a civil service reform and a municipal home rule increased in the cities in order to simplify and centralize the organization of the local government and strengthen the power of the mayor by extending his veto power.[75]

The decline of the boss system was connected to this transitory period from the creative government to the good government. Though, machine politics still exists in the American urban development in an alternative form. The centralized machine system created a certain kind of city that can be compared, apart from the ideological implications, to the Socialist city on the basis of the fact how a centralized political system can affect the physical character of a city and make it as a built environment with a politically determined form. Can one compare, however, the capitalist urban development to a socialist one? The next chapter touches upon this problem with the comprehension that a deeper analysis of the topic would be a next step of a further research.

4. The Hungarian Socialist Urban Model

In 1972 the leaders of urban government from twenty-four European capital cities met in Budapest for a conference on contemporary urbanism and its discontents. One of the key issues in this symposium was the question of whether or not the socialist city is fundamentally different from the cities in the capitalist societies.[76] Some Western experts saw a convergence of the two forms and argued that the differences reflect different stages of urbanization and that the socialist city is now becoming more and more like its capitalist counterpart. Special emphasis was laid on the fact that from the 1960s the socialist economic management made some planning decisions that resemble to those of the capitalist enterprise such as the realization that it is more effective to locate new industries in existing cities than to go on creating new town.[77] This assumption seems to be rather a theoretical question but it provided a springboard for the unconventional comparison of the capitalist and socialist cities in later studies.

These observations, however, cannot avoid one of the main differences between these two urban models which is the ideological implication in planning. Thus, the socialist urban models intended to be “blueprints” for a planned future and they were the product of the political will, that of the state and the party. Moreover, according to Bodnár Judit, the primacy of the political and its independence from the economic determine the distinctive logic of the socialist urban model, whose specific content may vary according to the party line, that is, the ideology of individual socialist states.[78]

Bodnár argues for *the method of mirrored comparison* based on Karl Polanyi’s forms of integration that can be the basis of a comparative study of the socialist and capitalist urban developments. Polanyi’s model defines three basic types of social relations such as the reciprocity, redistribution and exchange which are the parts of any concrete arrangement of economic integration and different regimes display various configurations of the three. Harvey relies on Polanyi’s model to construct a theory of urbanism which provides space for temporal comparisons by arguing, as Bodnár recalls Harvey:

“Urbanism as a way of life comprises all three modes of economic integration as well as the societal forms with which each is associated.” This interpretative mechanism – although not applied explicitly to the comparison of capitalist and state socialist cities – provides a key link to an analysis of state socialist and post-state socialist cities (Bodnár 2001, 33).

Harvey’s urban theory provided the stimulus for Szelényi Iván’s model of socialist city. Szelényi built on Polányi’s original suggestion that “state socialism is a social formation in which elements of redistribution and market exchange are integrated under the overwhelming logic of state redistribution.”[79] This is different from capitalism where market exchange is the dominant cohesive force and redistribution plays a subordinate role. According to Bodnár, with these definitions of the two systems “mirrored comparison” becomes possible with the comprehension that a comparative study of the two systems could not help being influenced by the generalized dichotomy of capitalism vs. socialism and the ideological overtones of the urban model.[80]

The housing estate became the symbolic image of the new socialist urban development and uniformity both in its physical character and in its sociological implications. It represents, as Bodnár argues, the purest form of socialist town planning, architecture and social policy.[81] These projects are not unique architectural markers of state socialism, as Szelényi argues; they followed the example of Le Corbusier’s housing model such as the *Unité d’Habitation de Marseilles*. [82] Another characteristic feature of the housing estate comes from the principles of socialism that is the homogeneity and uniformity of the residential areas and the lack, or at least the smallest degree of social segregation. This was also caused by the fact that the standardized flats in the housing estates did not increase the chances of random distribution of dwellers by social class, thus, prevented social segregation.[83]

Probably it is not well-known that the average class position of the dwellers did not come from the urban underclass or the poor during the Socialist Era. The average class position of their dwellers was higher than in similar projects in non-socialist countries. Most of the young families with small children, the intelligentsia and the middle and even upper-income people lived in the housing estates because of the limited housing construction, the lack or the deterioration of the old houses after the World War II, the modernity and newness of the newly built housing estates and the socialist housing policy.[84] They were even happy to have a place to live which was defined by Szelényi as the “flat-joy” (*lakásöröm*) of the state socialism.[85] The flats were either the property of the state and the dweller had to pay rent for it, or they belonged to the co-

operative society (*szövetkezet*) from which the dweller could buy the flat on credit.[86] The flats were distributed by the state on the basis of the applicants' social status, working positions and for their services and merits to the state.[87]

According to Szelényi, the construction and improvement projects of the housing estates resulted from the fact that only a little money was spent by the state to the reconstruction, preservation and development of the old downtown districts. This was accompanied with the ideology of creating new town centers instead of the old bourgeois ones.[88] Szelényi argues that the new housing estates were not at all slums; he compares the Hungarian housing estates to the Western suburbia on the basis of the uniformity, monotony of the urban built environment and the social status of their residents.[89] This assumption illustrates a main difference between the tenement houses of the American immigrant neighborhoods and the Hungarian housing estates, that is, in the U.S. the immigrant districts around the downtown became slums while in the socialist Hungary, the so-called *transitory zone* in between the downtown and the "suburbia-housing estate," as Szelényi argues, set out for becoming similar to a slum.[90]

The similar physical character of the American neighborhoods with the monotonous tenement-houses under the control of the political machine and Hungarian housing estate (*lakótelep*)[91] in the state socialism led me to outline a comparative framework for these two urban developments. Both forms of housing were an urgent answer to the shortage of adequate housing for masses and the indebtedness due to the major public constructions was also a common feature. In both cases the centralized form of one-party government created a uniformed and standardized space of living for their "voters." [92] The Hungarian socialist urban development, however, was driven more by ideology than the need to reinforce the compact pattern of living to control the voters as it was common under the U.S. political machine. Moreover, the neglect of downtown central business districts was also part of this pattern in the postwar Hungary.

Conclusion

The present study focused on the institution of the political machine and its impact on the urban development and the physical character of the American city in the second half of the nineteenth century. The underlying assumption of the paper was to provide, firstly, a historical perspective of the boss system and the political machine then, secondly, analyzing the way how this centralized regime politics made its imprint upon the city as a planned environment with political implications. Another aim of this study was also to compare the American urban model shaped by the political machine to the Hungarian socialist urban development with the comprehension that a deeper investigation of this complicated and unconventional comparison would be the next step of a further study.

The post-Civil War period in the U.S. was the historical term when the ethnic composition of the population and the electoral basis of politics changed significantly with the succeeding waves of immigration. The altered political economy of the U.S. created an alternative offspring of the government in the form of the centralized machine politics. The organization of the political machine ruled the major bigger cities of the U.S. at that time, in parallel with the municipal government, by overlapping each other and "correcting" the governmental system. The origin and foundation of the boss system or machine politics was the immigrant enclaves in the city neighborhoods who lived mainly in the tedious and poor tenement houses and districts of the cities. The political machine fostered the cohesion of the immigrants by relying on their loyalty to the system that "protected" them in the new urban milieu, while, at the same time, it froze their opportunities for social mobility since the machine treated its voters not as a class but as its "neighbor friends." Many machine bosses owned saloon, pubs or lodging houses in the immigrant districts which became the centers for recruiting voters even with bribery and fraud. As I view it, the centralized machine politics with its huge construction projects created the rough shell or framework for the American urban development on the Cartesian gridiron pattern which was modified by the town beautification movements and the plans of the progressive reformers. The monotonous and tedious urban space and tenement houses of the bigger cities led me to compare the so-called capitalist urban development of the U.S. with the Hungarian Socialist urban model of the housing estates and to search for a comparative framework of method. This happened with the comprehension that a deeper investigation of the topic would be the next step of a further study. Summing up what has been said; both in the U.S. and Hungary the centralized one-party

rules - without comparing the distinct ideological implications - played a crucial role and were significant forces in forming and developing the urban development with a politically determined form. The one-party system in both cases provided a monopole position with no competition to the ruling party in shaping the physical character of the residential districts of their voters.

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[54]Ibid., 159-161.

[55]Ibid., 162.

[56]Ibid., 177.

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[64]Judd and Swanstorm, op.cit., 53.

[65]Glaab and Brown, op.cit., 182-183.

[66]Kantor, "The Local Polity as a Pathway for Public Power: Taming the Business Tiger During New York City's Industrial Age," op.cit., 86.

[67]Kantor, "The Political Economy of Business Politics in U.S. Cities: A Developmental Perspective," op.cit., 257.

[68]Idem.

[69]Jacob A. Riis (1849-1914) was born in Denmark. His mother was a Latin teacher and his father a journalist. Riis came to the U.S. in 1870 as a trained carpenter. He also lived in tenement and lodging houses, like the other immigrants, until he made his reputation as journalist. First, he was a police reporter

for the *New York Tribune* and the *New York Evening Sun* then he wrote to other large-circulation magazines as well. Published in 1890, early in the era of muckraking, *How the Other Half Lives* stands with Lincoln Steffens' *Shame of the Cities* (1904) for its impact on urban history. See in Sam Bass Warner, Jr., "Editor's Introduction," in Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives. Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (Cambridge: The John Harvard Library, 1970), vii-xix.

[70]Sam Bass Warner, Jr., "Editor's Introduction," in Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives. Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (Cambridge: The John Harvard Library, 1970), xviii-xix.

[71]Sam Bass Warner, Jr., "Editor's Introduction," op.cit., xix.

[72]Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives. Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (Cambridge: The John Harvard Library, 1970), 61.

[73]Glaab and Brown, op.cit., 180-182.

[74]Judd and Swanstorm, op.cit., 61.

[75]Glaab and Brown, op.cit., 187-194.

[76]R.A. French and F.E. Jan Hamilton, "Is There a Socialist City?" in R.A. French and F.E. Jan Hamilton, eds. *The Socialist City: spatial structure and urban policy* (Wiley: Chichester, 1979), 1.

[77]Ibid., 17-18.

[78]Bodnár Judit, *Fin de Millénaire Budapest: Metamorphosis of Urban Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15.

[79]Ibid., 34.

[80]Idem.

[81]Ibid., 30.

[82]Konrád György and Szelényi Iván, "Új lakótelepek szociológiai vizsgálata (The Sociological Investigation of the New Housing Estates)," in Szelényi Iván, ed. *A szocialista városok és a szociológia* (The Socialist Cities and the Sociology) (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1971), 201.

[83]Bodnár Judit, *Fin de Millénaire Budapest*, 30-31.

[84]Konrád and Szelényi, op.cit., 186.

[85]Ibid., 204.

[86]Ibid., 183.

[87]Ibid., 186.

[88]Ibid., 191-92.

[89]Ibid., 210.

[90]Ibid., 194.

[91]See the image of a Hungarian housing estate available at <http://mek.oszk.hu/01900/01906/html/index446.html>, access: 24 February 2006.

[92]It is a bold comparison but one has to mention that frauds at the elections on both sides were also a common feature, though, only before the advent of the actual one-party system in the postwar Hungary. The disreputable "blue-card elections" of 1947 (*kék-cédulás választások*) in Hungary was among the last "democratic" elections in the postwar Hungary when the Communist Party with a secret agreement of the government intended to multiply its votes with forged voting cards. László Rajk, the Minister of the Interior

ordered the issue of the so-called blue voting cards for those who did not live in their permanent home so that they can vote with the means of this license everywhere in the country. The Communist Party, however, under the guidance of Mihály Farkas published around 80,000 illegal blue cards and distributed them among the members of the Communist Party who were carried by cars and vans to other parts of the country and voted more than one time to the Communist Party.



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