

FROM LOCAL MEMORY TO RESEARCH-READY KNOWLEDGE

**Community-Driven Urban History in a Research Library
Repository – The Mihály Ráday Memorial Project**

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“RÁDAY MIHÁLY MEMORIAL PROJECT” THE CHALLENGE

What happens to knowledge outside formal research?

- What happens to local memories that never enter archives?
- What happens to knowledge held by communities rather than institutions?
- How can research libraries preserve and reuse such knowledge?



Közösségi tudomány
Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Könyvtár
Ráday Mihály Emlékprojekt





AN UNUSUAL CASE

- Central Library & 46 branches across Budapest
- 3 million visits per year
- public library, national special library (sociology) & “academic library”
- Budapest Collection, Music Collection
- a trusted bridge between citizens and knowledge



THE LEGACY OF MIHÁLY RÁDAY

A citizen science project before the term existed

1980s:

- hundreds of volunteers
- photographs
- interviews
- building surveys
- urban heritage documentation

Forty years later:

- Could this work be continued today?
- Could contemporary citizens investigate the city around them in a similarly systematic way?
- Could a library provide the framework for such work?



KIRÁLY STREET AS AN URBAN LABORATORY



RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

1. What had changed since the original survey was conducted in the 1980s?

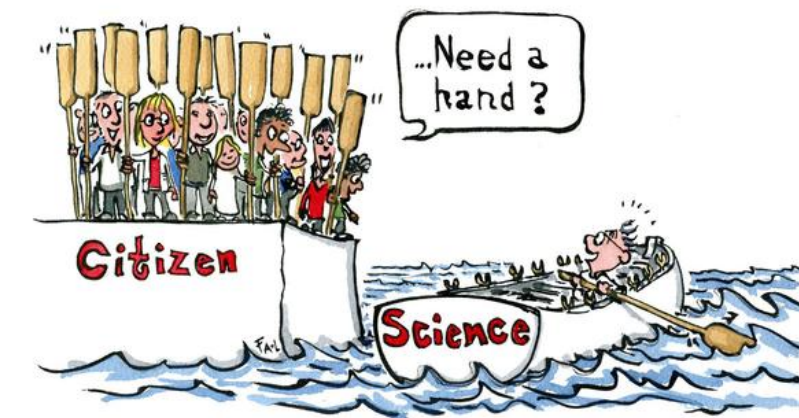
1. What forms of knowledge could local residents contribute that would not be visible in official records or traditional archival sources?

1. Who would conduct the research?

2. How would data be collected?

3. How would quality be ensured?

4. How could knowledge become a reliable research resource?



**"WE WANTED TO HELP READERS
BECOME CAPABLE OF
CONDUCTING THEIR OWN
RESEARCH INTO THE CITY'S
HISTORY."**

Judit N. Kósa
researcher of urban history

FROM READERS TO RESEARCHERS

At the beginning	As the project evolved
Volunteers joined a library project	Volunteers became research partners
Collecting information	Interpreting sources
Following a methodology	Discussing and evaluating findings
Providing data	Contributing local knowledge and experience

A partnership between library professionals, historians and local residents

THE LIBRARY AS MEDIATOR

- **FSZEK 6th district branch library: the Boulevard Library**
 - initiator and coordinator
 - strong local identity, rich in local history collection
- **People came to:**
 - lectures
 - book presentations
 - city walks
- **Then we asked:**
 - Can local residents become researchers?



BUILDING A RESEARCH COMMUNITY

- Different backgrounds, shared curiosity
- **34 volunteers**
 - local residents
 - retirees
 - university students
 - amateur historians
 - librarians
- **Trainings for civil researchers**
 - digital collections and databases
 - source criticism
 - differentiation between facts, personal memories and local legends
 - conducting interviews, documenting observations
- **Learning from one another**



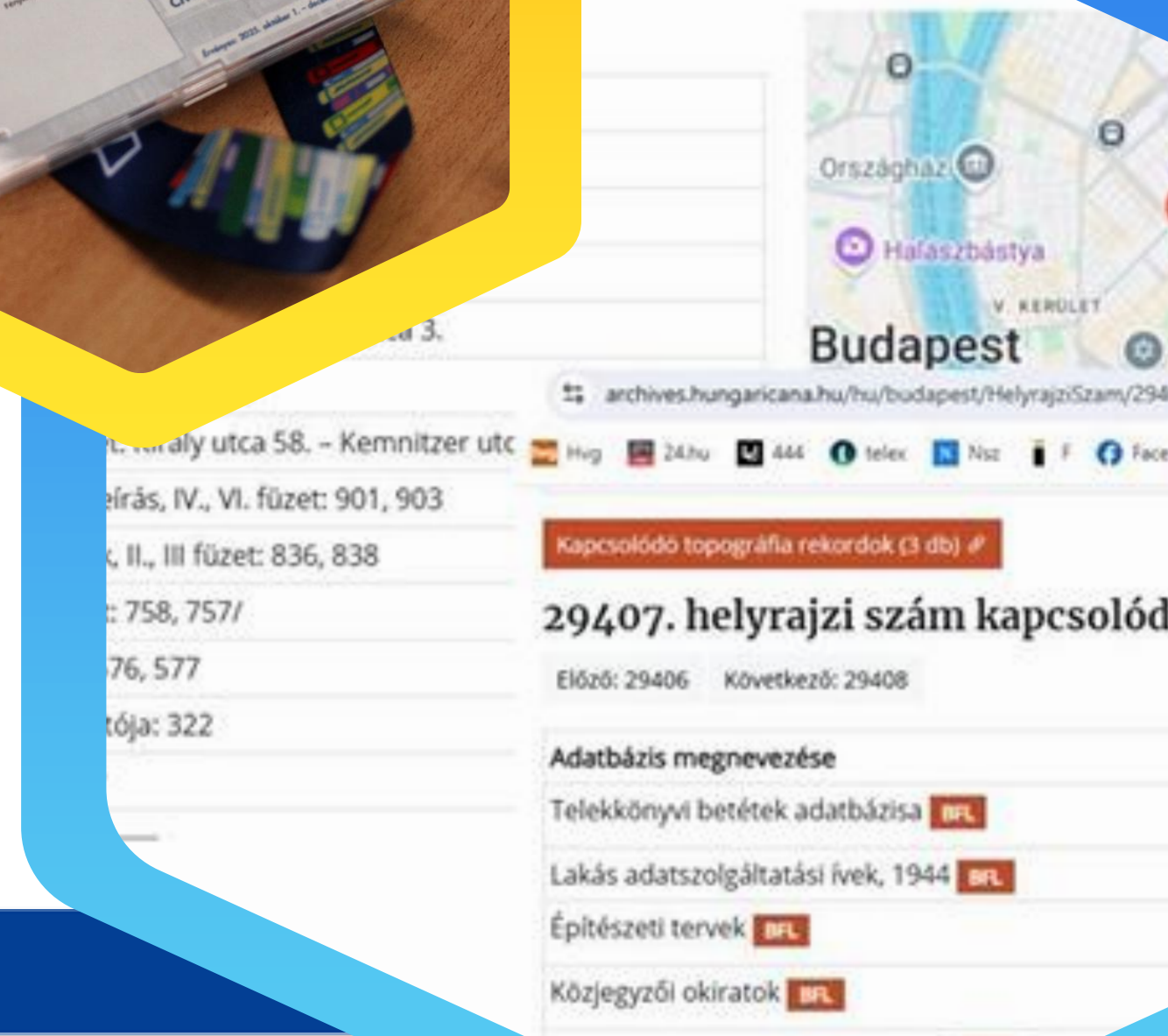
FROM PARTICIPATION TO RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

The library was not only a venue.

It provided:

- training
- coordination
- access to sources
- legal and ethical framework
- digital preservation
- public dissemination

The library provided the framework, methodological consistency, validation and quality assurance.



WHAT DID THE VOLUNTEERS DO?

Local knowledge + historical sources

- photographed 40 buildings inside and outside
- conducted archival research
- compared contemporary conditions with documentation created in the 1980s
- interviewed residents and collected personal memories
- searched for information - ownership, functions, social changes, architectural transformations



FROM COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE TO RESEARCH-READY KNOWLEDGE

Community knowledge adds:

- lived experience
- everyday use of places
- invisible social changes
- personal and collective memory



**COMMUNITY
KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT
REPLACE
TRADITIONAL
SOURCES.
IT HELPS US
UNDERSTAND THEM.**

WHY COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE MATTERS

The role of the library

Community knowledge is

- subjective
- incomplete
- not always independently verifiable



document
contextualise
review
validate

Research-ready knowledge

- ✓ credible
- ✓ documented
- ✓ contextualised
- ✓ reusable

The role of the library is not to accept every statement uncritically.
It is to provide the framework through which different forms of evidence can be documented, contextualised and assessed.

FROM PARTICIPATION TO COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Community participation



Digital collection development



Future research resources



Vissza a találatokhoz

Király utca 34.



Fájlok

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k ©2025_David_Andras.jpeg (3.49

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2025David

Épület címe

1061 Budapest, Király utca 34.

Dátum (Épült / Készült)

1904

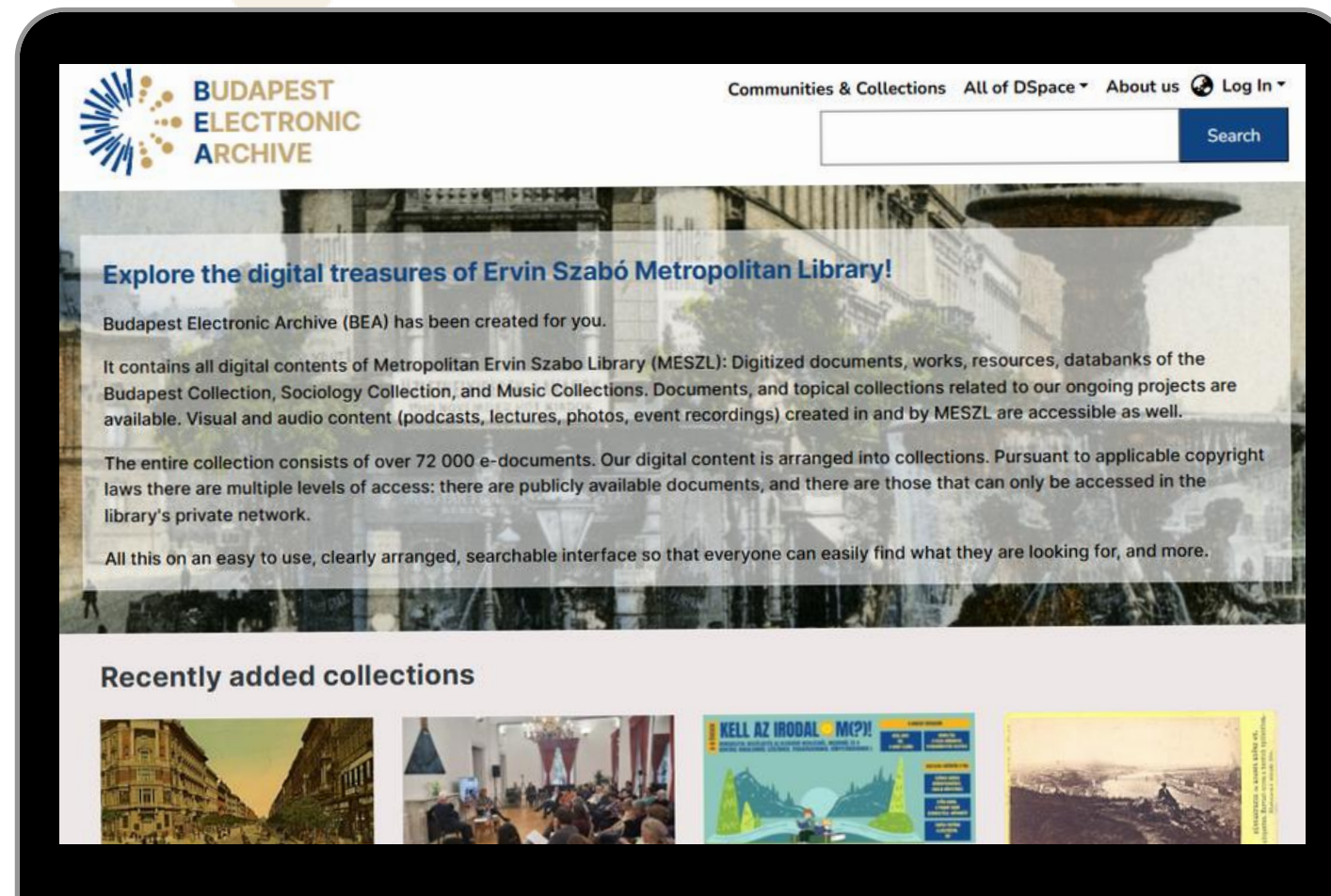
GPS szélesség

47.50024

csúlság



BUDAPEST ELECTRONIC ARCHIVE (BEA)



bea.fszek.hu

- **Not only the outputs...**
 - photographs
 - building histories
 - interviews
- **...but also the evidence behind them**
 - documentation
 - metadata
 - contextual information
 - validation records
- **Research can be**
 - verified
 - reinterpreted
 - reused

Technology stores information.

Documentation creates research-ready knowledge.

OUTCOMES

Project outputs

- 40 buildings documented
- 32 building histories researched
- Hundreds of photographs
- Interviews and community memories
- Publicly accessible research collection

Research findings - What changed in Király Street?

- 🏠 Residential buildings → hotels
- 🏠 Fewer owner-occupiers
- 🔑 Growth of short-term rentals (Airbnb)
- 🛠 Disappearance of small workshops and shops
- 🏙 A very different social landscape than 40 years ago

"Beyond the specific facts, it is the life stories behind them that captivate me."

János Jelen, volunteer



THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME

- The process itself
- Beyond new knowledge...
 - stronger research literacy
 - stronger digital literacy
 - stronger information literacy
 - stronger research community
- Lasting research capacity within the community



WHAT CAN RESEARCH LIBRARIES LEARN?

Any research library can adopt this approach. What it needs is:

- Clear objectives
- Methodological guidance
- Quality assurance
- Long-term stewardship

What libraries gain

- ✓ richer collections
- ✓ broader evidence base
- ✓ stronger community engagement
- ✓ new research perspectives

Citizen science is not a replacement for research.

It is a complementary method that expands the range of knowledge libraries can preserve, organise and make accessible.

LIBRARIES AS TRUSTED INTERMEDIARIES

**Libraries do not only preserve knowledge.
They help communities create knowledge that is worth preserving.**

TRUST • CONTINUITY • INFRASTRUCTURE • STEWARDSHIP

THANK YOU



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