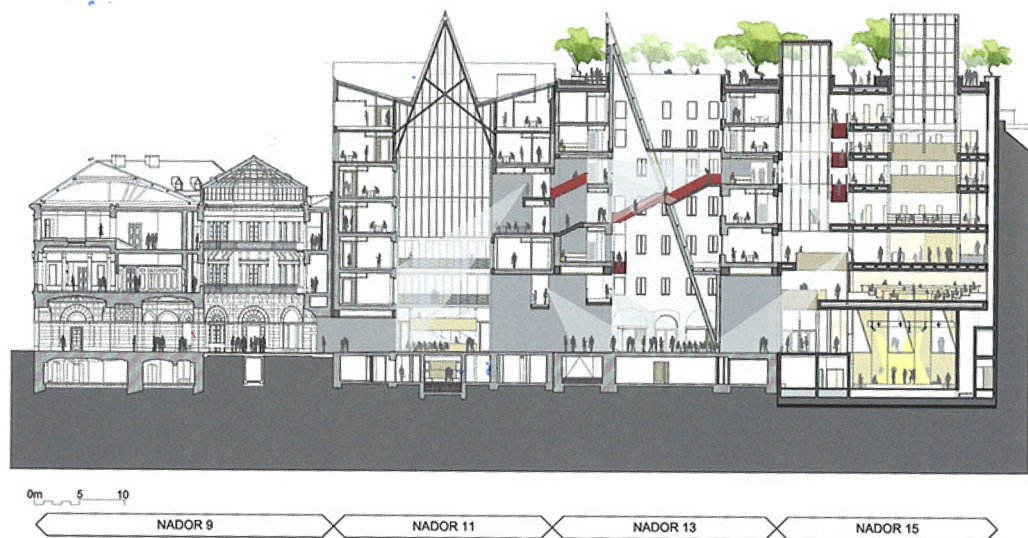


academic buildings beyond. The university required the architects of the new buildings along the street to work together, synchronising levels, relationships of mass and materials. The result is a unifying matrix of architectural detailing and materials that forms a setting to the colourful pre-existing grandstands and places all emphasis on the activity on the street. For the very different Richard E Lindner Varsity Village, which includes an institute of sport built a little later than the street (2006), Bernard Tschumi persuaded the university to allow him to insert the building on a curved slither of land between the

O'Donnell + Tuomey,
Central European
University Competition,
Budapest, 2011
Rendered view into one of
the new courtyards.





stadium and the rear of the recreation center – a very constrained site – and he designed a white slippery round-edged form with a slim internal crevasse-like atrium that presents a memory of a glacier sliding along its valley.

Thus the university came to understand and visualise its topography. Then it applied the city ideals of a civic spine and picturesque central park onto its neoclassical and individualist 1970s morphology. None of this now apparent 'being what it always wanted to be' could have happened without Hargreaves revealing the innate poetics of the landscape. From that central insight cascades both design and social performance: the works transformed the university's ability to attract and retain students and staff.

**O'Donnell + Tuomey,
Central European
University Competition,
Budapest, 2011**

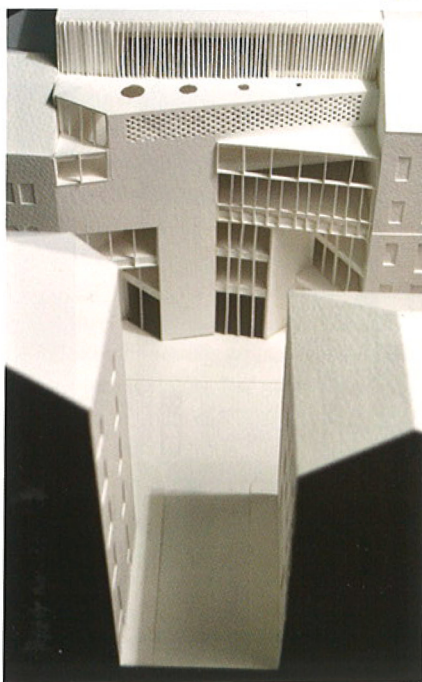
Cross section showing the atrium courtyards and the bridges across them.

In 2011 architects O'Donnell + Tuomey won a competition to re-engineer the Central European University in Budapest. This involved some 30,000 square metres (320,000 square feet) of existing buildings and courtyards, two new buildings and courtyards and a new route through the university's five adjacent but separate buildings. These buildings are in the heart of the city, between an axis from the Basilica of St Stephen to the river and an offset axis back into the city grid across the face of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences at right angles to the riverbank. The urban form is a perimeter block around courtyards. Riding over this unremarkable Central European urban form are layers of institutional ambition. The city was part of the Holy Roman Empire

(dissolved in 1806). It was partner to Vienna in the equally multicultural Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867–1918). Prague to the north was another partner, Ljubljana to the south a junior. These were empires held together by ideas, not by national boundaries, and great thinking flowed. As nationalism began to undermine the empire, Robert Musil (1880–1942) wrote his modern epic *The Man Without Qualities*.¹² In this Diotima, a principal character, traverses the territories seeking an idea that will hold all together. In the 21st century, philanthropist George Soros is such a character, formulating and expounding ideas that may keep the body politic of Europe in balance. Education is his passion, and here as elsewhere he sponsors the developing educational programme of the university.

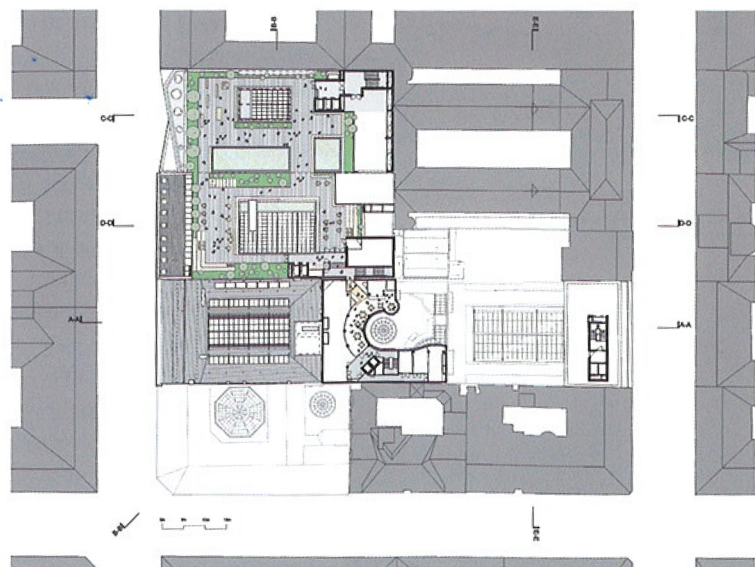
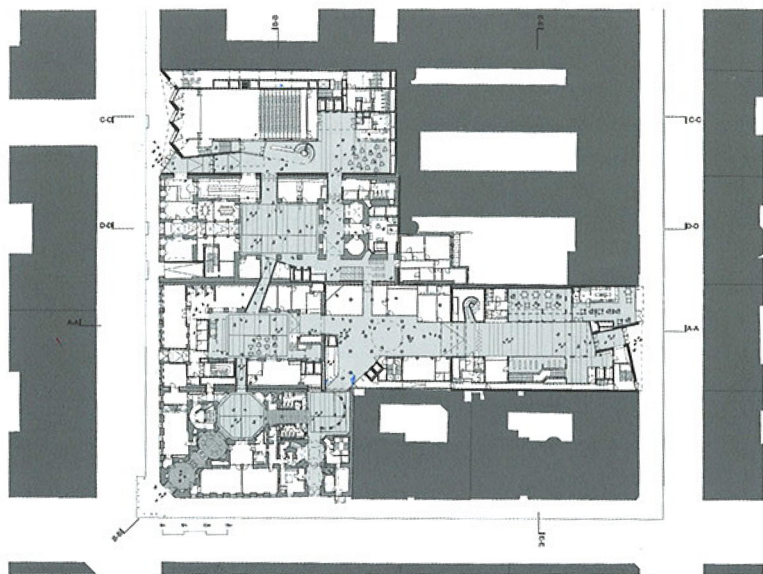
This Central Europe is the terrain in which Camillo Sitte (1843–1903) analysed urban form, revealing the organic syncopation of all of the most loved squares in the cities, and here he railed against the numbing abstraction of Beaux-Arts axial and symmetrical city design.¹³ And from Prague to Ljubljana worked Jože Plečnik (1872–1957), that master of tweaking levels, enclosing courts and bridging rivers so that cities effortlessly look and work as they seemingly must

O'Donnell + Tuomey,
Central European
University Competition,
Budapest, 2011
Model of the new facade to
the south facing an axis to
the river.



always have 'wanted to'.¹⁴ And here in Budapest O'Donnell + Tuomey arrive to implement in this old carcass the advanced educational programmes of the contemporary university, a project less about timetabling than ever before, more about providing locales in which learners – progressing through courses in their own ways and at their own pace, drawing on the worldwide resources made available on the internet – can gather with their peers (and sometimes their mentors) to find a common sense of purpose.

The O'Donnell + Tuomey poetic insight here is that of urban dentistry: cut away the decay, remove the bad fillings (some



low-quality infill from the latter half of the 20th century), create a denture (that new route) that feels smooth in the mouth, and make two new insertions (with courtyards). The cutting away reveals where the opportunities for new congregative space lie, courtyards are roofed over, bridged at upper levels, and as in the prevailing urban form the new buildings have courtyards. Further respecting the historic layering, the new route through the five sites mimics the implied dogleg between the two competing existing axes. One internal arm runs parallel to the axis from the Basilica of St Stephen to the river, turns at right angles and then emerges through a new building with its new facade heading along the axis down to the river past the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on the riverbank. Thus, in the new university design, the new route through the five adjacent sites links the buildings – old and new – and echoes in miniature the larger city. O'Donnell + Tuomey's key poetic insight respects and enhances the intellectual history of the region, adds to its meaning, and structures the refreshed university around an eidetic replication of the urban structure.

In 2011, RMIT, a university of technology and design situated mainly in the northern quarter of the central business district of Melbourne, prepared a brief for adding some 5,000 square metres (50,000 square feet) of space and re-engineering around 20,000 square metres (200,000 square feet) of a block of four 12-storey buildings facing onto the civic spine of the city, and on the other side onto the central open-space spine of the campus. Expressions of interest were called for, a shortlist of five was drawn up and, from examination of the design approaches proffered, a team of five architectural practices – Harrison and White, Maddison Architects, Minifie van Schaik Architects (MvS) and NMBW Architecture Studio, led by Lyons – was selected. Design commenced in 2012. The rationale for the development was the recasting of the role played by university facilities in an age of MOOCs. For a while in the 1990s, many in university administration believed that the need for built facilities would shrink dramatically as online learning replaced face-to-face learning. The need for a place of learning would fade. The decade of investment in its campuses by RMIT in response to student complaints that (to paraphrase Gertrude Stein) 'there was no there there' was assumed to be over.¹⁵ The emphasis, it was believed, should be on the capturing of and capitalising on a university's courseware. Then in 2002 Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) put all its courseware online with unrestricted access. Understanding the implications of this – that what universities offer is high-quality space and the opportunity for face-to-face interactions – Margaret Gardner, a visionary vice chancellor at RMIT, reversed the trends of the decade and invested in a new academic building consisting largely of student portals: