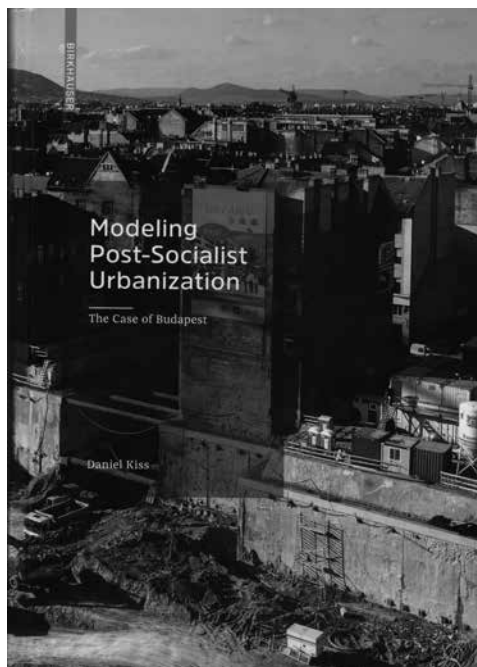


# DUAL-CHARACTER MODELS OF THE TRANSITION: DEDUCTIV AND INDUCTIV PERSPECTIVES ON POST-SOCIALIST URBAN DEVELOPMENT

DVOJZNAČNÉ MODELY PRECHODU: DEDUKTÍVNE A INDUKTÍVNE HĽADISKÁ POSTSOCIALISTICKÉHO URBÁNNEHO VÝVINU

Domonkos Wettstein



**DANIEL KISS: MODELING POST-SOCIALIST URBANIZATION / THE CASE OF BUDAPEST**

2019, Birkhäuser, Basel, 208 p.  
ISBN: 978-3-0356-1649-1

The problem of modelling, abstraction and the case study is the central issue of urban design research: how can the lessons of a city case study be universally valid? Can abstract theoretical models be verified with limited quantities of data? And at what levels of abstraction can universal features be drawn from local histories? The architect and scholar Daniel Kiss's research encompasses the scale of post-socialist Eastern Europe, Budapest, and then 8th District rehabilitation, but the starting scale is the global understanding of theory. In this way, the tension space of universal and local, theory and practice form the dual methodology of the 2019 book titled *Modelling Post-Socialist Urbanization: The case of Budapest*.

A confusing structure of positions and visions characterized the reorganization of Central Eastern European societies after the regime change. During the necessarily transitional period, a pluralistic situation replaced the former monolithic, dictatorial system. The fluid intellectual space of the actors, interests, institutions reveals more general questions: How does the transition period affect urban development? What features can be generalized? How can the temporal space of transition be modelled?

Due to Budapest's scale and complexity, the capital is one of the most exciting cities in Europe. Its modern history offers a model-like and multi-faceted approach, similar to Berlin,

where the symbolic developments of the reunited city offered models to determine the global metropolitan identity.<sup>1</sup> However, Berlin cannot give general models for post-socialist urbanization because of western German influences. Parallel to the capitals of the former Eastern Bloc, Budapest's rapid and large-scale changes, political, cultural and urban revolutions, it embodies many aspects and problems of the millennium. The social and physical problems of the historic, 19th-century urban fabric became more spectacular in the second half of the twentieth century, and after the change of regime, necessitated rehabilitation, which made the inner city districts of Budapest into experimental laboratories of the different strategies.<sup>2</sup> The renewal of the districts of Budapest, especially the rehabilitation of Józsefváros, was accompanied by intensive academic research and public reflection.<sup>3</sup> In search of soft rehabilitation solutions, they highlighted the potential of socio-economic sustainability of high-density downtown blocks, and they pointed to the problem of social overlap.<sup>4</sup>

The post-war architectural and urban trends in eastern and western countries have been gradually analysed by academic circles over the past decade.<sup>5</sup> The knowledge transfer, parallels and differences between the shared Europe of 1945 – 1989 were investigated at international conference series titled "East-West Central" under the leadership of Ákos

Moravánszky at the ETH Zürich GTA Institute.<sup>6</sup> Daniel Kiss also participated in this project, and he analysed the antecedents of ideological crisis of the Hungarian post-socialist transition, which provide a basic model for the recent book. The investigating perspective of historical periods has now reached the recent horizon, and publications and conference series started analysing the post-socialist transformation.<sup>7</sup> Daniel Kiss's several-year doctoral research has recognized the actuality of the topic early on, so as an example for the parallel processions, the work was published as a pioneer project this year.

Switzerland and the ETH Zürich have traditionally been the meeting point for the knowledge transfer of Eastern and Western European architecture and ideologies, which is confirmed by the country's autonomous political status. There are still many research projects with Eastern European researchers who are processing the history of socialist architecture in the former Eastern Bloc countries. Daniel Kiss also examines Hungarian processes from this dual position. Being of Hungarian origin, he personal experience the Central European and Hungarian transitions after the change of regime. At the same time, Daniel Kiss's perspective is also influenced by American and Western European academic experiences. He graduated from Harvard University, then worked at the Chair of Architecture and Urban Design ETH Zürich with Professor Kees Christiaanse, and defended his doctoral thesis at the same university. In addition to his theoretical work, the author is also a practicing architect, which further strengthens the problem-oriented modelling attitude of his book. He worked for two years in the office Herzog & de Meuron in Basel, and has been co-founder of XM Architekten since 2016.

Based on international experiences, he approaches his model from an external perspective, while also possessing direct experiences of local conditions. This "participant observer" status greatly determines how the book is edited and is a productive tension in terms of objective description and ideological position. His research interest was also evident in his educational activities, leading several semester projects not only in Budapest, but also in Cluj, Romania, and these experiences could help to draw more general features of the post-socialist urbanization model.

The issue of inductive and deductive modelling is central to the research. The dual

position of Daniel Kiss outlines a pluralistic space where he transforms complex, often confusing, processes into different dimensions, and then attempts to synthesize the relationships of dimensions, to create a unified abstract model. The structure of the book leads from the theoretical, literary, verbal narratives to the rehabilitation case study of the 8th District (Józsefváros). The three models, the Socialist Urban Legacy Narrative, the Decentralization Narrative, and the Kulturkampf Narrative, reflects the post-transition situation into three dimensions for urban management, state organization and public life.

The synthesis of the book is a systematic scheme, where the abstract ideas are translated back to practical approaches and tries to build up a logic structure of the confused transition. The figure resembles an electronic circuit diagram, which also shows the logical variability of the elements and connections, thus also offering a toolkit for modelling other similar transition situations freely combining the actors and relations. This abstract schema in the book leads to the case study, where it presents the rehabilitation of the so-called "Little Chicago" of Budapest due to its social problems. The drawing itself has a temporary, flexible character. Analysing the rehabilitation, the interests of real estate development companies, the local government and the public life are found to be in strong conflict. In this way, the inductive and deductive approach is interlinked and verified by each other. Meanwhile, the question remains open, whether the two approaches could independently work or how far the case study can give a general model for understanding the post-socialist transitions?

The book is closed by a discussion between Daniel Kiss, Ákos Moravánszky and Kees Christiaanse. The questions raised focus on the methodology of urban design research: they are asked about the applicability of the models built on the basis of individual case studies. As a methodological synthesis they consider the urban modelling as an open source toolkit for comparing different examples. The author does not want to give rigid theories, but rather builds a framework that allows for comparability of different cases. Not only the ideal topic and the investigated district, but the methodology and the modelling become temporary in nature. With this final dialogue, linking perspectives and opening the frames, Daniel Kiss's research methodology become an inspiring model on a broader scale.

**1** KERÉKGYÁRTÓ, Béla (ed.), 2008. *Berlin Transformations – City, Architecture, Culture* (In Hungarian: *Berlin átváltozásai – Város, építészet, kultúra*.) Budapest: Typotex Kiadó.

**2** ALFÖLDI, György, 2011. Urban Quartett: The interaction between city and social fabric. In: Benkő, M. and Szabó, Á. (ed.). *Urban Renewal: Essays on Urban Design*. Budapest: BME Department of Urban Planning and Design, pp. 82 – 91.

**3** ALFÖLDI, György, 2012. Budapest after 2050 (In Hungarian: *Budapest 2050 után*). In: Alföldi, G. (ed.) *Budapest 2050 – Survival Chances of Downtown Blocks*. (In Hungarian: *Budapest 2050 – a belvárosi tömbök fennmaradásának esélyei*.) Budapest: Terc Kiadó, pp. 156 – 165.

**4** BORSOS, Melinda, 2019. *Social aspects in Budapest urban rehabilitation models. Research location: Budapest – Józsefváros* (In Hungarian: *Társadalmi szempontok Budapest városrehabilitációs modelljeiben. Kutatási helyszín: Budapest – Józsefváros*.) Budapest: BME DLA Doctoral School, Doctoral Dissertation.

**5** WAGENAAR, Cor (ed.), 2009. *Happy: Cities and Public Happiness in Post-War Europe*. Rotterdam: Nai010.

**6** MORAVÁNSZKY, Ákos (ed.), 2019. *East West Central Re-building Europe, 1950 – 1990*. Basel: Birkhäuser.

**7** BENKŐ, Melinda and KISSFAZEKAS, Kornélia (eds.), 2019. *Understanding Post-Socialist European Cities: Case Studies in Urban Planning and Design*. Paris: L'Harmattan.