

Report on Paul Saïssset's TEMA Master Dissertation *La Hongrie post-communiste comme opportunité : de la diffusion à l'abandon des modèles d'interventions urbaines de la Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations. Le cas de l'arrondissement de Ferencváros à Budapest (1988-2014)*

Paul Saïssset's dissertation sets a clear objective. It aims at exploring, analyzing and interpreting the situation in which, after the fall of communist political system in Hungary, the French institution Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations, had started to introduce and diffuse an urban development model in Budapest and then, somewhat later, aborted it. The dissertation's main objective is to discover and understand which were the main social, political factors and conditions for this institutional implementation in urban development and its withdrawal. In order to achieve this goal the research seeks to carry on ethnographic and historical analysis on the local, national and transnational levels as well as to chose a concrete case, that of the IX district of Budapest, for study. Within this scope, one of the main methodological efforts of the author is to focus his analysis on the role and behavior of the social actors of this situation and their narrations. Thus, in a general perspective, the aim of this work is to understand how in a local context and from the point of view of the actors, the introduction of a specific French urban model in a different political and cultural context reveals the logic of opportunities, chances, difficulties and perils that characterized the style and destiny of the economic and to some extent political interventions realized by Western institutions on the post-communist scene in Eastern-Europe.

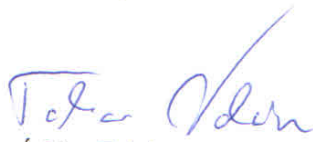
The dissertation is divided into three large parts, each part containing several chapters and sub-chapters. The first part is devoted to explore and analyze the phenomena of transition of the communist to post-communist regime in the case of Hungary as well as the opportunities that became open for the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations in this situation. Nevertheless, the chosen methodological perspective of the dissertation leads to transform this question into the analysis of the network of the actors who were involved in this situation from the French and the Hungarian side. In this respect, the dissertation points out accurately, and in a detailed way, to what extent the development of personal and professional relations at the levels of social actors influenced the coming about of the chances of intervention in new economic and political situation of the post-communist period. Within this context, the case of Ferencváros (IX district of Budapest) in terms of urban development policy and privatisation are also presented. This latter also provides a larger context in which the professional profile of several key actors will be analysed as well as their perceptions on the strategies and actions of the CDC to enter into the post-communist scene in Budapest.

The second main part of the dissertation aims at highlighting the major features of the strategy and policy actions taken by the CDC in the Hungarian case. It is demonstrated that to what level and extent the general strategy followed by this institution was shaped by the process of political adaptation to the conditions of the newly emerged post-communist situation in the IX district of Budapest, and by the interests of the expert-actors themselves (urbanists, architects, experts of urban development). Within this frame, the influence of the network of professional relation on the development of the situation, i.e in adapting the French model, is profoundly highlighted. It is also analyzed how domestic political discourse had been formed by referring, with the help of the experts, the French urban development model as an etalon as an example to follow. The French model serves as a reference point and practice here in order foster Hungary's chances to adhere to the regional policies followed in the European Union.

The third part of the dissertation sets the objective to foreground the actions and reasons that lead at the end of 1990s to abandoning the urban development model promoted by the CDC in Hungary and in particular in the Budapest IX district case. In this context, the process in which the implementation of urban development models more proper to the Hungarian situation, instead of the adaptation of foreign model, are gaining force is demonstrated. Also, the emergence of urban strategies based on the particularities of local and domestic sources and considerations is analyzed in terms of the emergence of the new phase in the Hungarian attitude toward the regional politics promoted by the European Union. The new political ambitions of the "Model Budapest", the ongoing urban reconstruction program as well as the new national urban policy seeking to capitalize on EU funds with its political consequences are also analyzed in detail in this respect. Nevertheless, in the context of the analysis of the new situation the voice of the actors are also reconstructed with force. They are susceptible to reveal how the narrative of the change during the 1990s and 2000s in the urban development models in Hungary is perceived.

Paul Saïssset's master dissertation is an innovative and well-researched study. His work mainly achieves what it promises. The case of the implementation of the CDC in Hungary is analyzed in detail and with a historical and conceptual rigor. In most of the cases the methodological position of the dissertation supports the acquired results, and the actor-based analysis proves to be valid. Nevertheless, and especially in the third part of the dissertation, the reconstruction of professional interests realized on the personal and professional level does not always seem to be able to ground the analysis of political implications. In other words, although the voice of the actors remains heard all along in the analyses and interpretations of the dissertation, in the exploration of the political ambitions and consequences of the change in urban modelling in the case of Budapest, the conclusive interpretations lack a proper analytical (sociological, historical or political scientific) perspective. Such a grounded perspective could have allowed for highlighting the significance of the studied case even more and situating it in a larger context of political of social change in post-communist Eastern-Europe.

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Ádám Takács
Assistant Professor
TEMA Budapest

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