

# Theses

**DÓRA DÁVID**  
**DLA DISSERTATION**

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RELOCATED COMMUNITIES  
ARCHITECTURAL – URBAN LESSONS OF NEW TOWNS  
CREATED FOR RESETTLEMENT

BUDAPEST UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMICS  
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE, DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE  
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TITLE OF DLA DISSERTATION:

RELOCATED COMMUNITIES

Architectural–urban lessons of new towns  
created for resettlement

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MASTERWORK:

Historical reconstruction of “Szekérállás” in Hortobágy

BUDAPEST UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMICS

FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE, DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

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# 01 Abstract

The dissertation examines settlements created for resettlement (relocation) from an architectural–urbanistic perspective. The analysis is based on four case studies, the communities of which were forced to leave their place of residence due to a compelling circumstance, and were given the opportunity to relocate to a new settlement designed and built specifically for them as compensation. These settlements were designed by professionals and their overall architectural, infrastructural concept goes beyond the camp-like emergency solutions, and as such are suitable for analysis of the design solutions.

The hypothesis of the investigation is that the drastic structural, useage-linked and spatial differences between the destroyed settlements and the new habitat hinder the processing of the trauma of losing one's home and impede the community's resilience and sense of identity, which in the long run may lead to the loosening and disappearance of the ties that keep the community together.

The results confirm that only complex interdisciplinary work in relocation projects can reveal the unique space-use characteristics that allow for the development of community-focused, home-making plans that go beyond providing for shelter.

The study is based on first-hand knowledge of the settlements, in addition to extensive literature research. The time passed since the new homes were occupied has given the opportunity to analyse the effects of the design decisions in the longer term, taking into account the impact of the new environment on the community.



Satellite view of the area of Devecser, Somlóvásárhely and Kolontár at the time of the red sludge catastrophe. Source: Google Earth, 2010.

## 02 Summary

The loss of a home is a trauma. Whether we move because of an unavoidable, compelling circumstance or of our own free will, changing our habitat means having to redefine our daily sense of security in a new environment. The extent of the trauma is influenced by the circumstances and our cultural conditioning. It matters whether we have the opportunity to prepare for the change, or we are left groundless by an unexpected disaster; whether we have to cope with the change that upends our lives alone, or our entire social safety net is destroyed. In any case, rebuilding a home involves mental work beyond the physical effort.

The physical act of leaving and re-setting a home takes place in a built environment. Where do we feel comfortable? What makes a new place a home that helps us move forward and grow? What are the attributes in our physical environment that hinder our settlement? Planning for an individual or community traumatised by the loss of home is a particularly difficult task. What can designers do to ensure that they are creating spaces that truly serve the individuals and communities affected?

The main objective of the research from the outset was to outline concepts that can be applied in the design of permanent interventions. The study therefore focuses on a specific, well-defined type of project: resettlements (relocations). Resettlement involves communities whose existing home (settlement or part of a settlement) had been destroyed by a disaster or a planned human intervention and, unlike many, were offered the opportunity to relocate to a new settlement(s) specifically designed and established for them.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The literature refers to this process by various terms, i.e. *relocation, forced relocation, involuntary relocation, resettlement, involuntary resettlement, forced resettlement*. In the dissertation I use the terms "relocation" and "resettlement" to identify the process.

Resettlement projects are a specific intersection of the humanitarian<sup>2</sup> and new town<sup>3</sup> planning task. They are linked to the former because external intervention is needed to rebuild the community's environment; and to the latter because a new settlement is created on a previously undeveloped site, based on plans drawn up on a drawing board. There are evident contradictions in the dynamics of the two approaches: humanitarian aid typically requires rapid, militarily rigorous, top-down and temporary solutions; while responsible planning of a new town is unthinkable without complex, interdisciplinary collaboration, impact assessments, economic and infrastructure planning as well as social work, which, because of its complexity, cannot be done with the speed of humanitarian interventions. The designers of the relocation projects examined in the case studies were probably often negatively influenced by the contradictions between the two types of tasks, and therefore often adopted solutions that limited their ability to meet the real needs of the people they were trying to help.

The collective loss of home of a community is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the destruction of a single house or housing unit, since the spaces and surfaces of community interaction are also lost. The spatial solutions of the relocation settlement affect the restoration of the community's sense of home, security and identity in the new settlement, both at the architectural and urbanistic level.

The theoretical background of the study is formed by the results of the developments in architectural theory and environmental psychology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The effects of the unprecedented development of that era have triggered an intensive work of design theoreticians in the field of urban systems, and in parallel, environmental psychology has emerged as a discipline of its own.<sup>4</sup> The relational theories approach the interaction between individual and form, community and urban space more from the designer's perspective, and seek to identify

the identity-forming elements of spaces.<sup>5</sup> The scientific investigation of the concepts of spatial identity, place identity, and home attachment provides an increasingly precise picture of the environment we call home defines the layers of our personality, our everyday experience and identity.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear from both the design theory and psychology approaches that people and their environments mutually affect and shape one another. Consequently, the structure that provides the space for a community's interactions influences the community and is influenced by the community. A community can function well within the type of spatial structure it has created around itself, which itself has influenced and shaped the actions of the community, and by extension, the individual's relationship to the community.

The resettlements discussed in the thesis took place in different periods, under different economic and cultural circumstances, but all involved communities with strong cultural traditions and identities. Egypt has a historically centralised social structure, and the two case studies from there represent a culturally distinct region of the Nile country. The model village of New Gurna, designed by architect Hassan Fathy (1900–1989) in 1945, was built between 1945–48, but the experimental settlement failed on many levels.<sup>7</sup> The resettlement of traditional Nubia was made necessary by the construction of the Great Dam in Aswan and the creation of Lake Nasser, affecting some 70 000 people in Egypt alone. The New Nubia settlements (1962–64–~69), created for the relocatees by government planning teams, have drastically different spatial conditions in comparison to the old villages, a change that has contributed greatly to the slow loss of identity of the community that had always been in close connection to nature.<sup>8</sup>

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2 Definition of humanitarian crises: "A humanitarian crisis is defined as any circumstance where humanitarian needs are sufficiently large and complex to require significant external assistance and resources, and where a multi-sectoral response is needed, with the engagement of a wide range of international humanitarian actors (IASC). This may include smaller-scale emergencies; in countries with limited capacities, the threshold will be lower than in countries with strong capacities. An emergency is a situation that threatens the lives and well-being of large numbers of a population and requires extraordinary action to ensure their survival, care and protection." Source: UNICEF, see: <https://www.corecommitments.unicef.org/cc-1-1> (accessed: 20 08 2024)

3 Definition of New Towns: "New Towns are cities or towns that are designed from scratch and built in a short period of time. They are designed by professionals according to a Master Plan on a site where there was no city before. This distinguishes a New Town from a 'normal' city that gradually grows and evolves over time. Also, New Towns are mostly the result of a political (top-down) decision. The building of a new city 'from scratch' is a heroic enterprise that challenges the architect or planner to find the ideal shape for the urban program according to the state of the art planning ideas. A New Town is always a reflection of one moment in time and the ambitions of that moment." Source: International New Town Institute, see: <https://www.newtowninstitute.org/spip.php?rubrique1> (accessed: 20 08 2024)

4 See DÜLL, Andrea: *Helyek, tárgyak, viselkedés. Környezetpszichológiai tanulmányok*. 2009., 5-21 (online publication): [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274699356\\_Dull\\_Andrea\\_Helyek\\_targyak\\_viselkedes\\_Kornyeztpszichologiai\\_tanulmanyok](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274699356_Dull_Andrea_Helyek_targyak_viselkedes_Kornyeztpszichologiai_tanulmanyok) (accessed: 20 08 2024)

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5 See in: KRETZ, Simon, KISS, Dániel: *Relational Theories of Urban Form*. Basel: Birkhauser, 2021.

6 See DÜLL 2009, 67-73 and 80, 120-132, 133 and 95, 110

7 See FATHY, Hassan: *Architecture for the Poor: An experiment in rural Egypt*. Kairó: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010. (original edition: FATHY, Hassan: *Gourna: A Tale of Two Villages*. Kairó: Ministry of Culture, 1969.), also DÁVID Dóra, VASÁROS Zsolt (eds.): *Current research of the Hassan Fathy Survey Mission in Egypt 2016–2017*. Budapest–Cairo: Ipari és Mezőgazdasági Építészeti Tanszék– The Office of the Hungarian Cultural Counsellor in Cairo, 2020. and DÁVID Dóra, VASÁROS Zsolt (eds.): *Current research of the Hassan Fathy Survey Mission in Egypt 2018–2019*. Budapest–Cairo: Ipari és Mezőgazdasági Építészeti Tanszék– The Office of the Hungarian Cultural Counsellor in Cairo, 2020.

8 See SERAGELDIN, Mona: *Planning for New Nubia 1960–1980*. In: TAYLOR, Brian Brace (eds.): *The Changing Rural Habitat; Volume I: Case Studies*. Singapore: Concept Media/Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1982., also MAGHOUB, Yasser Osman Moharam: *The Nubian Experience: A Study of the Social and Cultural Meanings of Architecture*. PhD thesis, The University of Michigan, 1990.

Sicily in the 1960s and 1970s was a deprived area of a country experiencing a vast modernisation boom, where the pressure to modernise and catch up with the rest of the country was a determining factor in the disaster management of the Belice Valley earthquake of 1968. The culturally alien solutions of Gibellina Nuova, one of the relocation settlements created to compensate for the tragedy, are analysed in the thesis.<sup>9</sup>

Destroyed by the 2010 red sludge disaster in Ajka, the Devecser district and its reconstruction bears the imprint of Hungary's contemporary disaster management strategies. Through an undoubtedly effective and well-intentioned relief effort, the government, which was committed to compensating for the damage, also used the disaster as part of a political narrative, demonstrating the supposed importance of a strong, caring state and reliance on folk traditions.<sup>10</sup>

The theses summarize the experiences drawn from the case studies.

## Literature of the summary

BADAMI, Alessandra: *Gibellina, la città che visse due volte. Terremoto e ricostruzione nella Valle del Belice*. FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2019.

BARTAL Anna Mária, FERENCZ Zoltán: *A vörösiszap-katasztrófa társadalmi hatásai*. Budapest: Argumentum és MTA Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont Szociológiai Intézet, 2015.

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FATHY, Hassan: *Architecture for the Poor: An experiment in rural Egypt*. Kairó: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010. (original edition: FATHY, Hassan: *Gourna: A Tale of Two Villages*. Kairó: Ministry of Culture, 1969.)

LUXNÉ DR. PREHODA Anna: *A vörösiszap-katasztrófa személyes története. Társadalmi traumafeldolgozás*. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2020.

MAGHOUB, Yasser Osman Moharam: *The Nubian Experience: A Study of the Social and Cultural Meanings of Architecture*. PhD disszertáció, The University of Michigan, 1990.

SERAGELDIN, Mona: Planning for New Nubia 1960-1980. In: TAYLOR, Brian Brace (eds.): *The Changing Rural Habitat; Volume I: Case Studies*. Singapore: Concept Media/Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1982.

TURI Attila: Az Adaptálás művészete – a művészet adaptálása. *Országépítő*, 2020/3, 7-21.

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9 See BADAMI, Alessandra: *Gibellina, la città che visse due volte. Terremoto e ricostruzione nella Valle del Belice*. FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2019.

10 See CSÓKA, Balázs: Vörösiszap-ár után. *Országépítő*, 2011/2, 6-11.  
TURI Attila: Az Adaptálás művészete – a művészet adaptálása. In: *Országépítő*, 2020/3, 7-21.  
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LUXNÉ DR. PREHODA Anna: *A vörösiszap-katasztrófa személyes története. Társadalmi traumafeldolgozás*. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2020.

# 03 Theses



Houses under construction in the resettlement area of Devcser. Photo: András Lenner, 2011.

### **1st THESIS – The baseline of a resettlement project**

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The planning of a relocation settlement is a specific case of new town planning that is the result of the need for a humanitarian intervention. However, unlike a new town, a relocation settlement has a history and its future users are known. Therefore, the working methods of neither humanitarian architecture nor new town planning can be exclusively applied to it. It requires a unique timeline, project management and planning approach, the main challenge of which is to develop a highly complex, multi-stakeholder and time-consuming process under tight time constraints.



*A street of "New Nubia" during Ramadan, in the village of Ballana. Photo: Dóra Dávid, 2022.*

## **2nd THESIS – Interdisciplinarity**

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The tools of architectural analysis are not sufficient to explore the causality of all the spatial dimensions that determine the functioning of communities, and to recognize the role of all spaces and spatial contexts in the way of life. Planning a resettlement town is a complex task that requires an interdisciplinary approach, involving sociologists, anthropologists, environmental psychologists, ecologists and economists among others, from the preparatory stage of the planning.



Franco Purini, Laura Thermes: "Sistema delle Piazze" (1980), Gibellina Nuova. Photo: Zsolt Vasáros, 2018.

### **3rd THESIS – Balance between conservation and development**

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The development potential of a "fresh start" must be sourced from within the community's existing systems, otherwise innovation will force displaced people to develop coping mechanisms rather than catalysing development. Resettlement cannot rewrite or redefine a community's identity or reform its needs in relation to its physical environment by introducing a different architectural/urban character or institutions.



Alberto Burri: "Cretto di Burri" (1984-2015), the concrete footprint of a part of Gibellina Vecchia.  
Photo: Dóra Dávid, 2022.

#### 4th THESIS – Maintaining basic spatial character and cultural references

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The basic spatial characteristics of the built environment - its density, the connections within the settlement and with its immediate surroundings, its landscape linkages, its setting in the landscape - are decisive for everyday spatial experiences, activities, encounters and spatial affordance. The symbolic places of a settlement have a function in the life of the community beyond any formal typology, so their identification and re-creation are key to allow for experiences and events that create a sense of place and identity in the relocation settlement.



*The house built for a victim family in Somlóvásárhely after 13 years of relocation. Photo: Zsolt Vasáros, 2024.*

## **5th THESIS – Time management and project structure**

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The design of the structural characteristics of the new settlement is fundamentally a planning competence and responsibility. It is nearly impossible to change the basic urban layout defined during the planning phase, therefore it can determine the fate of the settlement for even centuries. Accordingly, these decisions require the most careful planning approach. To make responsible decisions, it is essential to separate the response to the immediate life-threatening situation and the medium-term solutions of relief from the planning of the relocation settlement.



*A street of New Gurna around 1950.  
Courtesy of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo.*

### **6th THESIS – Open-ended design and resident participation**

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The experiences linked to the establishment of the new settlement contribute to the self-definition and sense of place of residents. An important means of dealing with trauma is to restore the residents' general sense of control through real participation and active involvement, which is not possible when designers hand them ready-made solutions. The experiences of creating a new place to live are crucial for the development of place attachment and later home attachment and territorial identity, therefore the quality and message of these events have a long-term impact.



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