

DOCONF2025 / CALL FOR ABSTRACT 'Facing Post-Socialist Urban Heritage'

[abstract submission](#) deadline – 15 April 2025
notification of acceptance – 30 April 2025

The DOCONF2025 is the 6th international doctoral/post-doctoral conference in architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, and planning organized by the Department of Urban Planning and Design, Faculty of Architecture, Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME). The conference will be held in Budapest on the 9-11th of October 2025.

The DOCONF series provides a comparative overview of current doctoral research in architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning, focusing on the urban challenges of the inherited physical (built and natural) environment of the **post-socialist** cities in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and post-soviet Asia. Those invited include **doctoral students or post-doctoral researchers** (with a PhD/DLA degree earned after the 1st of January 2020) – specializing in **architecture, urban design, urban planning, landscape architecture**, or other topic-related academic fields.

The DOCONF gives a chance for young researchers to find relevant international context regarding their research topic, to present and discuss at an academic conference, and to publish a final full paper (15000 – 20000 signs) in the double peer-review open access DOCONF2025 e-proceedings (see previous doconf's [publications](#)).

In addition, you could discover [Budapest](#), the capital city of Hungary!

Abstracts can build on theoretical concepts, case studies, process interpretations, and comparative analyzes among post-socialist countries or between Eastern and Western Europe. Important that the scale of your research will be **urban** (not just a building), and if you work with case studies, at least one of them should be located in a **post-socialist city**. For abstract submission, using the form ([abstract submission](#)), give your doctoral data, and write your title and a 250-300 word-long abstract proposal related to the general topic of the DOCONF series Facing Post-Socialist Urban Heritage.

Organizers of DOCONF' series are doctoral supervisors at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Urban Planning and Design. In 2025,

Melinda Benkő habil PhD, Domonkos Wettstein PhD, Prof. György Alföldi DLA, Árpád Szabó DLA, and Bálint Kádár PhD propose five sessions based on previous years' experience and their actual research topics:

mass housing neighborhoods / historical urban fabric / shrinking cities / public space / ruralscape

Below, you can find the detailed description of every session. Nevertheless, the conference sessions and the program will be finalized after your abstract submissions with other invited members of the DOCONF's international scientific board.

Mass Housing Neighborhoods

Throughout the world, mass housing was the answer to decent living conditions after the Second World War and is still an efficient solution to the housing shortage or investment needs in many countries. Modern, postmodern, and contemporary theories and practices shaping these housing developments seem global. Still, their urban form, architectural characteristics, technical details, green infrastructure, ownership system, space usage, socio-economic position, everyday life, etc., are varied locally. In post-socialist cities, most housing estates were publicly owned, centrally planned, built, and managed neighborhoods. However, following the criticisms of the spatial turn, the political and economic changes, and the privatization process, they represent specific everyday areas of cities demanding conceptual and thoughtful public policy decisions regarding their complex sustainability and livability. Housing research and the associated practice are compulsory multidisciplinary, but doctoral research should generally be conducted within only one discipline. Within the DOCONF framework, the Mass Housing Neighborhoods session would reflect the urban-scale-related questions of residential developments, landmark building complexes, urban space networks, etc., of these spatial and social units of cities.

The abstract proposal can focus 1) on a relevant contemporary theoretical sub-topic discovering the specialties of the mass housing neighborhoods: how new urban phenomena and concepts such as the 15-minute city, the changing publicness, the densification/intensification of the compact city, the active mobility, the healthy city, the vertical city, the inclusive city, etc. can be analyzed to reevaluate and maybe develop these areas in new directions, 2) on a comparison of case studies with different geographical position from the same city, country or a larger international context (but at least one of them should be from a post-socialist country), 3) on a comparison between modern and contemporary residential developments (concept, urban form, planning and design process, etc.), 4) on one case study analysis based on primary resources, 5) on a mass housing related term analysis in your local context: what does it mean mass housing, housing estate, living norms, etc.

Historical Urban Fabric: from Rehabilitations to Reconstructions

After the Second World War, the restoration and reconstruction of destroyed historical cities was on the agenda. Socialist ideology also sharpened the historical-ideological relationship with the past, while the interpretation of the heritage of historical architecture was also a problem for modern architecture. From the 1960s, the perspective of urban renewal changed, and the rehabilitations of historic city districts came to the fore, which made it necessary to re-interpret architectural heritage. However, the decades that have passed since the 20th century rehabilitation processes make it necessary to rehabilitate formerly rehabilitated city districts. Critical restorations also result in the reconstruction of buildings demolished during previous rehabilitations.

The cycles of rehabilitation raise the question, how does today's public thinking and architectural concept creation relate to socialist rehabilitations? What narratives and architectural strategies were formulated? How can the relationships between the different rehabilitation layers be interpreted? In this section, we are looking for case studies, theoretical works, and concepts from Central and Eastern Europe that interpret the rehabilitation of the historical urban fabric. The studies may focus on the methodological questions: understanding the methodologies of rehabilitation and the research methodological issues of the topic.

Shrinking Cities

Globalization seems to have reached its zenith. In today's post-globalized world, the polarization of our cities is intensifying. Primary cities in developed and prominent areas are retaining their attractiveness, and the population of large cities is becoming more concentrated, but even in these areas, small and medium-sized cities are losing their role, experiencing demographic decline and resource loss. This process is cumulatively affecting cities in non-winning areas. Much of Central and Eastern Europe falls into this zone. In these areas and countries, shrinking cities have been facing a reorganization of boundaries, roles, and spatial attractiveness for centuries and are, therefore, the primary carriers of accelerating spatial-social and cultural decline. At the same time, the pandemic of 2020 has highlighted the vulnerability and fragility of cities, which for some time seemed to be losing their appeal. However, after a short period, attention and resources have shifted to metropolises and their immediate surroundings. In today's world of 'polycrisis', these declining places face new crises. Central governments and public authorities are doing their utmost to reduce spatial disparities and prevent the depopulation of certain areas, with less success. Growth paradigms make it difficult to face the challenge of recovering from shrinkage. The cities concerned are caught in a vicious circle of regression, losing their attractiveness and capacity to recover.

Successful examples to date show that cities can turn shrinkage into victory by harnessing the engines of green transformation, the circular economy, recreation, agriculture, and green infrastructure to generate new energy. Experience shows that successful experiments in which the local community is at the forefront of change, supported by central spatial development policies, help cities achieve their urban goals. Based on these premises, contributions are invited to discuss the following topics in the context of Central and Eastern Europe: examples of successfully integrated local and central strategies in shrinking cities / specific characteristics of shrinking cities by region or historical context / alignment of planning measures with types and/or causes of shrinkage / adaptive reuse of abandoned/decaying infrastructure and sites in shrinking cities / case studies of value-based projects in marginalized or shrinking places / presenting local (civic) initiatives and their impact in changing city dwellers' attitudes.

Public Space: from Design to Inclusivity

Public spaces in recent decades underwent a significant transformation, adopting new political and social roles that differed drastically from their historical, traditional use. In post-socialist cities, after decades of rigidly regulated public life until the 1990s, residents have often hesitated to embrace these spaces as gathering places or sites of free expression. However, rehabilitation initiatives and the introduction of new public functions have started revitalizing them with various planning approaches. The early top-down redesigns with physical intervention-oriented approaches have slowly been replaced by more experimental, more responsive and more socially oriented planning methods, where issues of sustainability, climate responsiveness, diversity and inclusivity become more and more relevant. Fortunately, today, a sophisticated sense of identity is more and more often prioritized over the visual image of the place.

This session brings together studies on the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of public spaces in post-socialist urban contexts. Analyses may focus on the theoretical background and the reinterpretation of outdoor spaces, provided their use has undergone significant physical or social change. Papers should consider how the chosen cases affect the complex system of everyday urban life. Contributions highlighting both successful and problematic practices are welcome. We are looking for proposals that critically investigate public space-related projects based on how effectively they fulfilled their proposed goals and whether those goals reflected the real demands of the local society.

Ruralscape: Post-socialist Transitions of Rural Landscapes

Socialist countries had been forcing urbanization related also to industrialization in the second half of the 20th century, disregarding or, in many cases, destroying rural communities. While forced collectivization of agricultural production and the concentration of development funds to cities and industrial areas left rural landscapes neglected in most cases, there were interesting processes that led to peculiar ruralscapes defining post-socialist development topics: In some cases, the planned destruction and depopulation of rural areas brought the functional decay of rural areas, posing challenges to find development resources here in the past decades. In other cases, the neglect towards these communities led to the conservation of traditional communities and life forms, carrying immense resources for tourism and cultural development, but also bringing very fast transformation processes in liberal post-socialist environments due to the sudden discovery of modern lifestyles here.

It is important to note that many rural areas received planned development possibilities during socialist times, which are interesting experiments of somewhat idealized rural scenarios. The scale of such developments had been many times only acupuncture, new community houses, service centers, singular building of community housing examples, other times infrastructural, by new road networks, modernization of services and first of all of the agricultural production system, and sometimes by planned reconstruction of entire villages. It is also essential to highlight the somewhat organic transformation process of rural communities and landscapes, as local societies have lost the socio-economic foundations of their traditions, therefore aimed to copy more urban lifestyles by building their own housing out-of-scale of traditional villagescapes, adopting more industrialized building techniques, giving up their traditional decorative and object cultures. These processes changed radically after the 1990s, municipalities and regions became more autonomous but still lacked resources to face the peculiarities of these distorted rural environments. The depopulation of villages became even faster, the building developments of socialist times were instantly outdated, and these rural areas struggled to find sustainable lifestyles and strong identities. The transition of rural landscapes in post-socialist countries has many aspects that need research and systematic documentation. Comparing rural transformation processes in different countries and landscapes could lead to more resilient strategies to rebuild the self-sustainable identities to these communities.

contact info

abstract submission: doconf.architect.bme.hu/abstract_submission/
email: doconfbudapest@gmail.com

BME Department of Urban Planning and Design
Műgyetem rkp. 3. 1111-Budapest, Hungary