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Territory from diversity to standardisation

by Laura Facchinelli

The theme of a territory's identity, which is the expression and mirror of a population's identity, has always been the focus of our research. We have explored it since the now distant issue number 20 "Economic development, landscape, identity", observing how too often (what we call) progress leads to the irreparable loss of elements in the landscape, architectural and cultural heritage which has sedimented over the centuries. In this issue, we return to this theme, focusing our attention on different situations and points of view.

On the theme of the loss of elements of the historic heritage, we consider the exemplary case of China. Following the "ideological" devastations of the 1950s and the loss of so much of the existing architectural heritage, replaced by buildings that were endless replicas of the "socialist" models imposed by the regime, in recent years China has begun equally radical demolition projects to build districts and cities inspired by propaganda and business, undertaken with no debate whatsoever about urban planning. This phenomenon takes place in other countries as well, in the pursuit of spectacular effects, the tallest skyscrapers, the most daring forms. The mad and convulsive pace of building robs each of us of the possibility of visiting, or even knowing that there are places that remain authentic, rooted in different cultures.

The transformations undertaken in the second half of the nineteenth century by Haussmann in Paris were of a completely different nature. They did in fact demolish old and suggestive streets and squares, but to bring a new and grandiose look to a city that since then has communicated the energy and fascination of sumptuous buildings, long straight avenues, squares with their typical "brasseries". In this case, the demolition of the old neighbourhoods served to create the Paris we all love today. A sociologist who considers all points of view underscores that, on the one hand, architects and urban planners are the ones who design the spaces, but on the other, residents and visitors are the ones who live in and experience the city, and that writers, artists and photographers have always been the ones who understand its needs and desires.

A city can also have its buildings, squares and monuments destroyed by the violence of wartime bombings. In postwar Germany, the need was felt to reclaim the soul of the city by reconstructing the buildings philologically, recreating the forms with the same materials. The traumatic event could also be an earthquake, a flood, a fire. At that point the question becomes "how" to rebuild. Opposing solutions can be sustained with theoretically founded arguments, from "like it was where it was" to innovation at all cost. But considering the question on an ethical level, is it acceptable to build concrete boxes in the place where water destroyed the small old houses of a mountain village? And do we not consider brazen the proposal of the architect who wanted to build a glass and steel pinnacle on the roof of Notre Dame in Paris, to take advantage of the void left by the fire?

In seeking a common denominator across different situations, we might consider valid the choices that are not aimed at immediate glory, but seek to leave their mark through meaning for the centuries to come. Beyond personal interests, beyond the trends and conceptualisations of the moment.

Of the many themes and points of view developed in this issue of our magazine, there is a recognition of the core of vitality that exists in the Italian landscape. While the inclination to value differences has contributed over the centuries to producing a living archive of extremely rich urban solutions, in more recent times perverse forms of development have gained the upper hand. But even a landscape of incomplete fragments often devoid of quality has continued to generate unexpected variations. And so, based on this analysis which we are pleased to share, the seeds of a possible renaissance remain viable.

Territori fra diversità e omologazione

di Laura Facchinelli

Il tema dell'identità di un territorio, espressione e specchio dell'identità di un popolo, è sempre stato al centro delle nostre ricerche. Lo abbiamo esplorato a partire dall'ormai lontano numero 20 "Sviluppo economico, paesaggio, identità", constatando che troppo spesso il (cosiddetto) progresso porta alla cancellazione irreparabile di testimonianze paesaggistiche, architettoniche, culturali sedimentate per secoli. In questo numero riprendiamo l'argomento focalizzando l'attenzione su differenti situazioni e punti di vista.

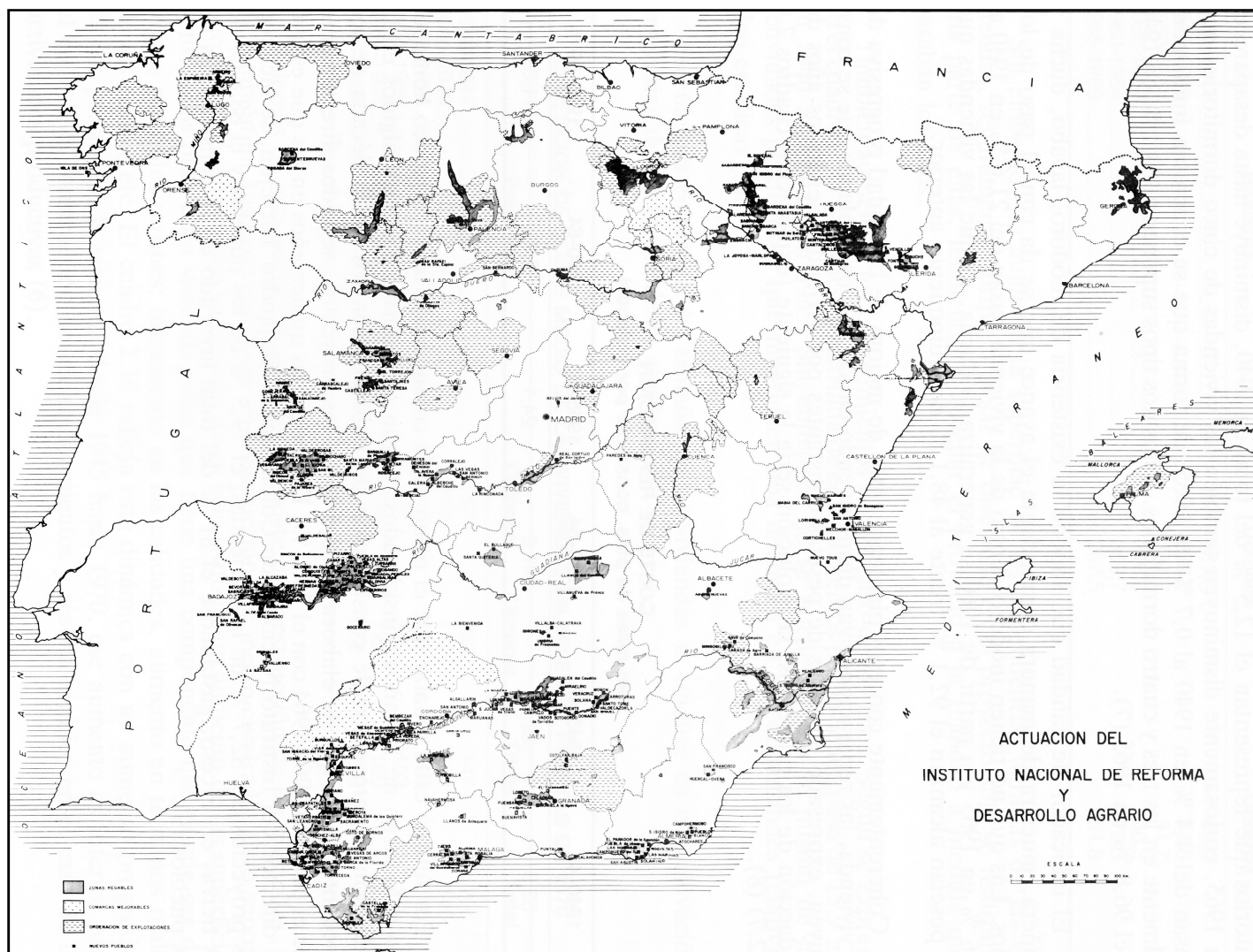
In tema di perdita delle testimonianze storiche è esemplare il caso della Cina che, dopo le devastazioni "ideologiche" compiute dagli anni Cinquanta del Novecento a danno del patrimonio architettonico esistente, sostituito da edifici che moltiplicavano all'infinito i modelli "socialisti" imposti dal regime, negli anni recenti ha avviato altrettanto radicali interventi di demolizione per costruire quartieri e città ispirati da propaganda e business: il tutto nella totale assenza di un dibattito urbanistico. Quest'ultimo fenomeno si presenta anche in altri Paesi, con la ricerca di effetti spettacolari, di grattacieli sempre più alti, di forme sempre più ardite. Questo costruire convulso e dissennato ruba a ciascuno di noi la possibilità di visitare o comunque di sapere che esistono luoghi autentici, radicati nelle differenti culture.

Completamente diversi erano stati gli interventi di trasformazione compiuti, nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento, a Parigi da Haussmann. Interventi che avevano, sì, cancellato vecchie e suggestive case e strade e piazze, ma per dare un volto nuovo e grandioso a una città che da allora comunica l'energia e il fascino dei sontuosi edifici, dei lunghi rettilinei, delle piazze con le tipiche "brasserie". In questo caso, gli sventramenti dei vecchi quartieri sono serviti a far nascere la Parigi che tutti noi amiamo. Un sociologo attento alla molteplicità dei punti di vista sottolinea che, da un lato, sono gli architetti e gli urbanisti che disegnano gli spazi ma, dall'altro, sono gli abitanti e i visitatori a vivere la città, e sono sempre stati gli scrittori, gli artisti e i fotografi a comprenderne i bisogni e i desideri.

Una città può veder cancellati i propri edifici, piazze e monumenti dalla violenza dei bombardamenti. Ebbene, nella Germania del dopoguerra ha preso forma l'esigenza di ritrovare l'anima della città attraverso una vera e propria ricostruzione filologica degli edifici, ricreando le forme con gli stessi materiali. L'evento traumatico può essere anche un terremoto, un'inondazione, un incendio. Viene allora da interrogarsi sul "come" della ricostruzione. Si possono sostenere, con argomentazioni teoricamente fondate, soluzioni opposte, dal "com'era dov'era" allo slancio innovativo. Ma, ponendo la questione sul piano etico, è accettabile collocare scatole di calcestruzzo là dove l'acqua aveva cancellato le piccole vecchie case di un paesino di montagna? E non ci sembra sfrontata la proposta di quell'archistar che voleva erigere una guglia di vetro e acciaio sul tetto di Notre Dame a Parigi, approfittando del vuoto lasciato dall'incendio?

Volendo trovare un comune denominatore, nelle diverse situazioni potremmo considerare valide le scelte che non puntano sulla facile gloria del momento, ma si propongono di lasciare un segno ricco di significato per i secoli futuri. Al di là degli interessi personali, al di là delle concettualizzazioni e delle mode del momento.

Fra i molti aspetti e punti di vista sviluppati in questo numero della rivista, c'è il riconoscimento – nel nostro paesaggio italiano – di un connaturato nucleo di vitalità. Se l'attitudine alle differenze ha contribuito, nel corso dei secoli, a produrre un archivio vivente di ricchissime soluzioni urbane, nei tempi più vicini a noi hanno preso il sopravvento forme perverse di sviluppo. Ma anche un panorama di frammenti incompiuti e spesso privi di qualità ha continuato a generare variazioni imprevedibili. E quindi – secondo questa analisi, che vogliamo condividere – sono rimasti in vita i semi di una rinascita possibile.



Water, New Towns and Interior Colonization: the experience of Spain, 1939-1971

by Jean-François Lejeune

The 1898 defeat of Spain in the Spanish-American War and the subsequent loss of the last colonies opened a major intellectual, moral, political and social crisis. The after-shock provided an impetus for many writers and intellectuals to diagnose their country's ills and to seek ways to jolt the nation out of its predicament.

Franco's Hydro-social Dream

As they were forced to focus inwards, the rediscovery of the Spanish heartland, away from the big cities, was a physical, geographical, cultural, and also architectural process that would spur a radical revision of national identity. Politician, jurist, economist and historian Joaquín Costa Martínez (1846-1911) became the most important representative of *Regeneracionismo* (Regenerationism), a multi-disciplinary movement whose objective was the modernization of the country with a focus on the impoverished countryside. For Costa and his friends, modernization meant the remaking of Spanish nature and thus of the rural world (Swyngedouw, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2015). The erratic fluvial system, the uneven rainfalls, and the long periods of drought had hampered agricultural productivity for centuries, and the complex answer involved the need for major hydrographical engineering of the country:

"There are countries which [...] can solely and exclusively become civilized with such a hydraulic policy, planned and developed by means of a hydraulic policy and its necessary works. Spain is among them [...] the truth is that Spanish agriculture finds itself strongly subjected to this inexorable dilemma: to have water or to die [...]" (Macías Picavea, 1977: 318-319)

Modernity became "a geographical and environmental project or, more accurately, about the production of new geographies and new

Acqua, nuove città e colonizzazione interna: l'esperienza in Spagna, 1939-1971

di Jean-François Lejeune

Ispirandosi alle opere della Tennessee Valley Authority e al recupero delle Paludi Pontine nell'Italia degli anni '30, la Spagna emersa dalla Guerra Civile utilizzò la "campagna" come *locus* e simbolo per la ricostruzione e la modernizzazione dello Stato. Nel corso di tre decenni gli architetti, i pianificatori e gli operatori dell'Instituto Nacional de Colonización, INC, lavorarono in collaborazione con gli ingegneri idraulici statali alla creazione di nuovi paesaggi artificiali (*Kulturlandschaften*, paesaggi culturali) costituiti da dighe, canali di irrigazione, centrali elettriche e città di nuova fondazione. Ogni nuovo pueblo fu progettato come una "utopia rurale" incentrata su una *plaza mayor*, che incarnava, tra tradizione e modernità, l'ideale politico della vita civile sotto il regime nazionalista-cattolico.

Negli anni '50-'60, una nuova generazione di architetti, tra i quali José Luis Fernández del Amo e Alejandro de la Sota, reinventò i *pueblos* come piattaforme di sperimentazione urbana e architettonica nella loro ricerca di uno stile vernacolare rurale astratto e di una forma urbana organica che si armonizzasse con il paesaggio.

On the previous page, at the top: map of the interior colonization with the hydrographic watersheds and all built new towns by the I.N.C. © From: Instituto Nacional de Reforma y Desarrollo Agrario (I.R.Y.D.A.) / Historia y Evolución de la Colonización Agraria en España, Vol. III, Madrid, 1991. On the previous page, below: Aerial view of Entreríos (1953, Badajoz, Alejandro de la Sota). © MAPA. Mediateca. Fondo I.N.C.



qua non condition of the modernization of Spain. However, when Luis Buñuel shot his third film *Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan* in 1933, the gap between Spain's urban life and the blighted countryside had reached increasingly dramatic and politically dangerous proportions. Using a George Bataille-inspired technique of chilling montage and abrupt juxtaposition, the "anarchist-surrealist" documentary about one of the poorest and most remote village of Spain was immediately censored by the Republican government, intent as it were to promote a more optimistic vision of rural Spain through various projects of agrarian reform and propaganda (Mendelson, 2005).

Water, Rural Utopia, and Modernity

The *Instituto Nacional de Colonización* (INC) was created in October 1939 to strengthen Franco's strategy of "ideological ruralization of the proletariat" and implement a proactive policy of land reclamation and rural foundation. In the footsteps of Mussolini in Italy (reclamation of the Pontine Marshes south of Rome) and Roosevelt in the United States (Tennessee Valley Authority), large-scale irrigation, dam construction, electrification, and foundation of new settlements were all necessary solutions to the improvement of rural life and overall political stability that the Second Republic studied, but had no time to implement (Villanueva Paredes & Leal Maldonado, 1991; Lejeune 2019; Pérez Escolano et. al., 2008)¹. The Falangist planners identified a series of major river basins whose improvement could help spur both agricultural development and improvement of the rural way of life: among those, the Guadalquivir and its associate rivers such as the Vía in Andalucía; the Guadiana River from Badajoz to Ciudad Real; the Tagus and Alagón Rivers from the Portuguese border to Toledo; the Ebro River between Huesca and Lerida; the Duero River between Salamanca and Palencia; and the Segura River around Murcia. Over



1 - On this page, at the top: young women in a street of Valdelacalzada (1947, Badajoz, Manuel Rosado Gonzalo and José Borobio Ojeda), 1950s. © MAPA. Mediateca. Fondo I.N.C.

'natures', both materially and symbolically" (Swyngedouw, 2015: 2). By the 1930s, decades of debates and legal initiatives, intensified during Primo de Rivera's dictatorship and the Second Republic, had established a socio-political consensus that an ambitious state-driven hydraulic policy was the *sine*

¹ See Javier Monclús and José Luis Oyon, *Políticas y técnicas en la ordenación del espacio rural*, Volume I of the *Historia y Evolución de la Colonización Agraria in España* (Madrid: MAP/MAPA/MOPU, 1988). In 1933, a competition was organized for the design of new towns in Andalucía's countryside: see "Concurso de anteproyectos para la construcción de poblados en las zonas regables del Guadalquivir y del Guadalmellato," *Arquitectura* XVI, nº 10 (1934): 267-298.

three decades, the architects, planners, and workers of the National Institute of Colonization worked in collaboration with the state's hydraulic engineers to create new man-made landscapes of dams, irrigation canals, electric power plants, and new foundations. Overall, the network of canals and reservoirs infrastructure that channeled the water within the newly irrigated fields was relatively invisible with the exception of the hundreds of dams that were constructed, mostly after 1950. As very few towns were founded on the banks of a river, the connection of the infrastructure was primarily visible from and within the fields.

More than sixty-five thousand colons and their families – thus an estimated half a million of residents considering the size of rural families and their service employees during that period – settled in these newly reclaimed and historically poor and under-equipped regions of Spain. Three hundred villages and towns were built and integrated within the new regional networks. Relatively small in size and low density (mostly one story high), they included more than forty thousand dwellings, designed both as residential and productive unit with their outbuildings and patios for animals and machines. Through human colonization, the techno-nature was transformed into *Kulturlandschaften* (cultural landscapes), i.e., “the human achievement of transformation in context with nature whereby the growth of culture parallels the growth of nature, aiming together towards a heightening of the natural world through manmade cultural interventions.” (Czaplicka, 2000: 5-6). They became productive territories, but they were also planned to support the full socio-economic, cultural and religious needs of the newly arrived colons.

Seen within a European and even worldwide perspective, the interior colonization led for more than 25 years by the *Instituto Nacional de Colonización* embodied an extraordinary experience in the history of urban form. It embraced tradition but was at the same time unabashedly modern if one considers the diversity of the aesthetic trends that were implemented on the ground – classicism, picturesque vernacular, rationalism – at times keeping them pure, at other mitigating them by absorbing elements from various aesthetics and merging them in syncretic fashion. The urban form of the *pueblos* was not homogenous and, beyond some aspects of their program, was not a particular built expression of Francoism, but rather of Spanish cultural identity. Essentially, the archi-



itects of the INC demonstrated their constant preoccupation with form, between aesthetics, hygiene, and practice, to give physical shape to the modern town or village, to their modern public spaces between city and countryside.

Arguably, the program of colonization was not an experiment *ex novo*. From the *Reconquista*, Spain had forged a rich and brilliant tradition of urban foundation, both in America and in the Peninsula itself (De Terán, 1989). Architects and planners of the INC found a fertile ground in that heritage, yet they were equally and unequivocally aware of modern planning in Germany, Palestine, and Fascist Italy. Italian new towns like Sabaudia and Segazia, as well as the 1933 *Concurso de Anteproyectos para la construcción de poblados en*

2 - On the previous page, below: Rincón de Ballesteros (Cacères, 1953, Carlos Sobrini Marín): view of the church from the plaza arcades. © MAPA. Mediateca. Fondo I.N.C.

3 - Aqueduct. © MAPA. Mediateca. Fondo I.N.C.



4 - Aerial view of the plaza mayor in Valdelacalzada (Badajoz). © MAPA. Mediateca. Fondo I.N.C.

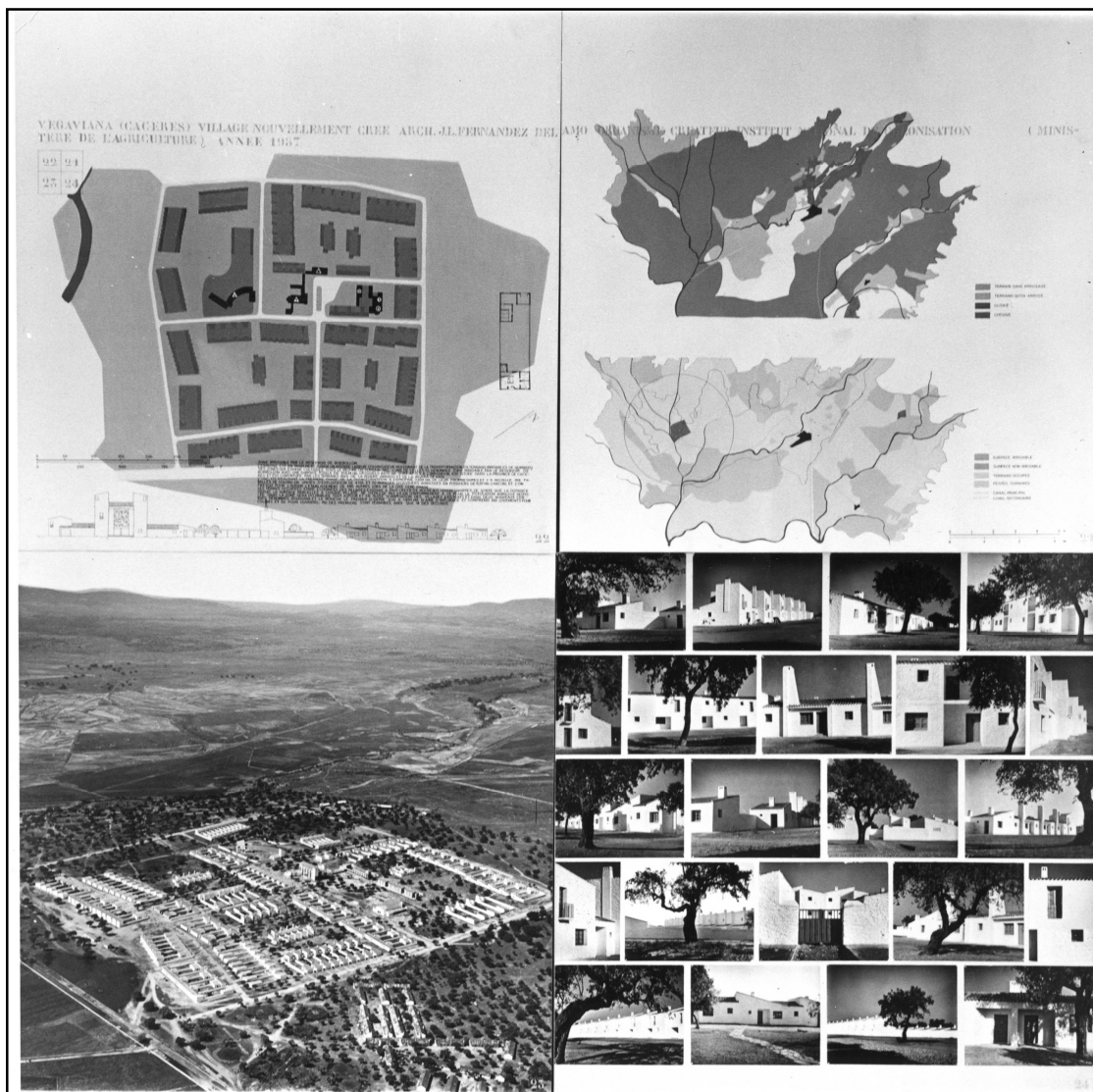
las zonas regables del Guadalquivir served as blueprints for the first generation of towns. In the Pontine Marshes, the most publicized program in Italy and abroad, the planners had systematically promoted the concept of the *casa colonica*, a farm unit often two-story high and isolated in the fields, while the towns were mostly populated by workers in the administration or commercial sectors. In contrast, the INC concluded that the concentrated village or *pueblo* containing all of the farmers' houses was the most satisfactory solution. Beyond the economic and functional advantages, the concept of the compact village organized around its *plaza mayor* helped reinforce the regime's ideological tenets and the importance of the church for its stability. Implicit in this policy was the polycentric structure of the new territories and landscapes, as well as the absence of any hierarchy between the new foundations. Equally critical was the symbolic, ideological, and primarily cultural value to be attributed to community living and providing the adequate urban spaces to perform that civic life. Streets and squares were indispensable to Spanish life and at the heart of its Mediterranean culture. It was thereby logical that the *plaza* became the point of crystallization of the village (Tamés Alarcón, 1948; Tamés Alarcón, 1988).

Accordingly, early towns like Bernuy (1944, Manuel Jiménez Varea, Gimennells (1945, Alejandro de la Sota), Suchs (1945, José Borobio Ojeda), Torre de la Reina (José Tamés, 1951) or Valdelacalzada (1947, Manuel Rosado Gonzalo and José Borobio Ojeda) were planned rationally and systematically, albeit with a lot of design diversity, according to a loose grid centered on an enclosed and at times arcaded plaza mayor. Each town was planned and built by a single architect as a unified project responding to a precise program. The town edges provided spaces for parks, schools, or sport fields, while the peripheral blocks created a genuine urban façade fronting the fields. Within this overall strategy, the towns continued to appear within the agricultural landscapes as compact settlements dominated by a slender, and increasingly modern in design, church tower.

In 1939 the newly created National Institute of Housing directed by José Fonseca enacted the *Ordenanzas de la Vivienda*, a set of regulations based upon pre-Civil War research that established all technical conditions necessary for the new worker dwelling unit and colonist house, including number and dimensions of rooms, orientation, preferred materials, and ventilation systems (Fonseca, 1936). As a result, the typology within the INC projects was strictly regulated. The houses were rationally conceived behind a vernacular and, within the first generation of towns, "regionalist" mask that would recall the typical dwellings of the region. Likewise, all basic constructive elements like windows, bars, balconies, and urban furniture were standardized (Calzada Pérez, 2005).

Modernization and abstraction of the vernacular and the urban form

The Vth National Assembly of Architects of 1949 marked a seminal date for the Spanish architectural world, which opened to an international forum after ten years of relative isolation. Italian guest lecturers Alberto Sartoris and Gio Ponti argued for a new architecture of "mediation" whose modernity would reflect "the rational and functional concept of the art of building... as old as the world and born on the coasts of the Mediterranean," thus reconnecting with the pre-Civil War debates in Spain (Pizza and Rovira, 2000: 89-90). Josep Antonio Coderch's projects for Sitges in the 1940s, the birth



5 - Vegaviana (1954, Cáceres, José Luis Fernández del Amo). Panels presented at the U.I.A. conference in Moscow (1958). © MAPA. Mediateca. Fondo I.N.C.

of *Grupo R* in Barcelona (1951), the Spanish Pavilion for the IX Milano Triennale (1951), and the *Manifiesto de la Alhambra* (1953) among others, provided the impulse and the cultural alibi, not only to adopt a stripped-down vernacular as a politically acceptable form (Chueca Goitia et. al., 1953).

From the early 1950s a new generation of I.N.C. towns sprang up from the drawing boards of Alejandro de la Sota, José Fernández del Amo, Miguel Herrero, Fernando de Terán, and others like Antonio Fernández Alba. For this new generation of architects, the search for a more abstract urban form to match the modernized vernacular implied that the grid and the block could lose their absolute character and be substituted by more organic plans and relationships between city and nature. Camillo Sitte's tenets of urban composition, which provided a traditional sense of identity to the first generation of new towns built in the 1940s, remained critical, although in a reinterpreted manner,

to the implementation of that novel dialectic between tradition and modernity (Lejeune, 2021). Accordingly, Alejandro de la Sota designed the pioneering Esquivel (1952) as a symmetrical fan-shaped figure, whose apparent rigidity reflected "it was born all at once on a flat terrain" (De la Sota, 1953: 16). An extensive system of pedestrian-only streets, alleys, and small squares gave access to the front of the houses, whereas another system of streets, wider and bordered by high courtyard walls, concentrated all the agricultural traffic and the commercial movement. José Luis Fernández del Amo developed further the vision of a modern urban form in Cañada de Agra (1962), Villalba de Calatrava (1955), Miraelrío (1964), and especially Vegaviana (1954) (Centellas Soler, 2010). Located close to the Portuguese border, Vegaviana was praised as a work of "human, plastic, and social quality" (Saenz de Oiza, 1959: 25) "whose architecture derives from man and serves his vital fulfillment"



6 - Civic center of Esquivel with the church seen from the commercial arcades.
© MAPA. Mediateca. Fondo I.N.C. Photo Kindel.

(Castro Arines, 1983). As Fernández del Amo later wrote:

"I have run across the Spanish land and have learnt, in all its corners, what an anonymous architecture could teach me [...]. Going from surprise to surprise, I have been taught to guess the measure and the function of the spaces that man built to shelter his life and his work, and how he set up an environment for social life. So were born and were made the villages and small towns that I admire and from which I have gathered the hidden laws of spontaneous organization" (Fernández del Amo, 1995: 77).

In contrast to the Fascist Pontine cities whose public buildings and spaces were scenically and politically conceived as objects of propaganda to be extensively photographed and visited, the 300 Spanish towns were built along little traveled roads, almost anonymously, and thus far from the tourists' gaze. Beyond the pragmatism of the program and the timeless quality of their streets and patio-based housing fabric, at times a "surrealist" atmosphere transpired. In *Profession Reporter* (1975), Michelangelo Antonioni captured the power of the "metaphysical" or rather "surrealist" spirit, when, leaving the Palacio Güell on their way to Almería, Nicholson/Locke and the Girl enter the sun-scorched and last Andalusian town of the INC, Solanillo designed in 1968 by Francisco Langle Granados (Lejeune, 2021). Forty-two years after Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes*, the image of the Spanish village had changed dramatically. That year marked the end of Franco's regime and the return to democracy.

Conclusions

The new pueblos were not garden cities that imitate the countryside for very different users, potentially nostalgic of a past that they have never experienced. On the contrary, they were genuine agricultural villages for genuine workers of the land. In other words, there was no 'displacement of meaning' between architecture, urbanism, and users – something that happens every day with tourist developments, the transformation of historic villages into tourist havens and even middle-class villas in subdivisions that are taking over the Spanish peripheries, especially the Mediterranean coasts, to host retirees from Spain and other European countries. This coda does not pretend to suggest solutions or imagine what kind of regulating infrastructure would be required in order to better control development. It simply aims to frame a historical case study within a future perspective, whose analysis and emulation in democratic Spain – and more globally across Europe and America – could provide the ammunition necessary to challenge the status quo of international real estate market forces.

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7 - Aerial view of Solanillo (1968, Almería, Francisco Langle Granados). © MAPA. Mediateca. Fondo I.N.C.