

RURAL UTOPIA AND WATER URBANISM. THE MODERN VILLAGE IN FRANCO'S SPAIN

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Lejeune, J.F. (2021) *Rural Utopia and Water Urbanism. The Modern Village in Franco's Spain* (DOM publishers: Berlin).

Jean-François Lejeune's book «The Modern Village in Franco's Spain» studies the reconstruction of the towns devastated in the civil war between 1936 and 1939. In the 1940s and 1950s Franco's government planted about 300 rural settlements in the Spanish countryside. The new settlements were embedded in the rural setting by the creation of man-made landscapes of dams, irrigation canals and electric power plants.

Lejeune's book analyses the ideological, political, and urbanistic principles in Franco's hydro-social programme of modernisation of the countryside. Under the backdrop of Franco's authoritarian dictatorship the villages, or pueblos, were designed as a 'rural utopia'. Each village is centred around a plaza mayor embodying the centre of urban life under the national-catholic ideology.

While describing the mind set of the Spanish architects, such as Alejandro de la Sota and José Luis Fernández del Amo, the book manages to link the movement for urban modernisation in Spain to the early-modernist movement romanticising the rural lifestyle in Germany and other European countries. He traces the search for an alternative modernity beyond the Mies- and Bauhaus- modernity. Lejeune's introduction manages to free the romantic modernist movement from its dark roots of ethnic and reactionary thinking and set them in the larger context of a more diverse approach to modernity in the beginning of the 20th century, such as Bruno Taut, Paul Schmitthenner and Richard Kauffmann.

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The book shows also the reality of rural modernisation in Franco's Spain, where the motives of the alternative modern architecture necessarily got tainted by the autocratic and nationalist agenda of the regime. The *pueblos de colonización* shown by Lejeune show traits very familiar to works such as Schulte-Frohlinde's plans for German settlements in the east (Schulte-Frohlinde, Kratz et al. 1940). They illustrate thereby the tragic affinity of romantic urbanism to totalitarian thinking which has soured their appreciation in modern architectural history writing.

Lejeune's work contributes hereby to shed light on a subject so often ignored by contemporary architectural history writing. The main contribution of the book is nevertheless to link modern vernacular architecture in Spain to the romantic modernism of 20th century Europe.

The book is well illustrated with over 400 photos and drawings. It contains a catalogue of villages planned or executed in the period between 1943 and 1970 with localisation and major morphological information. The publisher has to be commended (again) for making the subject accessible in such an opulent way.

References

Schulte-Frohlinde, J., et al. (1940). *Der Osten*. München., G. D. W. Callwey.

