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THE NAZI ANTI-URBAN UTOPIA

Generalplan Ost

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Nazi Germany saw Eastern Europe as an opportunity to expand its territory, its living space. Poland would become the laboratory for an inhumane colonisation plan, the *Generalplan Ost* ("General Plan for the East"), which involved replacement of the non-Aryan population with Germanic farmers. The anti-urban management of that lobotomised territory was scientifically drafted by a group of architects, geographers, and agronomists working under the orders of Heinrich Himmler. The urban planning aspects of this utopian plan, based on central place theory, self-sufficiency, and neighbourhood units, were of great technical interest and influenced the creation of new communities within Franco's regime. However, we cannot overlook the fact that, had the Nazi plan been completed, it would have resulted in the forced relocation of 31 million Europeans.

Keywords: Nazi Germany, *Generalplan Ost*, land management, colonisation, urban planning.

INTRODUCTION

The fields of urban planning and land management have historically focused on significantly different objectives depending on the authors of each plan and when they were created. Some have given greater prominence to the artistic components of urban planning, while others have focused on a strictly functional problem that they attempt to solve rationally; i.e., as a science. The great urban layouts of the Renaissance and Neoclassic era, for example, were essentially formal, aesthetic, and based on morphological views of cities and territories. Conversely, the urban planning of the Modern Movement in the first half of the twentieth century planned houses, cities, and territories from an essentially functional and rational perspective, approaching the discipline in a scientific and technical direction.

Although the Nazi party generally detested modern architecture and considered it contrary to the classical rules that should govern the new Germany, their urban and territory planning tried to follow functionalist and rationalist principles. This was especially true for the colonisation of the Eastern territories, mainly the land occupied in Poland between 1939 and 1945. The Nazi colonisation of Poland, both in territories annexed by the Third Reich and those in the *Generalgouvernement*, was a testing ground for land management and was understood as a scientific and technical discipline. This «science» was captured in the so-called *Generalplan Ost* or General Plan for the East, directed between 1940 and 1942 by Konrad Meyer-Hetling and supervised by Heinrich Himmler. It was designed to replace the Polish population with Germanic colonists and to create new German-style villages, as the first urban and territory management test for the more ambitious conquest of the entirety of Southern and Eastern Europe, including Soviet territory (Segal, 1942, p. 15).

«Nazi ideology was based on populist ruralism, which proposed that living connected to the land was healthier»

THE EAST IN THE GERMANIC IMAGINARY

There was a myth in part of the German collective imagination according to which its Eastern European territories were illegitimately occupied by Slavic and Baltic populations after the fall of the Roman Empire through barbaric invasions (including by the

Huns and Avars, etc.). The longing for that ancient Germania Magna was one of the intellectual motors that drove Nazis to invade and annex Austria and part of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Lithuania. According to Nazi ideology, these eastern territories were part of Germany's alleged *Lebensraum* ("living space"). They had interpreted the geopolitical concept created by the geographer Friedrich Ratzel in the early twentieth century in a biased way (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2008, p. 82). Hitler himself devoted a chapter in *Mein Kampf* to the «political orientation towards the east», explaining that one of Germany's main problems was precisely its high population density, so the most urgent need was to obtain a sufficiently large territory (Hitler, 1936, pp. 726–758). Cartographers such as Arnold Hillen-Ziegfeld published maps that the Nazi propaganda conveniently used to visually explain the need to increase Germany's living space towards the east. They presented the fact that there were German-speaking regions outside the Reich as evidence: according to them, these regions had been isolated after the Treaty of Versailles (Figure 1).

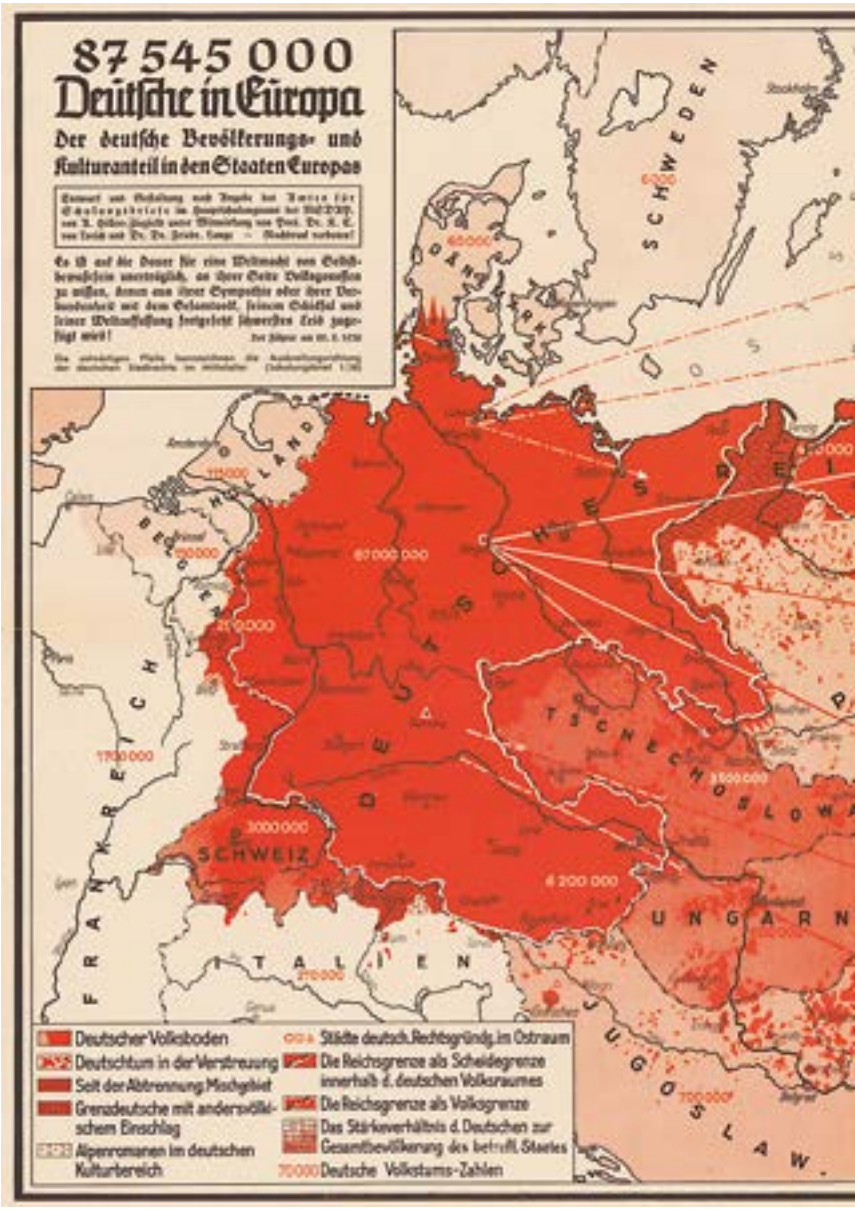


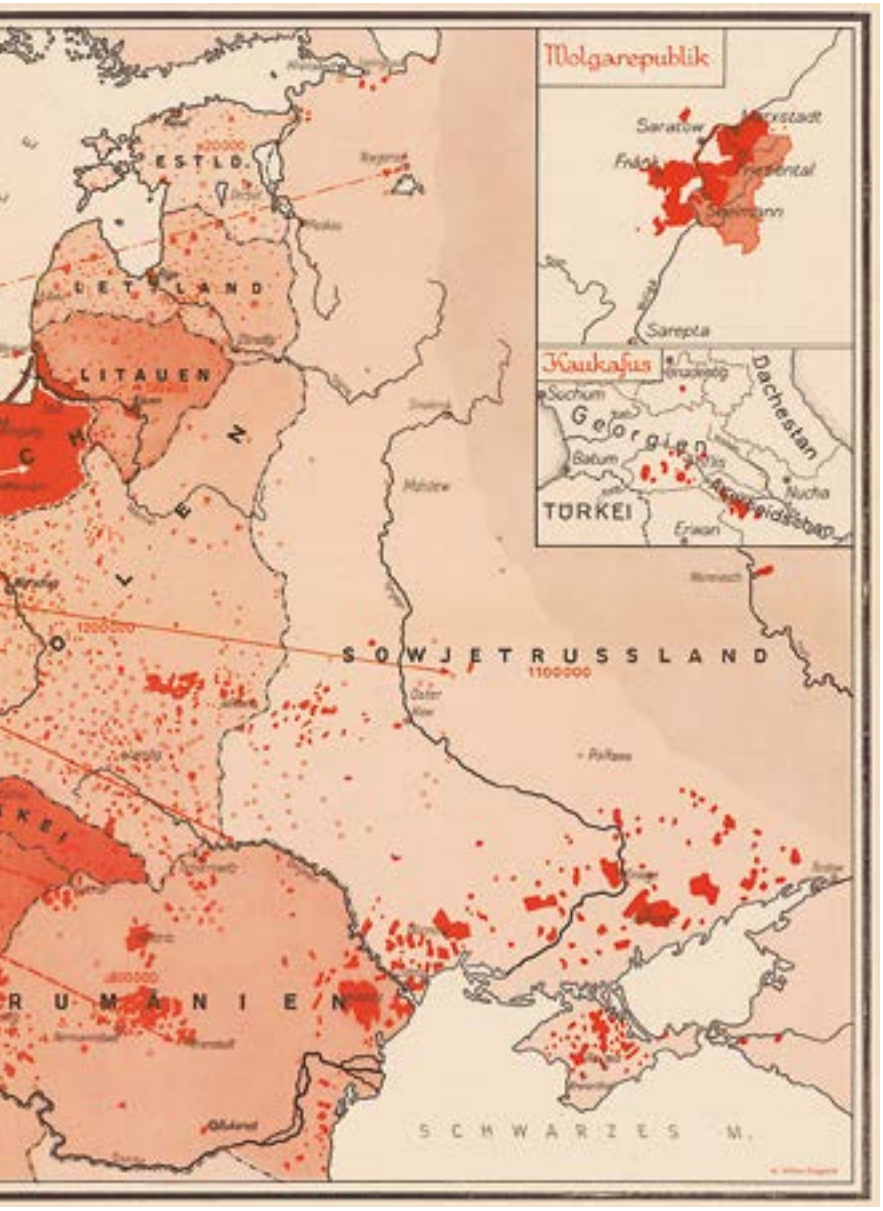
Figure 1. Map created by the Nazi cartographer Arnold Hillen-Ziegfeld in 1938 to prove the existence of 87,545,000 Germanic-origin inhabitants in Central and Eastern Europe. The different shades of red correspond to different «Germanic» population densities in East and Northwest Europe. The arrows indicate the spread of German municipal rights in the Middle Ages. These maps were conveniently used by Nazi propagandists to visually explain the need to expand Germany's living space towards the east.

SOURCE: PJ Mode Collection of Persuasive Cartography, Cornell University

RURALISM IN NAZI IDEOLOGY

The *drang nach osten* ("push towards the east") was to use German farmers as the examples of perfect colonists. The *Wehrbauer* or soldier-farmer would be responsible for defending the conquered eastern territories and germanising them with Nazi ideology. That ideology was based on the *Völkisch* movement ("populist ruralism"). In a romantic and anti-urban way, it proposed that living connected to the land was healthier, so an organised return to the countryside was necessary. In addition, their productive life would help the Reich by reducing its dependence on food imports. The result of the union of this idea with German nationalism can be summed up with the motto *blut und boden* ("blood and soil") which was adopted by the Nazis. The movements of the Artaman League and works by agricultural engineer Walther Darré, Minister of Agriculture and Supply between 1933 and 1942, were decisive in this process. Their shared ambitions focused on renewing the German race through agricultural and farming settlements in the countryside, which would be occupied mainly by young, previously urban men (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2008, pp. 78–79). According to

«In 1940, when he joined the National Socialist party, the geographer Walter Christaller put his influential central place theory into the hands of the Nazi regime»



their plan, the perfect place for such colonisation was Eastern Europe where they could establish not only social and racial order, but also urban order, through land management done as scientifically as possible.

POPULATION REPLACEMENT AND TERRITORIAL LOBOTOMY

The Nazis had started devising territorial planning for Germanic Poland even before its military invasion in September 1939. In 1935, the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* or "German Labour Front" had already made several territorial division proposals for Poland (Fehl, 1992, p. 96) and by 1939 the invasion had already been completed. In order to expand the details of their urban-territorial organisation without leaving behind his ideological perspective, Hitler appointed Heinrich Himmler, an agronomist, member of the Artaman League, and leader of the SS (initials for *Schutzstaffel*, the "protection squadron" – Hitler's political-military organisation) as head of the Reich Commission for the Consolidation of German Nationhood (RKFDV, *Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*). The objective was to repopulate the occupied areas in the east with Germanic farmers who lived even further away in Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and even Bulgaria. In the first phase, some of these Germanic farmers would settle in the annexed Polish region of Warthegau or Wartheland, in the Varta River basin. To this end, Himmler established the headquarters for the RKFDV in Posen (Poznań) to draft the *Generalplan Ost*.

Many of the inhabitants of the region were forced out of their homes so that the land could be reordered without any sociocultural determinants. In the spring of 1941, around 560,000 Jewish inhabitants were confined in a large ghetto in Łódź, and another 410,000 non-Jewish Polish nationals were forcibly relocated to the *Generalgouvernement*. All their personal property and real estate was confiscated. In the district of Poznań alone, the Nazis confiscated 3.2 million arable hectares, which accounted for 75 % of the total area of the district (Fehl, 1992, p. 101). Between 1940 and 1944 more than 241,000 Germanic peasants were instated in Warthegau (Epstein, 2010, p. 174). This was an attempt at the territorial lobotomy the Nazis had longed-for: to erase and substitute all non-Germanic local identity.

A SELECT TEAM OF URBAN PLANNERS

Due to its ideological component, the SS, rather than the regular administration, carried out the territorial reordering of Poland. To this end, Himmler organised a department of urban technicians under the supervision of the agronomist and University of Berlin professor, Konrad Meyer. In 1940, this group included Klaus Neupert, Josef Umlauf, and the well-known geographer Walter Christaller. Christaller had already published his influential central place

theory in 1933, and in 1940, it was put into the hands of the Nazi regime, when he joined the National Socialist party. Thus, the Polish territorial reorganisation used to implement the *Heim ins Reich* or "return to the empire" –after the massive *Entfernung* or «expulsion» of the local population of non-Aryan origin– would be carried out following the postulates of his supposedly scientific location theory (Barnes, 2015, pp. 193–198).

CHRISTALLER'S PROPOSALS

Christaller's central place theory was ideal for combining the aforementioned Nazi preference for classical and traditional architecture with a territorial plan based on rational and scientific assumptions. The minimal aggregation unit in this plan was, as we have already stated, the soldier-farmer and his family. He would live on a farm alongside other farms of similar size, all placed around public buildings (for example, the Nazi party headquarters or Hitler Youth headquarters, etc.) which would form the smallest urban unit: the *Dorf* or "village".

This minimal settlement had to represent the Nazi ideal of a rural community, which Christaller called *Hauptdorf* or "main village". It was limited to 600 inhabitants and would form, in principle, the pattern repeated throughout the colonisation settlements in Warthegau. This settlement pattern would include the establishment of new central places, each efficiently distanced and following a hierarchy based on Christaller's hexagonal theory (Figure 2), and provided a timeline for their construction over the subsequent 25 years (Rössler, 2016) or more.

Specifically, Christaller thought that 36 new *Hauptdörfer* or «new villages» would have to be built in Warthegau (Barnes, 2015, pp. 197–198), which was considered the first territorial laboratory for putting his theories into practice. He distanced the settlements sufficiently from each other that their functional socio-economic areas-of-influence would not overlap, but close enough that farmers could access them within an hour; i.e., around four kilometres distance. He projected them especially in the eastern half of the region because, unlike the western half which had already formed part of the nineteenth-century Kingdom of Prussia, the SS considered that area to be less historically germanised (Fehl, 1992, p. 101).

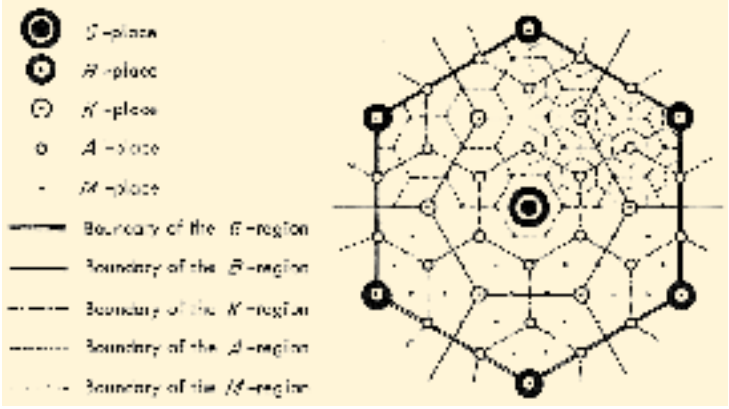


Figure 2. Ideal structure according to Walter Christaller's central place theory, 1933. The image shows five ranges of centrality among communities, depending on how specialised the goods and services they provide are, and the five boundaries of their areas of influence, or associated market regions (Boundary of the G-region, etc.). Thus, the G community (G-place) corresponds to the maximum range of centrality and market influence, by offering a wider range of services.

SOURCE: Christaller, W. (1966). *Central places in Southern Germany*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

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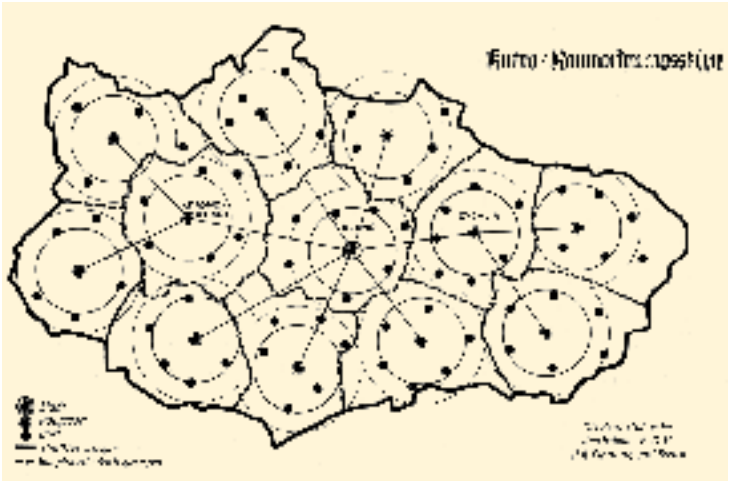

Figure 3. Outline of the settlement hierarchy resulting from applying central place theory to the Kutno region, northeast of Warthegau. It was created for Konrad Meyer by Walter Christaller in 1941. The main city (*Stadt*) would be Kutno, whose boundary (*Stadtbereichsgrenzen*) would be the entire region, marked by a thick solid line. Within this region would be several main villages (*Haudptdorf*), whose areas (*Hauptdorfbereichsgrenzen*) are marked by dashed lines, and various villages (*Dorf*).

SOURCE: Wasser, B. (1993). *Himmlers Raumplanung Im Osten: Der Generalplan Ost in Polen. 1940–1944*. Basel: Birkhäuser.

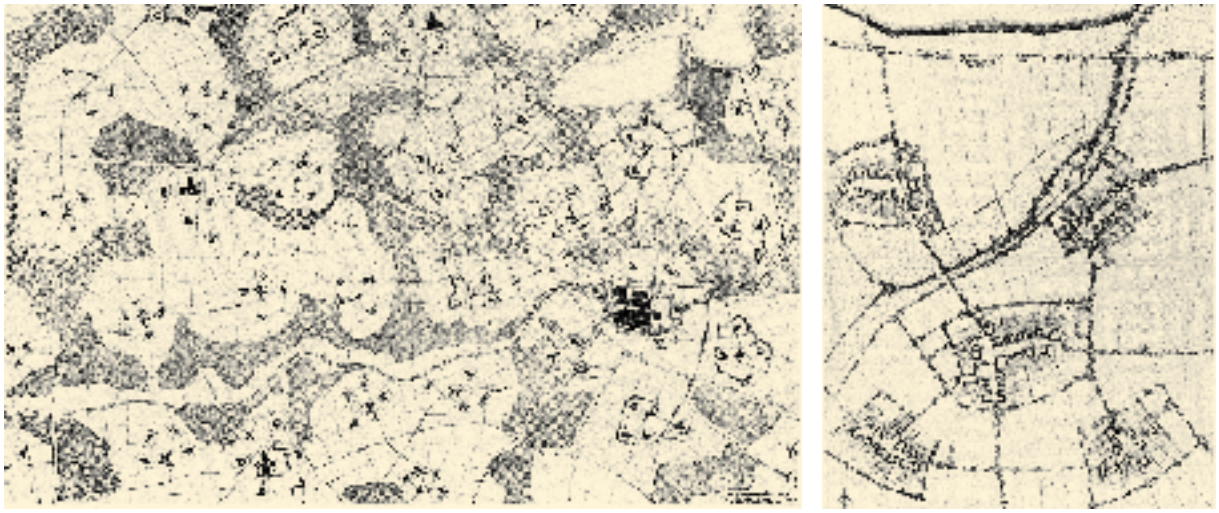

Figure 4. The general management and detail of the new agricultural settlements proposed for the Leslau area in 1941. The plans were made by the architect Karl Neupert, who, following Walter Christaller's ideas, structured the settlements hierarchically, surrounding central communities at different distances with satellite Germanic farms.

SOURCE: Dwork and Van Pelt (2008)

The new *Hauptdörfer* would occupy the entire territory, following the honeycomb-mesh pattern theorised by Christaller. Each six-village group would orbit a seventh larger, higher ranking settlement; this would be the *Gehobenes Hauptdorf* or "higher-level village" with twice the population (1,200 inhabitants) and would offer more advanced goods and services. The highest-ranking central place in Poland would obviously be the new Warsaw, the germanised Warschau, for which the Nazis had also developed a macabre urban plan that would see it completely destroyed and reconstructed.

THE FIRST OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

The first Warthegau district to be redesigned under these principles was Kutno (Barnes, 2015, p. 197), located to the northeast, within the voivodeship of Litzmannstadt or Łódź (Figure 3). Leslau, in the adjoining Kuyavian-Pomeranian voivodeship, was also the early subject of detailed planning (Figure 4) within *Generalplan Ost* (Neupert, 1940). Also noteworthy was Lublin, in the voivodeship of the same name, which was the temporary headquarters for drafting this plan (Poprzeczny, 2004, p. 200) and was located next to the city of Zamość, renamed Himmlerstadt, «Himmler's city», by the Nazis. In November 1942, the Nazis expelled 100,000 inhabitants from 300 towns in the region of Zamość and took them to the concentration and death camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz, replacing them with Germanic settlers (Fritz, 2011, pp. 257–258).

Warsaw, the highest-ranking city according to Christaller's hierarchical diagram, would also be rearranged and germanised following a specific plan known as the Pabst Plan, created and developed by the architects Friedrich Pabst, Hubert Gross, and Otto Nurnberger between 1940 and 1942. They intended to recreate a sort of medieval-inspired German village limited to 130,000 inhabitants after destroying the old Warsaw, which was ten times larger and had had 1,300,000 inhabitants, a third of whom were confined in the large Jewish ghetto.

THE THEORETICAL-URBANISTIC BASES

Apart from central place theory, the urban planners in Meyer's team based their work on three other sources which did not contradict Christaller's ideas: firstly, the ideas of the civil engineer and economist Gottfried Feder; secondly, extensions of that theory by the architect Carl Culemann; and lastly, the traditional designs of medieval German villages (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2008, pp. 241–246).

From Feder's ideas they mainly studied the concept of self-sufficient cities, which he theorized should combine agriculture and farming with industrial production. In particular, they used his detailed proposals for an ideal average city and its corresponding agricultural spaces for 20,000 inhabitants, which would occupy 375 hectares of urban land and 2,780 hectares of land in total (Feder, 1939, p. 448). This sort of data was important for a rational and scientific colonisation of Poland.

In terms of Culemann's concepts, the Nazis were interested in his systematic study of neighbourhood units, a fundamental idea in the modern history of urban planning. Culemann studied in detail the planning of urban cells in Feder's ideal city of 20,000 inhabitants. In the late 1940s, Culemann had concluded that such a city could include four cells or districts with about 900–1,200 dwellings each. Each district would in turn be divided into three smaller sub-districts of around 300 or 400 dwellings, which would contain four neighbourhood units of about 100 dwellings. The urban planner should, therefore, design that neighbourhood unit perfectly, considering the optimal orientation and the desired types of dwelling, equipment, and free spaces, from which the entire colonisation of Poland would be gradually and hierarchically derived.

Finally, Meyer's office was also influenced by the compact, defensive, and self-contained designs of German medieval villages. This is evident in Neupert's publications, which account for the work of his team (Neupert, 1940), as well as in the Pabst Plan for new Warsaw and in the 1942 plan for the reconstruction of the city of Auschwitz (Oświęcim) by Hans Stosberg, which even imitated the typical almond shape of many medieval German villages (Dwork & Van Pelt, 2008, plate 10).

Figure 5. Opening of the exhibition «Planning and Construction in the East» in Berlin on 20 March 1941. In the centre, opposite Konrad Meyer, Heinrich Himmler shows Rudolf Hess, among others, the model of an ideal rural settlement in the east.

AN EVOLUTIONARY PLAN

We do not exactly know what the *Generalplan Ost* entailed, because the Nazis destroyed most of their documentation. We do know, however, that at least five different documents were drafted (possibly six) between early 1940 and late 1942 (Kallis, 2009, pp. 190–193), but these were only partially implemented. In those six documents, the *Generalplan Ost* must have evolved and grown, with the last versions covering more and more territory, from Warthegau to Soviet regions, consequently implying plans for ever greater population replacement.

«The anti-urban utopia that inspired the Nazi colonisation of Poland had a greater influence than has been officially recognised»

The first plan was drafted by Meyer himself in January 1940, only for territories that had already been conquered, Warthegau among them. The second was drafted by Meyer in collaboration with the RKFDV in July 1941, but no copies of this draft remain. Thanks to documents written by the Nazi officer Erhard Wetzel, we know that an ambitious third version was drafted at the end of 1941 by the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, the "Reich Main Security Office", which depended on Himmler). This version included Soviet territories, especially in the Ukraine, whose non-Germanic inhabitants would be relocated to Siberia. In July 1941, a parallel document was drafted by Werner Hasselblatt which focussed on reordering the Baltic countries, and another version by Meyer emerged in May 1942 (Kay, 2006, pp. 97–104), even though by then, carrying out such a plan seemed incredibly difficult because of the bloody war campaign waging on Soviet territory.

Of note, the architectural, urban planning, and territorial aspects developed by Meyer's team were so interesting that the Nazis thought that they should be publicly exhibited and included in their propaganda. This was done in Berlin in 1941, in the exhibition «Planung und Aufbau im Osten» ("planning and construction in the east"; Figure 5). However, the evidently dark side of such planning – the terrible and inhumane socio-cultural replacement it involved, the

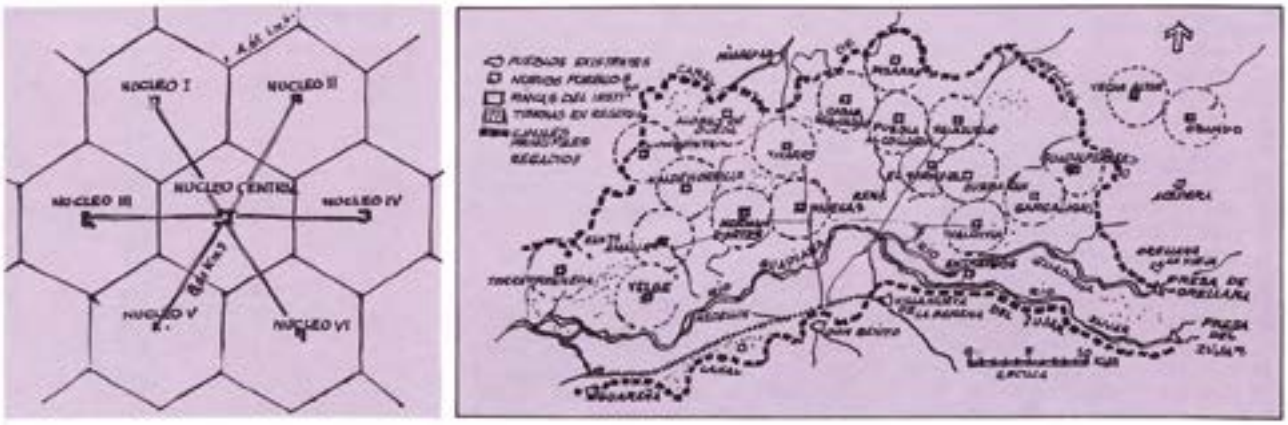

Figure 6. Diagrams of the National Institute of Colonisation for the Badajoz Plan, in which Christaller's geometric ideas can be observed. On the left, the image shows the theoretical structure for rural settlement in a large irrigated area for 25,000 people. On the right, a land management diagram for part of the region of Las Vegas Altas del Guadiana, in Badajoz (Spain) is shown. In total, 45 new villages were created in the Extremaduran basin of the Guadiana River between the 1950s and 1970s.

SOURCE: Tamés (1988)

forced displacement (and in many cases also death) of 31 million Eastern Europeans, to make room for ten million Germanic settlers – must not be ignored (Kay, 2006, pp. 99–100).

THE UNRECOGNISED INFLUENCE ON SPAIN

Territorial conquest by establishing agricultural colonies was not a new concept. Before the Nazis, the Romans had already used it via centuriation and the *villae rusticae*, the Soviets did it with their sovkhozy and kolkhozy, and so did the Zionists with kibutzes and *moshavin*. Still, the anti-urban utopia that inspired the Nazi colonisation of Poland had a greater influence than has been officially recognised. It influenced the so-called internal colonisation of Francoist Spain, carried out by the National Institute of Colonisation (INC in its Spanish initialism) between 1943 and 1970, which involved the creation of around three hundred new villages. This much is clear, not only because of a public visit by the Nazi architect Albert Speer to Madrid in 1941, but also because of the influence of Feder's ideas on Pedro Bidagor – the most important urban planner in the Francoist era (Sambricio, 1987). This was especially highlighted in an illuminating article by José Tamés, the director of the INC architecture service; although he only recognised the influence of the re-colonisations in Mussolini's fascist Italy and of Zionist experiences, the three planning diagrams he included were, unequivocally, translations of Christaller's geometric ideas to the territories of Seville and Badajoz (Tamés, 1988, p. 8; Figure 6). It is also not surprising that there are no references in this text – not even urban-planning references – to one of the darkest episodes in European history.

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