

Granturismo Earth (Silves, Portugal)

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1 ABSTRACT

The research program developed by Multitude agency for Iberian Peninsula (Portugal and Spain), since 2004's European Football Championship, is concerned with understanding the impact of Tourism activity in the region's southern provinces. The specific objective of its practice is to define a new territorial model based on the equilibrium between the environment, social relations and human subjectivity.

Contrary to the idea of "Costa Iberica Upbeat To The Leisure City" (MVRDV, Actar 2000), where the region is described as a mono-cultural model of development, the diversity of its action either in the Algarve or in the Andalusia, is a privileged ground for the study of urban and land transformation and their relation to several modern "constructions" such as: ecology, identity, authenticity, the natural, leisure and pleasure. However the "total ignorance of ecological responsibility" and the progressive deterioration of its human modes of life, demands for a redefinition of tasks in urban design, landscape architecture and media and for the role of architecture in the 'resolution' of opposites (the old and new, the built and not built, public and private, the urban congestion of the coast and the mountain's desertification).

This mediation indulges in a cyclic bio-negotiation of space and organization – division, distribution and redistribution of property – encouraging the definition of new territorial models of management and planning.

The agency's main programs under construction are: Casa Granturismo [CGT] (multi program city development in the city of Silves, since 2005) and Granturismo Earth [GE] (housing and forestation program in the Algarve's mountains since 2007). Both programs stand for a new approach from the private sector investing in the Mediterranean region that recognizes in the mountains the potential of material and processual intelligences to generate out of surviving modes unconventional practices and objects. The first [CGT] introduces in the architectural practice a new way of dealing with contingencies: (1) the program's call for concepts in 2005 (after the Euro2004 with the first signs of a tourism crises) searches for new real estate concepts of market and products inviting solutions capable to transform local material and visual culture; (2) during its construction in the years 2007/08 the announcement of a world economical crisis drove the attention to some specific projects where the ambitious use of the construction material and its nature exposure would fit specific user's needs and specific site conditions, as topography, natural vegetation, plot drainage and raw material.

The material condition and nature exposure's in relation to site context in CGT were key elements to introduce new means of architectural production into the local market, more conservative and less adventurous. From a sudden, the revealed interest on those means transposes the practice well beyond the limits of the urban space. The agriculture cycle of production, survival and land transformation became the right context to test the development of logical and efficient constructive and material systems.