EMERGENT PLANNING: regeneration through empowerment in Developing Countries. São Tomé and Príncipe as case-study.
A contribution to a systemic approach through micro, meso and macro-scales.

How can micro, meso and macro scales be articulated into integrated development?
And how can grassroots initiatives contribute?

The core issue of research is to understand, within a context of scarce resources, the role of Planning as an articulation tool of existing and emergent initiatives, through community empowerment.

To fulfill this purpose, the investigation analyses causes and patterns of human settlements, heritage, dwellings' typologies and spatial repercussions of cultural features, in order to understand the existing built environment and to suggest flexible and integrated planning systems based on communities' skills.

Context
The Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe is a Portuguese-speaking microstate located in the Gulf of Guinea around 250km off the Western Coast of Central Africa, formed by two islands (São Tomé, with the homonymous capital city, and Príncipe). It is the second smallest African country, with reduced territory (1095 km²) and demography (around 160,000 inhabitants), having a rainy tropical climate and extensive areas of dense vegetation.

Inhabited before their discovery in 1470 by the Portuguese, this territory has undergone several changes and economic cycles, from the sugar-cane plantation (16th century), coffee and cocoa exploration (19th to the beginning of the 20th century) to its independence in 1975, and the consequent nationalization of land.

Nowadays
It is currently part of the group of Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDC), where according to the Human Development Report of 2005, poverty affects 64% of the national population, 15% being under extreme poverty.

Nevertheless, this microstate bears great potential for development, with oil banks discovered ashore, future investments (planned, the remarkable remainders of colonial architecture, or the unexplored possibilities of local skills and materials. Thus, integrated analysis of the built environment, monitoring and planning are urgently needed.

Urban growth
The identification of structures and growth patterns, as well as their motivations, will allow the recognition of existing dynamics that are important for territorial monitoring and management.

Settlement patterns and changes
The study of settlements types and their mutations over time will allow to understand specific needs and potentials, and to have therefore a more accurate perception of the built environment.

The territory of São Tomé and Príncipe has been thoroughly occupied through plantation estates – Roças – specific typologies that have often been transformed into improvised villages, thus raising different demands from other types of settlements.

Heritage
The remainders of colonial architecture gather relevant potential, being therefore an important task to understand, analyse, document and evaluate them, in order to contribute to their rehabilitation and full use as development catalysts.

Appropriation of existing structures
The study of the changes and user appropriation performed to existing colonial structures is also being studied, in order to understand priorities and contemporary needs, and plan accordingly.

Dwelling typologies
And finally, the analysis of dwellings and the ways in which their space is used, will allow the identification of needs and preferences, thus a comprehensive overview of the built environment.

[Diagram and images of urban growth, settlement patterns, heritage, and dwelling typologies]