

A bit of background on the challenges...

The decades that followed the end of the dictatorship continued the trend of population loss that had begun to migrate to cities or abroad before the dictatorship ended. The owners of large reprivatized land not having so many easily-available low wage workers, and stimulated by the intensive agro-farming propaganda, opted for inputting more mechanical work and fertilizers for their lands, while complementing this when necessary with cheap labour. Also the automobile and the road became dominant features of the countryside, cutting across the old villages and lands and making it easier to use the countryside as a place to transport goods across, to visit on a weekend on the part of burgeoning middle classes forming in bigger cities on the coast, now becoming de-industrialized. All these changes accentuated the loss of local population and the break of the relationship between the inhabitants of south Portugal and the lands where once generations had lived.

These changes added much damage to the already degraded habitats of the south, furthermore considering the large scale and intensive agriculture promoted by Salazar's state in Alentejo during the 30s for the cultivation of wheat, this made the land lose fertility and strained the already fragile water sources, accelerating the desertification and compaction of vast swathes of soil in the region, that are felt until this day. Alentejo is one the lowest rainfall regions in Portugal, and one that faces some of the biggest problems with access to drinking water sources for its inhabitants.





Who are we?

Who are Ratxs? Hmm... We are a group of lovely, somewhat human, precarious rodents, striving to fend off the oppressive decadence of the capitalist, techno-feudal, and post-meaningful world. Striving to survive in metropolitan prison landscapes, playgrounds of landlords and real (e)states where we currently dwell - in a Fortress Europe close(d) to you. Half of us were born or have lived since childhood in Portugal and others are from diverse corners of the world.

Whilst all of us met in Lisbon at some point during the last three years, some of us have known each other a while longer while active/taking part in social-political struggles here. Where some of us are involved in care and mutual support groups, others in housing and squatting fights, a social center or a distro collective, we have all worked and evolved close to each others' realities and have developed a sense of mutual support, collective action and horizontality towards one another.

While on these previous paths, we found that we all share the need to move out of the city dynamics and deepen our understanding of, and relationship with ourselves, the lands that surround us, anti-authoritarian fights and anarchisms. So we want to put into action a living and communal project outside of the metropolis of Lisbon, that addresses primary ecological and social necessities for us and for the communities we're part of - such as shelter and food. A project that allows us to take more responsibility for land and its inhabitants, that helps us to search for other answers regarding collective housing solutions, communal life, access to food and natural and social ecology.

Many of us identify as queer, gender and sex non-normative people. This is a very important part of our mindset and core principles of action when going to this land. We want to intersect ecology, with queer identities, feminism, gender, race, class and anarchism in our politics, challenging discourses and attitudes that discriminate against the presence and dignity of bodies that are marginalized, made invisible, exploited or oppressed from the spaces of the Portuguese countryside and beyond the borders that engulf us.



A bit of background on the challenges...

Portugal is one of the poorest countries in the European Union. Portugal has a largely de-populated territory in the interior southern regions. For most of the 19th and 20th century the southern interior lands of Portugal have been in the hands of wealthy private ownership, either the church, land tenants, aristocrats, or agri-business investors. This situation had changed for a very brief period between 1974 and 1977, the years where the revolution followed the fall of the military dictatorship that lasted from 1926-1974, and saw the start of a process of popular land expropriation, that allowed peasants, local populations, and workers to try out a different relation to the lands where they were previously being exploited as wage slaves. This experience ended with the takeover of land by the state, which then through the re-liberalization of the economy gave back the expropriated lands to private wealthy ownership once again.

Since then this ownership has turned the land towards profit-making, by exploring capital intensive forms of agro or animal farming such as intensive olive monoculture, large extensions of cork production, large extensions of greenhouse horticulture, large scale pig or cow farming - many times intensive, large scale pine tree monoculture and vineyards. Many of these businesses rely on migrant slave, or wage slave, labor. As a complementary activity many large farms make extra profit from allowing hunting on their lands. The large land that has not been turned into intensive farming, has been turned into either touristic projects for the wealthy, like golf courses, rural eco-tourism, many times connected to vineyards, or is left unused.

In addition, there is the phenomena of the last decade where land purchase has been made more accessible to foreign investors, and taxes lowered for land owners based on their nationality. One result of this is that many southern countryside land parcels have been bought by rich European nationals from central and northern Europe, to give themselves a primary or summer house in the south, while turning many of these holdings into tourist attractions. This reinforces neocolonial and racist practices that allow wealthy, privileged individuals to settle on a territory, while a few kilometers away vulnerable workers (both Portuguese and immigrants from the global south) are enslaved to grow tomatoes, as capitalist and neocolonial asymmetries reproduce themselves through land access and ownership.



What do we want to do?

We recently bought 1.9 ha of land in Montemor-o-Novo, North Alentejo, in the south of Portugal, through a not-for-profit cultural association created by our adjacent neighbours' project (more on them later). We became part of it so as to keep the land collectivized without any individual being able to own it. We want to make the principles of the association such that this land cannot be sold back to the speculative market, inherited by any individual(s), corporations or by the state, and that it stays under the clear purpose of ecological care on the part of its residents. We understand this association as a tool, a legal framework against the state, and won't let its bureaucratic and hierarchic essence define how we want to live our project and relationships.

This land will become the primary housing for some of us that are leaving the metropolis and a place for the creation of unifying roots with both local inhabitants of the district and the future inhabitants of the community. In this regard, we want to develop/sustain good relations with the local communities and work with them, while always keeping at heart our ethical values. As a primary housing space, on this land we want to build and learn about collective structures for housing, showering, toilets, gardens and energy production and storage. We intend on having workshops spaces, a food forest and seek to improve the riverine conditions of the creek that crosses through the land. Within these dimensions we want to focus on DIY/DIT (Do It Together) ethics, and to recycle and upcycle the materials and tools we use, whenever possible.

We don't want this place to become an echo chamber or an end in itself. We want to inspire and be inspired by others while weaving webs of solidarity and mutual aid beyond this territory. So this will also be a space for comrades to recover from burnout, an infrastructure for fundraiser events for local and international struggles and collectives, a place for promotion, discussion and informational events. We're also looking forward to finding ways to link and shorten the gap between urban and countryside struggles, making the backwoods our trenches and the cities our battlefields.

Money sucks



Unfortunately money is part of the challenge of accessing land in Portugal. So much can and needs to be said about land access, which is quite beyond the possibilities of most inhabitants here. The younger generations really are excluded from this possibility. But it would be too long of a story for this pamphlet (although we are writing a more complete zine about our project where this subject is developed more). But the core of what we look for in this support is political and ethical intimacy amongst friends and accomplices who want to get closer, be nurtured and conspire alongside this community. Beyond just the money, we want to have you here, want you to visit our land and take part in this process, seek/offer help and get to know us: let's support each other and organize things together.

We also want to keep in contact, want to make zines, arts & crafts and a few newsletters each year letting you know what we've been up to. You will hear from us! :)

Love, Rage & Solidarity,

Ratsx collective.



some of the previous and current collectives / projects we are / were involved in

Disgraga - anti-authoritarian social center in Lisbon
Grupo de Saúde Anti-autoritária - anti-authoritarian Health Group
Kulturhuset i Jönköping - social / cultural center in Jönköping
Rede de Apoio Mútuo (RAM) - mutual aid network focused on labour struggles
Toruga - anarchist bookshop in Lisbon
Veganismo de Oposição à Exploração - intersectional anti-specism group



What now?

Winter is here, and some of us want to move there soon, so we are planning to build a collective shelter and a dry toilet from recycled materials.

Fortunately we have our friendly neighbours and comrades who started their own housing project some years ago, that will support us with access to some basic infrastructure that we can use as we carry out our coming construction works - a shower, a functioning well, a kitchen and a collective living room space with a fireplace for winter nights. Their project goes by the name of AKRA and we've been weaving laces of affinity, solidarity and kinship with them for a while now. They have also been active in horizontal and collective organising during the last few years, using their space for workshops, discussions, fundraisers, the latest of which being part of hosting and organizing the Alentejo leg of the Zapatista's journey in Europe, November 2021. If you want to know more about them we'd be happy to send you their manifesto.

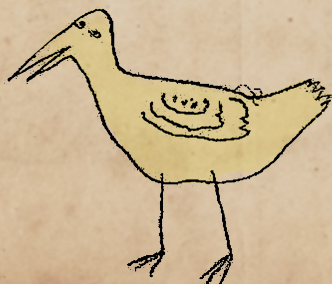
Also, our land has many olive trees and we want to pick up as many olives as we are still able to this year, so we can make olive oil for the community and to fund the project.

What is urgent for us?

Despite most of our loans being long-term, unfortunately one of our friends could not offer their loan for longer than a year and a half. Additionally this loan makes up the bulk of what we need to pay back (50000€) and was essential to retrieve the land from the market at short notice. Having the remaining loans (45000€) already guaranteed as long term.

This means that one of our priorities for the first phase of the project is to pay back the 50000€ loan as soon as possible, and change it for longer term, smaller loans, so as to release us from the pressure of this commitment, be able to replace / pay back future loans with ease, and free our energy to focus on the really desired ecological and community work we want to do.

We need 50000€ before October 2022.



How do these loans work?

Basically we are directly approaching friends who identify with our aims and desires to support us through interest free loans, for us to collect the necessary sum to pay back the 75,000€ by the due date. These loans can be made by anyone who identifies with the project's aims, ethics and needs. There will be a signed contract between the association and the loaner, and the association takes responsibility for paying back in accordance with the contract, which includes the possibility of loan withdrawal (in a way that doesn't push the project into bankruptcy).

Similar solidarity funding models have been/are being trialled and put into practice across the globe, including in our neighbour project, AKRA. People can then, instead of keeping money they won't touch in greedy banks, redirect and save it in collective projects. Their money won't grow, but it's kept safe by affinity and commitment, while funding anti authoritarian and collective organizing along the way

If you are interested in helping us out please let us know via email, so we can talk, collaborate and agree on a mutual plan for support. We want friends and comrades as supporters !! :)

Email: ratxs_da_cidade@riseup.net

PGP KEY: check our website! www.ratxs.net

How to payback the long-term loans?

We plan to progressively repay these long-term loans through fundraising activities based on our local economy. This would be through a combination of small-scale sales or larger fundraisers or pooling of resources. The former refers to the sale of produce that we grow or products we create - olive oil, oils and tinctures, tofu, soaps, jams, dry leafs infusions, artisan work, etc. The latter could include collectively organizing fundraising events for the project such as; DIY concerts and performances, having regular donation based activities including workshops and canteens, or running occasional support campaigns. It's our desire to move away from strategies that fallback to individualistic concepts of making ends meet.

We suspect that for the first few years we won't manage to have food and energy autonomy. Thus, to sustain ourselves during this period, we will rely on the local economy - recycling food and materials, trade and gift economy, and mutual support.

