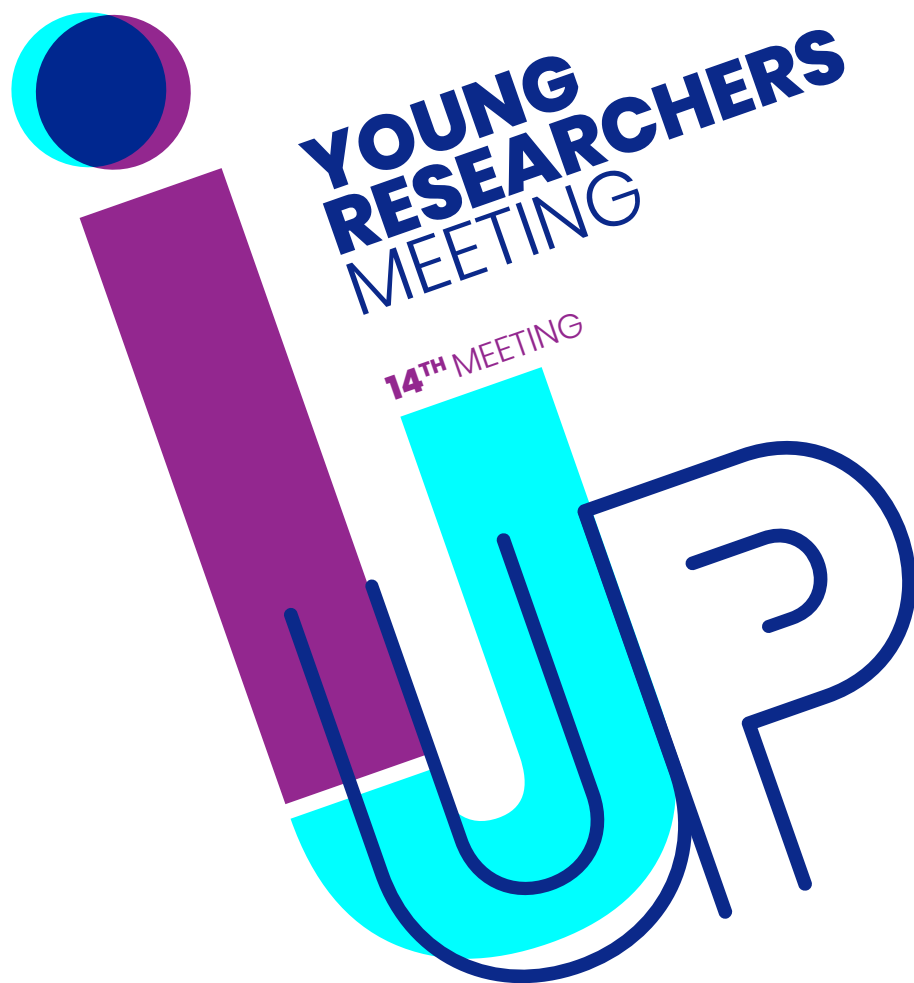




BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



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A 'Mirante' at the Mondego Valley: 'Building a Nest'

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Abstract

This research project seeks to conduct a comprehensive study of the narratives that drive the revitalization of a small watchtower (a "mirante", its name comes from the Portuguese word for observing). This particular 'mirante' is part of a housing complex, of around the 18th century, which overlooks the Mondego Valley. For this reason, we are presented with two main principles: firstly, understanding this 'mirante', thoroughly, to provide the necessary knowledge and tools to intervene on it consciously; and secondly, giving the watchtower the comfort of a 'home', in the form of a shelter-house in an old orchard.

The image of a nest intersects these two intentions, as it is a phenomenological symbol for both the idea of living in a tower and of building a comfortable home. The nest arches back to the primitive need for shelter, as with human 'nests' on top of trees, which led to the legacy of towers in the history of housing in Portugal (where the 'mirante' is inserted). But the nest is also a representation of a way of building, a way of inhabiting harmoniously with nature, a way of conceiving caring architecture. In the words of Thoreau "There is some of the same fitness in a man's building his own house that there is in a bird's building its own nest".

This shelter-house thus embodies a life in the woods that establishes an alternative to the modern life, in cities, which our societies have progressively moved towards. And its design follows the same guidelines as some architecture that has been forgotten in our modern life, and can be found in latent traces of "nest-like" architecture, which this investigation proposes to bring to light.

The nest symbolises the parallel motifs that design a phenomenology of the 'home' based on the eternally lost dream of an embryonic space. And in this sense, if the Laugier's primitive hut symbolises the rigor and reasoning in the primary forms of the house, the nest symbolises the comfort and tenderness that builds a home.



Figure 1 View of 'Mirante' (family archive)



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