CONCLUSIONS
Energy efficiency - achieved by reducing lighting and artificial cooling systems requirements through passive design strategies and incorporation of renewable energy resources - and cultural issues - such as the concept of building type, self-construction and psychological and social acceptance of the architecture - constitute complementary dimensions of the housing problem that should be handled as several cross layers within the process of design strategies for housing, at both the local and regional level.

FRAMEWORK
Most recently, the global economical crisis gave a new impulse to the low tech perspective, highlighting the comparative advantages of vernacular houses. Thus, several academic research projects assume vernacular performances as a main topic, building bridges between so-called bio-climatic design strategies and remaining traditional elements of popular architecture. Rather then reinterpreting or validating traditional & popular architecture through new scientific principles or methods, these approaches take vernacular architectural knowledge as a source of research, a fundamental one, in order to advance on bio-climatic architectural research (Gonzalez 2006, Cañas&Martín, 2004; Fernandes et al. 2012, Heal et al, 2006).

BACKGROUND AND REASONS FOR THE RESEARCH
Building 4Humanity, Designing and Reconstructing Communities Association (B4H) tries to develop the concept of social innovation architecture. With this new approach B4H seeks to investigate participation models that strengthen the social component of sustainability, assuming that ongoing social, economic and cultural transformations require a reconfiguration of the relationship between residents, technicians, institutions and administrations. 

B4H is benefiting from the work on the field developed in the SURE Africa project, an European joint-venture project focused on the improvement of energy efficiency of vernacular houses leaded by the Higher Technical Institute (IST, Portugal) (Correia Guedes et al, 2011).

METHODOLOGY
On one hand, B4H is implementing a testing laboratory space in order to develop and deepen models of community participation to create solutions to local challenges concerning the Well-Being and the real improvement of the Quality of Life of the population. On the other hand, the SURE Africa project check energy and ventilation performance in the interior of buildings, by measuring comfort levels and users’ comfort perceptions testimonies. Both analogical and digital methods are used, namely questionnaires and Ecotec software, a 3D building analysis and simulation program that integrate lightning, energy and environmental analyses in order to visualize and increase sustainable design solutions (Coughey & Oliva, 2006).

FIRST RESULTS
Final results of this project pointed up energy conservation through passive building design as a proven equivalent to renewable energy power generation, emphasizing net demand reduction rather than generation, an approach considered more compatible with traditional life-styles and to the social-economic conditions of the majority of the population (Dresser, 2006; Correia Guedes et al, 2011).

These cultural and social contexts suggests new ways of communication, addressing both native idiosyncrasies and knowledge, privileging hand drawing and local sources, as for example, oral tradition (Lenger, 2004).

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES
An innovative approach to the social, cultural and environmental dimension of green architecture & urban design, paying a special attention to the technical achievements of vernacular buildings within the building types transformation process, seems to be a critical matter for the sustainability of the built environment in the years to come. For B4H, the revisitation of popular building solutions of the past must correspond to a vindication for an architecture focused on a very precise question: how to continue, in a more sustainable way, it means, considering social, cultural, psychological, environmental and economical concerns, the process of the transformation of building types? Or, in other words, how to bind architecture to environment, to culture and to spirituality?