

Foz Côa Quarries

Schist is trendy

After having conquered both Europe and the United States of America, Foz Côa schists are in high demand by some Arab and African elites. Solicel is amongst the rare Portuguese companies which keep on thriving despite a severe financial crisis.

In addition to being the largest employer of Vila Nova de Foz Côa, Solicel wishes for the current year to increase both its sales revenue increase and the number of its employees, and to add up new countries for exportation.

Solicel is already distributing its production into the European and North-American markets but the firm wants, from now on, to conquer Angolans and Arabs *cheikhs* with Foz Côa schist.

Exports presently amount to 90 and 95% of total sale revenues but the company wants to carry on diversifying its address book and costumers. "Innovation, persistence, and diversification are the secret ingredients of our success" revealed Pedro Duarte, who holds a B. of Sc. in Engineering, and is Solicel's managing shareholder. In this way, the company, which specialises in exploiting and selling this kind of stone, wishes to augment its list of importing countries.

In spite of having sold some products in Africa, "the quantity is still a small one. Yet this is a market to explore, chiefly Angola" did he affirm.

But the Middle-East, particularly Egypt and Dubai "can also be very interesting countries since, at the moment, those countries are going through a period of growth momentum in the sector of civil construction" this responsible further detailed.

The great interest in Vila Nova de Foz Côa schist, shown by countries positioned all over the world, is due to the fact that "there is no other stone with those characteristics". "Further uses for schist are unlimited" enhanced this person in charge at Solicel.

There are thousands of forms into which this schist – which differs from the others because of its texture, colour and natural beauty – can be used: building facades, cladding, and as a decorative element. Especially because it can be shaped, polished and brushed.

Solicel's schist main orders have met the needs of construction: cobbling; paving stone; kitchen counters; facade and inside habitation cladding and garden ornamentation.

Plus, as more and more people wish to return to their sources, the demand for rustic materials is growing and this trend leads to an increase in sales.

"I have no doubt that schist is, at present, a fashionable product" stressed Pedro Duarte, and he further emphasised that vis-à-vis certain products, as for instance marble, schist is much more attractive. "People have already grown weary of marble" said he.

Two works of art, well-known precisely because Foz Côa schist was used in their making, demonstrate how versatile schist actually is: a country house belonging to the King of Spain and a Portuguese hospital, “Hospital da Luz”, situated in Lisbon.

As for the future of Solicel, Pedro Duarte has announced that, for the ongoing year, he expects sale revenues to soar. In a near future, hiring more personnel is also very probable for, as Pedro Duarte confessed, “at times, our capacity to match an overflowing order book is made quite difficult. To meet order becomes an ordeal”. He added that as Solicel is the largest employer in this region, more than fifty families depend on Solicel, either in a direct or indirect way.