

# GRAN SCALA FANTASY OR REALITY?



Scarcely anything of any note has happened with regard to the Gran Scala leisure and gaming mega project since it was presented with a great song and dance in late 2007.

So far, British development company International Leisure Development (ILD), set up exclusively to put the project in motion, has merely bought some cheap land in the Los Monegros region, one of the harshest landscapes in Europe, and tried to tempt a series of big gaming operators into the project. Gran Scala was to have involved an investment of €17,000 million, the largest amount spent on a leisure project in Europe to date. Financing was to come wholly from 12 international private companies, channelled through ILD.

It comes as somewhat as a surprise to see renowned international companies, such as Australian slot manufacturer Aristocrat and Groupe Tranchant, one of Europe's major Casino operators, among its founder members. However, with the passage of time, both business groups have faded into the background and prefer not to even mention the project.

In response to questions from the left-wing coalition Izquierda Unida, the Spanish government recently told Congress that it had "no formal knowledge" of the Gran Scala project,

To date, the only support for the project is from a sector of the Government of Aragon, where Los Monegros is located, who see in it a source of revenue, jobs and development.

From the other side of the fence, leftist and ecological groups have termed it a "model of unsustainable development from an economic, social and environmental point of view".

It also worth mentioning that the project has at no time received official support from any gaming associations in Spain, i.e. Casinos, bingos, arcades, slot manufacturers or operators.

As explained during the official launch of the project in 2007, ILD was to develop the complex with private resources, while the Government of Aragón would make the project possible by constructing the access infrastructure.

Gran Scala was to have been built over three phases: the first was to begin in late 2008, coming into operation two years later with the first three theme parks, the first group of Casinos and other leisure infrastructures.

The second phase would consist of four theme parks and 24 Casinos, in addition to hotels and restaurants. Stage three would complete the project, 15 years later.

Obviously, somebody's watch has stopped, because we are almost in 2010 and not a single stone has been laid. Worse still, there are no indications of anything happening any time soon.

Spanish gaming sector analysts are doubtful about the entire macro-complex, which aimed to emulate the success of Las Vegas. However, the two situations are nothing alike. Correction – there is a similarity, but only to the extent as both areas are deserts.

Ontiñena, the Los Monegros town where the Gran Scala project was to be built, currently has a population of 600. The project involved transforming it into a metropolis capable of welcoming 5.5 million visitors at first, a figure which was set to rise 12 millions by 2020. Could anybody ever really have believed these figures?

When Las Vegas was built, the USA was emerging from an economic crisis, and the country had no leisure amenities for adults, particularly not gaming-centred ones. The international economic crisis we are living through these days is, not to put too fine a point on it, savage.

Casinos the world over are recording reduced takes, to a worrying and even dangerous extent. It is becoming obvious that the project, conceived before the crisis, is now totally unviable.

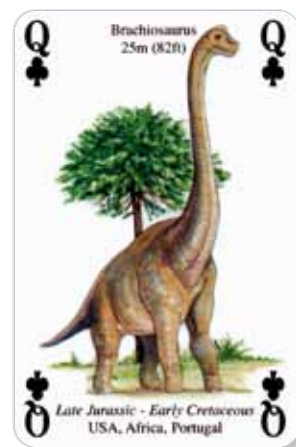
Moreover, there are slot machines everywhere in Spain, with over 250,000 installed in bars throughout the country. There are also numerous gaming establishments, with bingos and Casinos in practically every province and sports betting shops proliferating. It is apparent that Spain does not have the same need for a gaming centre as the Americans had when the mythical city of Las Vegas was built.

Spain also has one of the most important hotel infrastructures in the world, with innumerable luxury resorts and golf courses, and boasts several theme parks, including Terra Mítica, Isla Mágica and Port Aventura, offering a wide range of attractions and still undergoing serious difficulties to attract visitors. The story is similar in neighbouring France, with regard to the Disney, Park Asterix and Futuroscope parks.

Which such a bleak outlook, it should come as no surprise to see that ILD has practically disappeared, making no attempt to go ahead with a project that, under the current circumstances, is doomed to failure.

What sector operator could possibly conceive that a complete leisure mega-complex, built out in the middle of nowhere, with 32 Casinos, 72 hotels, 232 restaurants and five theme parks could ever be a success?

Time will tell, but the world is full of fantasists.



# ABBIATI

CASINO EQUIPMENT

ITALIAN QUALITY & DESIGN

INTERNATIONAL  
GAMING 2010 EXPO

Visit us!

January 26-28, 2010 - London  
booth: 3240



LASER WHEEL



PLAYING CARDS



RFID SYSTEM



Size 29"

## DISPLAY SYSTEM



Size 24"



Size 19"



Size 15"

[www.abbiati.com](http://www.abbiati.com)

