

Understanding How People Conceptualise Gardens: a Step in the Placemaking Process towards a Sustainable Use of Gardens in the Azores

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In the confluence of natural environment and human creation, gardens connect biodiversity with cultural values and services. Being propitious environments for socializing and engaging in leisurely and recreational outdoor activities, gardens, and in particular historical gardens, have important cultural, aesthetic and even philosophical dimensions, as the result of the artealization process of nature into landscape. Azorean historical gardens, especially those of S. Miguel Island, were a “must see” for travellers and naturalists throughout the 19th century (Albergaria, 2000). The gardens came to be perceived and represented by the local elite as part of their identity and were represented *in visu* by photographs, postcards, paintings, and other artistic crafts as iconic landscapes. Furthermore, a return to gardens and parks is a likely consequence of the need to connect to nature in a world in increasing urbanization (Howell *et al.*, 2011). However, the Azorean gardens failed to carry the same appeal on the 21st century. The research project, “Green Gardens – Azores (GreenGA)”, aims to explore new cultural meanings for historical gardens in the sense of a place making process (Pierce *et al.*, 2011). The emphasis is mainly on analysing the social and cultural dynamics of the use of space and the way gardens are conceived and represented by tourists and residents, to increase the patrimonial value of these impressive gardens. In order to understand how people conceptualise gardens, a study was conducted, in the summer of 2017, in São Miguel, Terceira and Faial Islands (Azores), using a survey by questionnaire (Arroz *et al.*, 2018). People were approached by research assistants, inside and outside gardens, and 732 agreed to participate in the survey; among these there were 410 tourists, coming from 40 countries. This communication will discuss the proximity *versus* diversity of garden’s representations of residents and non-residents. For this purpose, data were collected on a free association of words, elicited by the stimulus word “Garden”, and submitted to a hierarchical evocations method, within the scope of the Central Core Theory of Social Representations, performed with the program Evocation 2003. At a first glance, these social representations of residents and tourists do not differ considerably, both emphasizing “beauty” and “nature”, as well as the presence of “flowers”, “plants” and “trees”. They are followed by a set of sensory experiences providing “calm”, “tranquillity”, “relaxation”, “freshness”, etc. A more detailed examination allows the detection of some differences: fauna elements are prevalent in the representations of tourists' gardens (“butterflies”, “insects”, “animals”, “birds”) while “family” is only seen in the representations of the residents. This approach will be followed by a methodologic triangulation using another descriptive-interpretative analyse, such as Correspondence Factor Analysis, in order to check the relevance and usefulness of the meanings produced by the two techniques in the analysis of social representations. Implications for the next phases of the green garden project are discussed to encourage garden visitation and reinforce



place identification with Azorean gardens. The perspectives of the manager/caregiver's should meet the motivations of the visitors whether they are local people or tourists.

Keywords: Social representations, hierarchical evocation method, connectedness to nature, garden tourism

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