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Historic Gardens of Portugal: Qualification and Structuring of a New Touristic Offer

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Abstract

In historic gardens, natural and cultural heritage merge, claiming a unique position for conservation and maintenance. Historic gardens are places of memory that accumulate knowledge. Throughout human history, they have always been spaces for innovation serving as laboratories for scientific and technological advancements. They are particularly valuable when considering present day challenges such as climate change adaptation, namely for their selective use of vegetation where exotic and indigenous plant species coexist or for their distinguished management of water systems. Touristic demand for parks and gardens, whether historic or contemporary, has experienced significant expansion as places for visitors. However, historic gardens arise as a special appeal to those interested in heritage and require comprehensive visits that encompass ecology, history, art, botany, among others.

Portugal has a remarkable number of historic gardens, whose existence and value is largely unknown by its community. On the other hand, tourism plays a key role in Portugal and the competitiveness of this sector is expected to remain high. As such, Turismo de Portugal, the tourism office of Portugal, is investing on the diversification and consolidation of the national offer. These circumstances let the Portuguese Association of Historic Gardens – AJH, to propose the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal as a new touristic offer capable of attracting and retaining visitors in an efficient, attractive, and sustainable manner. The developed methodology included, 1) the preparation of a revisited and updated inventory, 2) the creation of touristic routes of historic gardens and, 3) the certification through a Quality Label and 4) the promotion of marketable tourist packs. The current Historic Gardens Route of Portugal includes twelve touristic routes, comprising a total of 215 gardens (150 private and 65 public).

In the course of these works, it is argued that AJH is promoting historic gardens of Portugal as spaces for living, contemplation, production, and enjoyment, recognizing their exceptional, fragile, and ephemeral values, through a particularly targeted touristic approach that offers another form of sustainable subsistence.

1. Introduction

Historic gardens are difficult to preserve and promote, mainly due to the overall demanding financial investment for this type of heritage and required maintenance expertise in need of specialized training. In January 2003 the Portuguese Association of Historic Gardens – AJH was created, gathering property owners, garden lovers and specialized professionals around the common interest of stimulating and enhancing the heritage of Portuguese historic gardens. Today, AJH includes not only individual property owners but also institution managers of

historic gardens as well as landscape architects, architects, art historians, agronomists, foresters, jurists, economists, or simply garden lovers.

In 2017, AJH's activities encompassed the design and development of the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal with the support of Turismo de Portugal under the VALORIZAR Programme that, through the promotion of inland territories, aimed to achieve a more balanced distribution of touristic demand throughout the country. Conducted endeavours had its starting point on the inventory of Portuguese Historic Gardens that was revisited, updated, and published online on AJH webpage, currently comprising 822 entries: <https://www.jardinshistoricos.pt>.

Following the initial goal to define and systematise tourist routes of historic gardens extended to the whole of Portugal, AJH received an invitation by the Municipality of Lisbon in the context of Lisbon European Green Capital 2020 to complete the routes with the remaining coastal territories and autonomous regions of Madeira and Azores.

2. Background and Literature Review

In 1981, the International Committee of Monuments and Sites – International Federation of Landscape Architects (ICOMOS-IFLA) approved the Florence Charter regarding historic gardens. This Charter is an addendum to the 1964 Venice Charter on the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, approved at the II International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, and adopted by ICOMOS in 1965. The Florence Charter became the normative text for intervention in historic gardens and for actions of immaterial nature necessary for their protection, conservation, and enhancement.

In the Florence Charter, a historic garden is defined as “an architectural and horticultural composition of interest to the public from the historical or artistic point of view” (article 1). As places where our relationship with nature is perpetuated and renewed, historic gardens incorporate a distinctive contribution to our cultural identity.

For the purpose of the AJH inventory and the Route, it is assumed that the modern historic gardens in the Western World began with convent enclosures and sanctuaries, nevertheless acknowledging that their roots are ancient. The Portuguese landscape architect Ilídio de Araújo (1925-2015) is the initiator of garden art research in Portugal and is the author of a seminal book titled “Landscape Art and Garden Art” (1962). He has written about the orderly structures that preceded the garden such as “cortinhas” (small walled gardens), Roman patios (atriums and peristyles that could include fountains and cultivated plants), villas, woods, vegetable gardens, convent or sanctuary enclosures and “quintais” (walled yards) (Araújo 1962). “From a very early period, some of these vegetable gardens and walled yards began to receive special care and attention namely regarding their location and implantation, their planned design and even, in some cases, with regards to their visual harmonisation with the surrounding landscape. Sometimes this care was conducted with such a meticulous attention, that many gardens became true masterpieces of the art of landscaping and even of sculpting new humanized landscapes. (...). The artistic quality of a vegetable garden, garden, park or estates should be assessed, jointly, by the degree of suitability among their multiple uses and by the satisfaction that their use can provide to the respective users, however refined their sensitivity to environmental factors may be.” (Author’s translation, Araújo 1979, p. 376).

Regarding Historic Garden Routes, there are two relevant European projects: the European Garden Heritage Network (EGHN) and the European Route of Historic Gardens (ERHG). EGHN operates since 2003, having developed numerous partnerships both at the professional and political level and they offer twelve regional garden routes and five European theme routes encompassing 150 gardens (EGHN 2003-2021). ERHG is a certified Cultural Route of the Council of Europe since 2020, its essential aim is the promotion of a common European identity through Historic Gardens to create a high quality cultural and touristic offer (ERHG 2017-2020). In terms of quality labels, the "Remarkable Garden" Label, created in 2004 by the French Ministry of Culture is a reference (Ministère de la Culture 2021). It is an initiative promoted by the regional boards for cultural affairs (DRAC) based on the opinion of committee of experts for a period of five years. It is awarded to gardens that meet several selection criteria, including: the composition, the quality of the surroundings, remarkable elements, the botanical interest, historical interest, access to the public and maintenance with respect for environmental quality. The label also guarantees a quality programme of cultural events. In France, today, 450 parks and gardens are labelled.

Inspired by these activities, the creation of the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal as an attractive and distinctive touristic product is essentially targeted at guaranteeing the quality and overall conditions of visiting experiences. It further aims to ensure that the respective natural, cultural, landscape and historic resources are preserved and valued, as well as enhanced and aligned with the visitors' expectations and needs.

3. Method and Data

To qualify and structure the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal as a new touristic offer capable of attracting and retaining visitors in an efficient, attractive, and sustainable manner, AJH defined four fundamental tasks, namely: 1) the preparation of a revisited and updated inventory, 2) the organization of twelve touristic routes of historic gardens covering the whole country, 3) the certification through a Quality Label of Historic Garden and 4) the promotion of touristic packs.

An updated and revised inventory of Portuguese historic gardens, here considered as core of all subsequent tasks, encompassed the collection and analysis of previously existing inventories. Bearing in mind the main characteristics of the 12 inventories carried out in Portugal (Silva and Carvalho 2022), the starting point of this endeavour encompassed the survey and evaluation conducted by the Centre for Applied Ecology "Prof. Baeta Neves" (AA.VV. 1998), coordinated by Cristina Castel-Branco, and the inventory of gardens and landscapes in Portugal, drawn up by the Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages (Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages 2014-2018). Regional and local bibliography was also considered, among other important references such as: "Arte Paisagista e Arte dos Jardins em Portugal" (Araújo 1962); "Tratado da Grandeza dos Jardins em Portugal: ou da originalidade e desaires desta arte" (Carita and Cardoso 1987); "Jardins com História: Poesia atrás de muros" (Castel-Branco 2002); "Jardins de Portugal" (Castel-Branco 2014); "GUIA de Portugal" (AA.VV. 1996); "Nobres Casas de Portugal" (Silva 1958); "A Jardinagem em Portugal" (Viterbo 1909). Official webpages of each private estate and corresponding municipalities, as well as established online heritage databases, were also consulted, namely: www.monumentos.gov.pt, www.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt, europeangardens.eu/inventories/pt, www.solaresdeportugal.pt.

The inventory includes public and private properties that encompass a designed structure and offer the possibility of recreation in association with other uses and functions, namely farming, religious or touristic. Based on the precedent inventories and literature review, AJH has adopted a comprehensive understanding of the concept of historic garden, public or private, establishing four different heritage categories of historic gardens. More specifically: 1) monastic or sanctuary enclosures, 2) “Quintas de Recreio” estates, 3) public gardens and parks and 4) botanical gardens.

Monastic or sanctuary enclosures correspond to the grounds of monasteries, convents and sanctuaries created as spaces for contemplation, prayer and religious purposes that have evolved through times. Many sanctuaries have particular ancestral pagan roots, served as meeting places of communities restless in their relationship with the transcendental and are places where the profane and the religious festivities intersect. Monastic grounds contained by walls created an environment separated from the outside world. They were also devoted to cultivation and many became a stage of artistic display driven by religious programmes that induced stairways, chapels, sculptures, sophisticated hydraulic systems and so forth. The models created by convent or sanctuary enclosures were appropriated by the nobility and the clergy, initially through the creation of vegetable gardens, hunting grounds and estates. These sites became landscapes of power used for celebration and entertainment and later were also replicated by the bourgeoisie. Overall, these places evolved into artistic manifestations, places of experimentation, places that inspired poetry and painting, and that have served cultivation and recreation purposes. Late in the 16th century, a new way of life and attitude towards leisure activities began to gain expression in the public space. Green spaces were implanted next to the gates of city walls where, for example, existed grounds of market fairs. Public promenades later gave place to public gardens and parks, many of which were to be built in former monastic enclosures, royal hunting grounds or episcopal estates.

In a very concise way, we have described the heritage categories brought under the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal. The organization of the twelve touristic routes required extensive site visits and contact with public and private owners. In December 2020, the board of AJH has approved the Regulation for the assignment of the historic garden of Portugal Quality Label to assure the assessment of the authenticity and integrity of the garden and at the same time endorse contextual and operational conditions that serve a high-quality visit.

The regulation establishes the conditions and standards for quality certification for obtaining and using the Label. It implies that the garden complies with qualification criteria that are of two types: mandatory and complementary, and applied at three levels (Figure 1):

1. 1st level criterion (mandatory), related to the authenticity of the historic garden
 - 1.1 | Proof of the garden's authenticity
2. 2nd level criteria (mandatory), relating to the visitation of the garden
 - 2.1 | Recognition of the good adequacy of the state of conservation
 - 2.2 | Definition of visitation circuits
 - 2.3 | Provision of sanitary facilities
 - 2.4 | Existence of visiting hours or availability of information on visiting conditions
3. Compliance with the 3rd level complementary (non-mandatory) criteria, relating to the qualification and sustainability of the garden visitation:
 - 3.1 | Guided tour by the owner, specialized guide or audio guide available

3.2 | Provision of specific (about the garden) or generic (about gardening, landscape, art or heritage) documentation or products characteristic of local or regional culture.

3.3 | Installation of adequate lighting for night visits

3.4 | Environmental control practice, namely through the preference for biological methods and products, the saving and autonomy of water resources, and the treatment and recycling of waste resulting from the activity.

Overall, the objectives of assigning the Label are: 1) to ensure a uniform level of conservation and visitation of the gardens of Portugal capable of guaranteeing a quality offer, 2) to point out the natural, cultural and historical heritage, of a material and / or immaterial nature, of reference in the historical gardens of Portugal, 3) to differentiate the national touristic offer, in general, and increase the offer of tourist programs structured around the historic gardens of Portugal, 4) to increase the tourist awareness of the historic gardens of Portugal that hold the Label, and 5) and to contribute to the revenue of the owners of the historic gardens of Portugal who hold the Label.

Today, the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal is registered with the certification brand “Rota dos Jardins Históricos de Portugal” and “Jardim Histórico” (Historic Garden) is also a registered trademark (Figure 2).

4. Results

As a result of the exposed methodology, a set of tasks was promoted by AJH to qualify and structure the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal as a new touristic offer, such as 1) the preparation of a revisited and updated inventory, 2) the organization of twelve touristic routes of historic gardens covering the whole country, 3) the certification through a Quality Label of Historic Garden and 4) the promotion of touristic packs.

The revisited and updated inventory of Portuguese historic gardens by AJH currently includes 822 entries (North Region - 409; Lisbon Metropolitan Area - 120; Centre-Region 172; Algarve - 4; Alentejo - 71; Autonomous Region of the Azores - 16; Autonomous Region of Madeira - 30). It is furthermore a database that is being periodically updated and disseminated through the AJH’s website. The inventory endeavour aims to achieve more than the simple implementation of the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal. It serves as an instrument to systematise Portugal’s historic gardens as heritage assets that have an extremely fragile conservation status, within a deficient framework of heritage classification. Likewise, it enables decision-making and reinforces institutional statements based on objective and transversal data.

Today, Historic Gardens Route of Portugal comprises twelve touristic routes of historic gardens: Alto Minho, Baixo Minho, Tâmega, Douro, Dão, Tejo and Alentejo, Greater Porto, Greater Lisbon, Litoral Centro, Azores / São Miguel and Madeira. Brief descriptions of each route, as well as basic contact information, location, contacts are provided freely in AJH website.

The twelve certified touristic routes of historic gardens offered in Portugal comprise a total of 215 gardens (150 private and 65 public) certified with the Label. At the request of garden owners, in exchange of a fee, 52 certification plaques of the Historic Garden Quality Label and identification of the Historic Gardens Route are provided (Figure 3). Pandemic times have prevented a larger success on the placement of plaques, but figures are expected to change soon. The label has a period of validity of five years and its renewal requires monitoring and revisiting

the site.

Finally, there is the ambition to transform the resource of the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal into a touristic product. The greatest motivation, in the perspective of AJH, is the possibility of indirectly increasing revenue for the owners to maintain their gardens as well as knowledge and awareness among the communities regarding the intrinsic cultural value of historic gardens. The AJH site is of free access and the touristic routes are promoted in three languages: Portuguese, French and English. Consequently, travel operators started to develop an interest on historic garden tours and touristic packs are now being offered, combined with enotourism, local or rural accommodation, nature tourism, gastronomy, and the promotion of other local products. Furthermore, this has been an opportunity to capacitate certified tour guides through an offer of workshops exploring the concept and language of gardens, landscape, natural and cultural heritage, therefore reinforcing “historic gardens” as a unique, recognizable and consistent cultural asset of specific meaning.



REGULAMENTO DE ATRIBUIÇÃO DO SELO DE QUALIDADE AOS JARDINS HISTÓRICOS DE PORTUGAL

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ANEXO I GRELHA PARA ATRIBUIÇÃO DO SELO (ARTIGOS 5º E 9º DO REGULAMENTO)

CRITÉRIOS		AValiação	PONTUAÇÃO
1º nível AUTENTICIDADE Obrigatório			
1.1	Comprovação da autenticidade do jardim	5 pontos Autêntico 0 pontos Não autêntico	
		SUBTOTAL	
2º nível VISITAÇÃO Obrigatório			
2.1	Adequação do estado de conservação	5 pontos Bem adequado 4 pontos Adequado 0 pontos Não adequado	
2.2	Definição de percursos de visitação	2 pontos Sim 0 pontos Não	
2.3	Disponibilização de instalações sanitárias	2 pontos Sim 0 pontos Não	
2.4	Existência de um horário de visitas ou disponibilização da informação das condições de visita	2 pontos Sim 0 pontos Não	
		SUBTOTAL	
3º nível VISITAÇÃO QUALIFICADA Complementar			
3.1	Disponibilização de visita guiada pelo proprietário, guia especializado ou audioguia	1 ponto Sim 0 pontos Não	
3.2	Disponibilização de documentação ou de produtos característicos da cultura local ou regional	1 ponto Sim 0 pontos Não	
3.3	Instalação de iluminação adequada à visitação noturna	1 ponto Sim 0 pontos Não	
3.4	Prática de controlo ambiental	1 ponto Sim 0 pontos Não	
		SUBTOTAL	
		TOTAL <i>Classificação mínima: 15 pontos</i> <i>Classificação máxima: 20 pontos</i>	

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Figure 1. Assessment matrix for the certification of the Quality Label of Portuguese Historic Garden



Figure 2. Left: Example of the logo for the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal of the Dão region. Right: Logo of the Historic Gardens Quality Label.



Figure 3. Example of celebration event for the Historic Gardens Quality Label certification and integration in the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal, September 2021. Município de Vizela.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The qualification and structuring of the Historic Gardens Route of Portugal as a new touristic offer is an ambitious process, constrained by the recurrent scarcity of resources that demands constant attention and astuteness in the definition of strategies and priorities.

As we are all aware of, historic gardens are highly demanding of labour, require specialised gardeners and imply continuous dedication. Yet they are also in need of new and improved sustainable management and governance models, new approaches, new uses. With the expansion of cities, change of ownership, land abandonment, many convent or sanctuary enclosures, estates, parks and gardens gave way to neighbourhoods, industrial areas, public facilities – schools, cemeteries, sports complexes, hotels, public parks, among others. In some cases, reminiscences of these places include the building, the cloister, the fountain, the monumental trees. In other cases, historical gardens have withstood the test of time and it is in their name and future that it is worth continuing these efforts towards an all-encompassing recognition as spaces of exceptional character that gather outstanding values.

As a direct consequence of the exposed methodology and developments carried out by AJH, it is

possible to argue that Historic Garden Routes of Portugal has already created a potential of transforming a resource into a touristic product. Dissemination activities have very likely contributed to reach the proposed goals. More specifically: the signed protocol between the Portuguese public broadcaster (RTP) and AJH, to produce a series of fifteen programmes entitled “Jardins Históricos” (Historic Gardens), which presented the twelve Historic Garden Routes of Portugal, broadcasted between August 24 and September 11, 2020; also the protocol between AJH and the “Jardins” monthly magazine specialized in the “the world of gardening” that published the twelve touristic routes for twelve consecutive months; alongside other diverse activities that have been demonstrating the increased interest on historic gardens as for example, a workshop for certified tour guides (15th February, 2022), or the joint webinar with the tourism office of Portugal on “Tourism and Historic Gardens | Relinking Nature and Culture” (22nd February, 2022), which attracted more than a hundred people of various backgrounds.

Eloquently anchoring natural and human processes, historic gardens offer significant opportunities to educate people on the meaning and importance of cultural landscapes. Although it is recognized that there is still a lot that can be done, the presented methodology and outcomes have accompanied AJH in the achievement of its goals as a non-profit association devoted to natural and cultural heritage.

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