

Encouraging Enlightened Public Recreation as a Comprehensive Landscape Healing Strategy: A Case Study of the Loures Riverfront Case Study

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Gardens' origin, and subsequent recent public parks, aim to create spaces for human leisure, relaxation, and contemplation, that is, cultural landscapes of healing/well-being for human beings. This recalls the ancient concept of paradise. Such early creations foster contrast with the surrounding environment, constituting artifacts that seem to be separated from nature. Earlier surrounding environments gradually changed through human activities—initially dominated by pastures, agriculture and small settlements, and more recently with the sharp rise of intensive agriculture, urban expansion, industry and forestry production.

Hence, early contrasts initially separated from nature were now replaced by later ones derived from urbanization, farming, and industry, among others. The massive reduction of pristine ecosystems is now escorted by worldwide national and regional strategies of protection. Conservation and connection between valuable territory parcels and their wise use for recreation, education and research, became highly desirable. Greenway concept has significantly assisted the implementation of planning and design aiming landscape quality.

The remaining natural habitats still occurring in intensively developed metropolitan areas became valuable for nature conservation, but also attractive for public recreation. They are now priceless opportunities to create contemporary paradises that bring relaxation within the highly urbanized landscape matrix. However, the fragility of these ecosystems demands a comprehensive assessment and understanding prior in order to design strategies to provide contemporary paradises in the form of public parks capable to induce an informed and enlightened public use.

This is the aim of the Loures Riverfront, recently designed for public recreation, though embracing clear conservation strategies. This 85 ha of marshland fits between the densely urbanized Lisbon Metropolitan Area and the still natural Tágus River estuary. The narrow strip of marshes co-exists and complements nearby larger areas of marshland, strongly protected by the Tagus Estuary Natural Park, in line with national and international conservation trends.

The desire to connect waterfront parks, south and north of Loures municipality, was understood as a unique opportunity, throughout an inter-municipality greenway with a metropolitan scale, for recreation and places' healing: marshes, coastal waters, the Planet. The design intents, together with leisure, is to rise public sensitivity and knowledge about these habitats. Design restrictions for minimizing negative impacts, became assets for landscape design inspiration. It enables a differentiated type of public recreation along 6.2Km, fostering the public knowledge about marshes that goes beyond nature conservation of Loures Riverfront, reaching out a public empathy for global marshes' system and their relationship with the nearby Atlantic Ocean.

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Teresa Barão is a founding partner of Topiariis (1988) and responsible for the coordination of landscape plans and projects in Portugal and abroad, winning awards and mentioned internationally. With Topiariis, she developed projects with an innovative formal approach based on the dynamics of dunes and local vegetation dynamics, namely in the Garden in Comporta (In: Chris van Uffelen. Hortus Conclusus. Braun Publishing AG, Berlin), Tagus Linear Park, a 15 ha project, Lisbon Metropolitan area (ARCHMARATHON 2016 Landscape Award, Wan Award Landscape 2016, American Architecture Prize – Bronze medal, 2016). She coordinated the Barrocal Park (WAN Awards 2020, Urban Landscape, Gold; LANDZINE 2020, LOOP Design Awards Honorable mention in Landscape, 2021). She coordinates relevant projects in the tourism industry, such as the Six Senses Douro Valley Hotel Resort.

Catarina Viana is a Topiariis (1988) founding partner and responsible for the coordination of landscape plans and projects in Portugal and abroad, winning awards internationally. She coordinates urban public space projects of large scale and relevance. In Lisbon's Parque das Nações she was responsible for the outdoor landscapes of Campus da Justiça and the IBM headquarters, and Braço de Prata Urban Development (with Renzo Piano Building Workshop). She recently coordinated the Loures Riverfront (Dezeen Longlist awards 2024, Landezine International Landscape Awards LILA 2024 Jury Award). She is a regular lecturer in professional training workshops.