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COMMUNITARIAN AND URBAN GARDENS IN BRAGANÇA, PORTUGAL

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Since 2011, the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (IPB), through the staff Cultural and Recreational Association, welcomes and sponsors a project of communitarian urban gardens carried out in the arable land of its campus. The project was designed to promote community gardening at leisure time, while focusing on organic and sustainable agricultural practices, providing healthy produce and fresh plants, as well as satisfying labor, neighborhood improvement, sense of community, connection to the environment and nature, and fostering interaction between users, which come from a broad geographical origin and have different gardening background and knowledge.

In order to report motivation, agricultural performances, the species grown, and to estimate the total production, we surveyed 51 gardens and we did consented interviews to 88 users from a total of 120.

We have found that traditional gardening practices combine with innovations introduced by modern agricultural technology and scientific research. Moreover, the gardens survey has shown that past and present come together, particularly regarding the array of species cultivated: species and varieties traditionally used in the region (quite important for local cuisine) are grown along with new ones, recently brought in eating habits, that are also considered signs of modernity and globalization.

Data provided by the interviews has enabled to estimate the amount of produce harvested in each garden during the spring/summer seasons. Therefore, it was possible to calculate how much each gardener could save by growing vegetables and its contribution to the household budget.

Besides being consumed by each household, produce are also shared with family, friends, neighbors and other gardeners, while fresh or after being frozen or made into savory or sweet preserves.

The main reasons for gardening are the satisfaction of heating food that is grown by themselves in the garden, the increase awareness of the positive impact of vegetables on health, safety of such food, the particular taste of some local produce and a relaxing and enjoyable activity.