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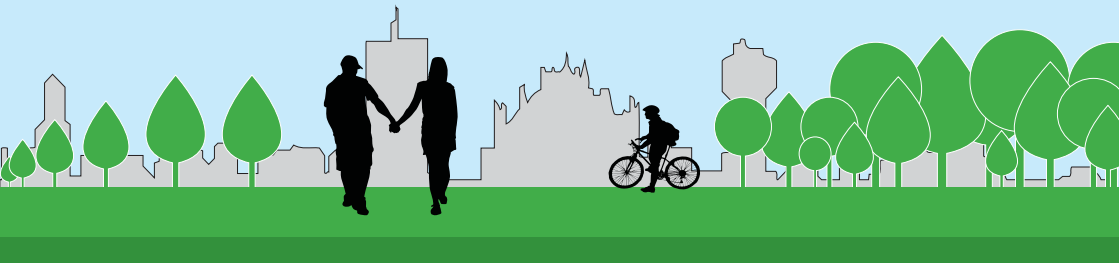

ABSTRACTS

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PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS PUBLIC GREEN SPACES EXPLORING THE SPATIAL DIMENSION

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Abstract

As cities expand and become more complex, choices made over land use become increasingly relevant. Urban Green Spaces (UGS) are essential elements in the constantly evolving urban realm, as they can significantly contribute to the quality of life of the population.

Green infrastructure planning is a complex process that should consider all dimensions of sustainable development. The investigation of public perceptions and attitudes provides key information for understanding social patterns in the interaction between the population and UGS. However, most studies tend to artificially dissociate social analysis from the spatial dimension, by examining attitudes and perceptions based only on surveys.

This study applied an integrated approach, by using spatial analysis to provide additional variables that can help to explain individual behaviors and perceptions towards UGS. The research carried out in Bragança (Portugal), a small town with a population of around 25.000 inhabitants, located on Northeast of Portugal, was conducted by a domiciliary survey, distributing questionnaires to 251 inhabitants, addressing a representative sample (proportional to gender and age groups), and taking into account the spatial distribution of the population. Questionnaires' raised a wide range of issues including the assessment of uses, the preferences on UGS and the perception of environmental quality. Data was then processed to include a geo-reference of household location, thus allowing for spatial analysis of users attitudes towards UGS.

Results from questionnaires interpretation, show that both attitudes and perceptions towards UGS present some variability considering such characteristics as age, gender, professional status, academic level and the tenure of house gardens.

Spatial analysis was developed using ArcGis 9.3 (ESRI ®) software. Spatial relations were established using an urban permeability matrix that allowed for the determination of the estimated distance between households and UGS. Results show that inhabitants living closer to UGS tend to use them more regularly. When asked to name and order the three UGS preferably used, the order of choices was mostly defined considering the increase in distance. Size was also fund to be a relevant aspect, as results show preferences towards the use of the closest larger UGS (with over 0,5 ha) over the closest smaller UGS (below 0,5 ha), despite the relative higher abundance and proximity of the second ones. Results add to the recognition of the importance of adequate distribution of UGS, in both size and location, as a part of urban planning process.

Key Words

Green Spaces, Perceptions, Behavior, Access.