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Tackling Social Inequality in the City of Porto, Northern Portugal: Grassroots Horticultural Practices and the Desired City

Paula Mota Santos [1,2]

[1] Department of Behavioural and Political Science, Universidade Fernando Pessoa, Portugal
[2] Centro de Administração e Políticas Públicas, Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Correspondence: Paula Mota Santos (pmsantos@ufp.edu.pt)

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Abstract

Grassroots urban horticultural plots (*hortas*), part of the Porto Metropolitan Area in Northern Portugal, are presented as liminal spaces that hold a richness of community life and a "gift economy." Often in existence for several decades and encompassing groups of over 20 or 30 people, these informal communities are, nevertheless, not cherished by the instances of city governance that do not stand in the way of the destruction of these low-income urbanite horticultural communities. The use of de Certeau's concepts of "strategy" and "tactics" are used to try and explain this incompatibility between these two forms of urban (self) governance that hinders the right to the city by the low-income urbanites who have created these horticultural grassroots communities.

Keywords

food security; gift economy; informal communities; Porto – Portugal; right to the city; strategy and tactics; urban horticultural plots

1. Introduction

This article results from an exploratory and anthropologically informed look at a specific type of urban *hortas*—urban allotment plots (UAPs)—in the Porto Metropolitan Area (PMA), Northern Portugal. The article posits the existence of three types of *hortas*, i.e., three types of UAPs: informal (illegal; I-UAPs), formal (legal; F-UAPs), and informal/formalized (IF-UAPs). The cases under closer analysis, and part of the exploratory study here presented, are those constituting I-UAPs: these are working-class grassroots *hortas* and are here taken as opposed to both the City Council-created *hortas* (F-UAPs) and the urban middle-class

environmental-conscious associations-sponsored *hortas* (IF-UAPs), of which there are a growing number in the PMA.

The article will open by characterizing the nature of the social world inhabiting I-UAPs as being one where a "gift economy" lives. The article will then put forward the argument that, within a present-day trend of urban governance that promotes the idea of a sustainable city where the existence of urban green areas is seen as key (Guilland et al., 2018), the official instances of city governance have a radically different approach to the three types of UAPs: City governance promotes one type of *hortas* (F-UAPs), supports another one (the IF-UAPs), and ignores or actively allows the destruction of the remaining I-UAPs.

This article will explore the reasons why both I-UAPs (some of them in existence for over 30 years) are not cherished by city governance and why their destruction is accepted, even if unwillingly, by the low-income urbanites who have brought them into existence. The article will propose the argument that the inability of city government to identify grassroots I-UAPs as places where the right to the city (Harvey, 2012) is actively constructed by those urbanites most vulnerable to food security resides in a major ontological difference between the two forms of spatial action defined by de Certeau (1984): strategy and tactics, each one producing two of types of UAPs—F-UAPs and I-UAPs, respectively.

The exploratory study on I-UAPs presented here stemmed from practical work undertaken within the lecturing of the anthropology of space curricular unit, part of an integrated master's in architecture and urban planning at Universidade Fernando Pessoa, in Porto. The information on I-UAPs presented here results from traditional anthropological fieldwork, i.e., direct contact with the communities under study: From the overall sites identified by students, I chose two on opposite sides of the city and proceeded to go there regularly over the span of an agricultural cycle. The information was collected via participant observation and informal conversations, or "deep hanging out" (Clifford, 1996).

2. Informal Urban *Hortas* as Liminal Spaces and as Heterotopias

UAPs are not a new reality in urban contexts. In Portugal, the first UAPs arose in the city of Lisbon in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of large-scale rural migration away from inner regions and toward coastal areas and major cities such as Lisbon, the nation's capital. In Lisbon, new self-built neighborhoods lacked green spaces, a fact that, combined with the rural background of these new urbanites, led to the creation of many illegal allotment gardens (Martinho da Silva et al., 2016): In 1967, Lisbon municipality registered 128 ha of this type of urban allotments. I-UAPs continued to increase and in 1987 there were circa 301 ha registered by Lisbon City Council (Martinho da Silva et al., 2016, p. 57). Regarding the whole of national territory and F-UAPs, in 2013 there were 107 units distributed across 16 of Portugal's 18 mainland districts (Gonçalves, 2014). There are no such nation-wide numbers available regarding the informal, grassroots allotments (I-UAPs).

The grassroots I-UAPs are frequently located in the internal margins of the urban fabric, and although they display strong roots within the urban structure, they are not necessarily tied to the constant grey of the city. These patches of cultivated greenery display a relation to specific conditions (morphological, historical, legal, social) that have so far limited the built/urban development of the areas they are in. As a result, I-UAPS are frequently seen as places where the city has-not-yet-happened. They are liminal (Turner, 1969) places

in as much as they are "ambiguous, since their classification slips through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (p. 94).

I-UAPs are liminal also because they are the result of an activity (agriculture-based food production) the city has historically relegated to its outskirts—or, in the present globalized world, displaced to other regions and continents. Presently, the idea of "a city" does not generally entail agricultural practices (Gottdiener, 2014, p. 19)—and this is one of the elements producing the liminal quality of I-UAPs. Other elements are some topographical or hydrological characteristics of the land being cultivated (for instance, narrow and steep terraced plots, or flood plains of small secondary water lines that flow toward a major water line). But perhaps the most relevant element that produces the liminal quality of I-UAPs is the undefined legal status of the cultivated plots: In the over 30 cases known to this research, the communities not only do not own the property they are cultivating, but they also do not know to whom that land belongs. They only know that the land laid idle and thus grabbed hold of the opportunity to produce their own food. From the outside—and because they are usually hidden by untamed shrubbery intentionally left untouched—I-UAPs are perceived as urban emptiness (Figure 1). Thus, they are invisible to the untrained eye: and invisibility is also a quality of liminality (Turner, 1969).

Nevertheless, in the instances analysed through fieldwork, connectivity and urban growth have forged a rich community urban-life setting of green-hidden islands amidst the grey urban structure (Figure 2). In fact, I-UAPs are liminal spaces only from the outside; from within (i.e., by being part of the community, or by being a visitor to it, as I was through fieldwork) it is very visible how I-UAPs carry out the essential work of interconnecting humans and nature (the latter taken in a very broad sense) and of humans with other humans, thus producing community. These liminal spaces and their social systems are tantamount to other-places that are protected and stewarded by the local communities that produce them: These urban non-urbanized places fall perfectly into Foucault's (1967/2004) definition of heterotopia: "kinds of places that are outside all places, even though they are effectively locatable. These places, because they are absolutely other than all the locations they reflect and speak of, I'll call them, as opposed to utopias, heterotopias" (p. 15).

In every I-UAP, each individual grower has their own plot(s). The number and size of each plot per grower can vary, being related to the organic way these communities came to exist. Usually there is a pioneer stage,

Figure 1. The invisibility of I-UAPS (© Daniela Peña-Corvillon).

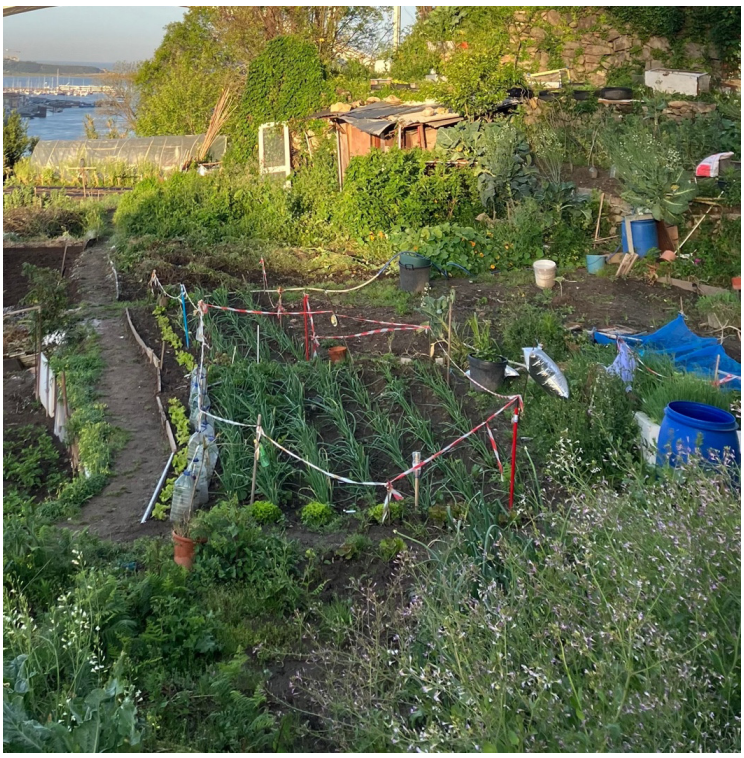

Figure 2. I-UAPs as green hidden islands (© Paula Mota Santos).

in which one, two, or three individuals start by clearing the land to then grow produce. As one of the oldest growers in site A stated:

> It was me and António, to start with. We came here in our spare time and started to clear the land; and as we cleared it the supporting walls of the terraces started to become visible. It was hard work!

Others joined the initial settlers later, at different points in time. The factors bringing these people together as a horticultural community are varied but usually fall along vicinal proximity, previous acquaintance, kinship, and/or professional ties. As one of the growers from site B said:

> I used to walk past this way in order to go to work, and I started to see that there were people going in there…and one day I walked in and I saw the cultivated plots: It was beautiful!…I immediately wanted to have one, and I started asking who I should talk to in order to have a small piece of land to start growing vegetables.

Due to the legal liminal nature of I-UAPs, new intended growers don't know who to reach to get the authorization they need if not from those who are already farming the land and act as gatekeepers of the community ethos.

2.1. Morphological and Social Structure of I-UAPs: Two Examples

This article will present the I-UAP cases of *horta* A and *horta* B: *Horta A* (Figure 3) is located on one of the edges of the city, being an area of natural stormwater drainage. The verticality of the place and the steep

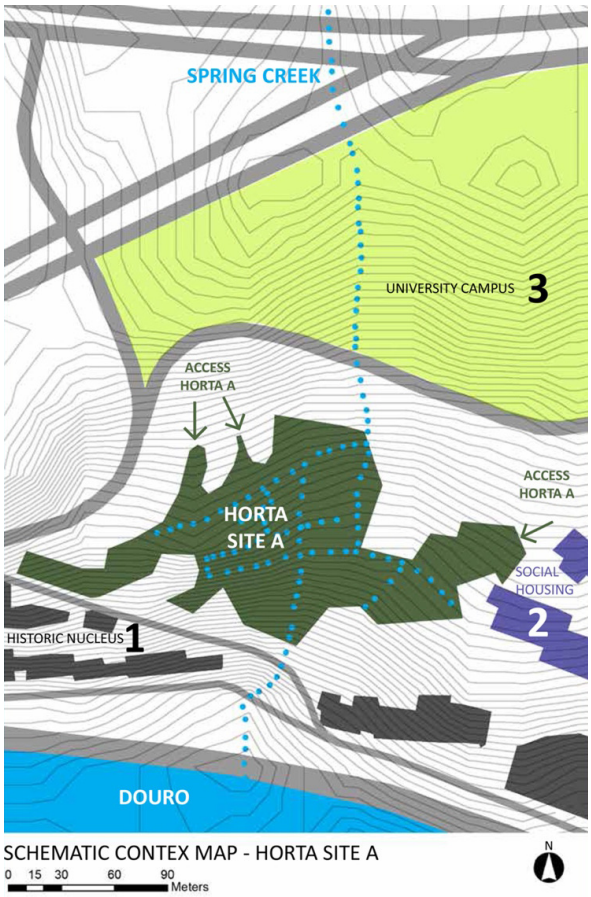

Figure 3. *Horta A* (© Daniela Peña-Corvillon): One part is located over the top of a cliff that goes down to the riverbank, while the other is surrounded by (1) a historic nucleus of the city, (2) a mid-late twentieth-century community housing project, and (3) a contemporary campus of one of the city's universities.

slope contributed to the overall erosion, mainly due to the continued water run-off, washing the topsoil away. The site has two different elevations: one part is located over the top of a cliff that goes down to the riverbank, while the other is surrounded by a historic nucleus of the city (mostly nineteenth-century houses), a mid-late twentieth-century community housing project, and a contemporary campus of one of the city's universities. The land is the property of this university and the growers use it with the tacit approval of the institution. The number of growers that constitute this community is circa 15 people (both male and female, although the former predominates). The total area of the cultivated plots is 20,000 m^2. According to the information collected through fieldwork, cultivation has been taking place on this site for over 25 years.

The food grown by this community ranges from potatoes to beans, tomatoes, onions, lettuces, cabbages, spinach, and, in some cases, strawberries. A few of the people also have chickens, a goat, and in the past, rabbits. The water has been collected and centralized on the highest point of the urban stream flow: This community decided to build a small water retaining structure for that stream (Figure 4). The construction work was carried out by themselves, sharing labour, materials, and any related expenses. From the ensuing pond, water is distributed by dug-out canals and pipes to each corner of the community *horta* in order to irrigate people's crops.

Figure 4. Water structures built by the growers (© Daniela Peña-Corvillon).

Water use is regulated by communal agreement: Some growers irrigate their plots in the morning while others do it in the afternoon; the detailed community arrangement as to water use regulation is something that further fieldwork will pursue. The initial apparently invisible subdivision of the space by the growers results in the *horta* looking like one big horticultural patch that reveals itself to us only as one crosses its entrance, emerging before our eyes like a secret garden. Accessibility to it is limited, having only three points of entry (Figure 3) and being very well protected—there are makeshift gates with locks for which you need keys (Figure 5). Growers say since the land belongs to the university, they feel responsible for what is going on inside the *horta*. Although this was the reason they initially gave regarding the importance of keeping control of the access to the grounds, continued fieldwork revealed that both the unkept shrubbery of the external edges of the *horta* and the locked entry points helped avoid the theft of produce by people from outside the community.

Figure 5. *Horta* A: makeshift gate (© Paula Mota Santos).

Horta B is located on a flood plain of a small creek (Figure 6). This type of land formation (i.e., flood plains) has been avoided by the development grid of the city due to the unstable ground conditions. The location is an area where the city meets in a multi-scalar way: the city ring-road, social housing estates (where the majority of the growers reside), the remains of a *quinta* (former agricultural estate), a historic hamlet, and a water corridor. They all coexist in an extensive open space where the cultivated plots (aggregated in more than one unit) occupy circa 68,500 m^2. In this article, I will only be referring to a smaller section of the complete area, (*horta* B), occupying circa 19,000 m^2.

The small creek that runs through the site brings water from the coastal hills (100 m elevation) into a bigger creek that runs through the city to the River Douro. The water quality of the creek is extremely poor, being polluted by industrial units located upstream, on the exterior of the ring-road. Using water as the main resource (Figure 2), people have been growing food produce such as potatoes, beans, tomatoes, onions, lettuce, cabbage, spinach, and some fruit trees. The community of growers of *horta B* is constituted of more than 30 individuals (both male and female, with a predominance of the former) and they have been cultivating this particular section for more than 22 years. The growers do not know who holds the deed of the land they are cultivating; it might belong to the city, but no one is sure.

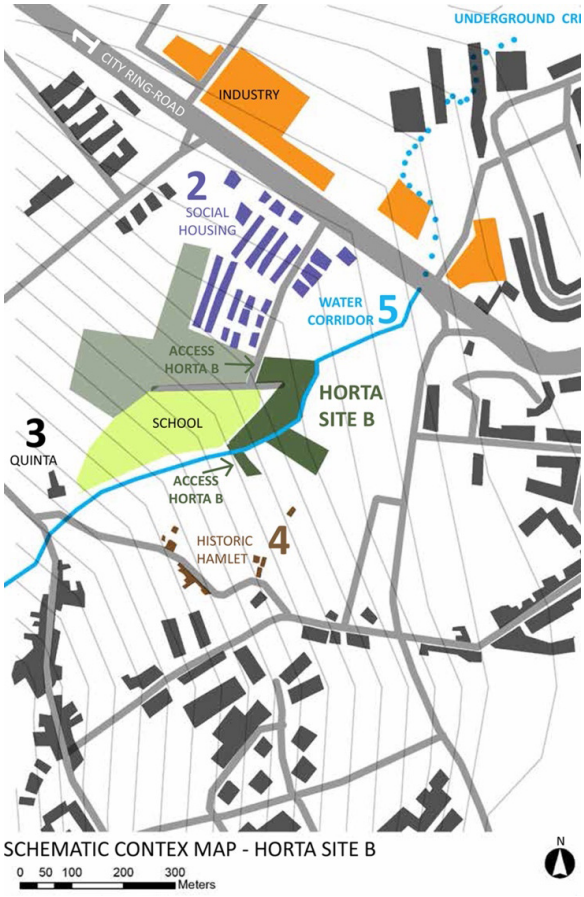

Figure 6. *Horta* B (© Daniela Peña-Corvillon): (1) the city ring-road, (2) social housing estates (where the majority of the growers reside), (3) the remains of a *quinta*, (4) a historic hamlet, and (5) a water corridor.

2.2. Hortas as Community Space: Practices and Discourses

At both these I-UAPs, horticultural growers mainly come from nearby housing communities, although not exclusively. Some of the growers might live further away, but almost all of them have connections to the *horta*'s initial settlers through family or work. These horticultural "communities of choice" are constituted mostly of retired men and women. All the physical activities and the daily chores that these urban agricultural units demand imply a lot of effort and time, but *hortas* are spoken of by growers as something that "does them good"—by which they mean, *hortas* keep them active, healthy, happy.

According to these growers, *hortas* are keeping them away from the *tasca* (a modern-day tavern predominantly associated with the working class in Portuguese society, where men, especially, can consume large amounts of alcohol). Thus, the *horta* is a source of well-being because it steers men away from the *tasca*, but also because it implies an outdoor, physically active lifestyle. The fresh air, growers state, is a source of well-being, and the combination of it with physical work "clears the mind of bad thoughts" (i.e., depression, so often associated with old age and the ending of an active work life). The *hortas* are also the place for socializing with food and drink, namely when the weather is dry and sunny.

The wholesomeness of the *horta* is mirrored in the high quality of the food produced. As the growers say: "The food I buy in the supermarket, God knows where it comes from and what stuff they put on it! This one, I know it is healthier because I grew it myself—and it tastes better too!" Thus, to the betterment of the growers' health through an active, outdoors lifestyle, the *hortas* bring the improved quality of the produce itself. An additional advantage of this practice is the contribution it makes to the household economy. Growers do refer to the fact that, by growing their own food produce, "a lot of things need no longer be bought at the supermarket." However, this contribution to the family budget (i.e., food security) is never presented as the main impetus for their horticultural practices. The economic contribution is clearly and discursively recognized, but never central. Growers mostly refer to the pleasure they derive from the horticultural activity as the main reason to engage in it—and because "it is good for you."

In fact, the *hortas* are not just a space: They are places, as defined by Tuan (1977/2001): They are centers of felt value (Tuan 2001, p. 4).Thus, besides being spoken of as a place that "is good for you," *hortas* as an urban terrain are also characterized by the circularity of "the gift," in the sense described by Mauss (1925/2000) whereby gift-giving is steeped in morality. By giving, receiving, and returning gifts, a moral bond between the persons exchanging gifts is created (i.e., *community* is created). So, what is the gift-giving that takes place in the *hortas*? The element that immediately circulates is food produce.

Growers refer quite often to the pleasure they have in offering some of their surplus produce to family, friends, and neighbors. As the wife of one of the cultivators of *horta* A, and an active element in the horticultural activity herself, said, standing in front of a $2m^2$ section packed with lettuces: "Our son and his wife are very happy with the produce we give them: potatoes, onions, tomatoes, lettuces…I mean, I can freeze the tomato surplus, but lettuces no. And how many lettuces can one eat, really?"

Close relatives are the most frequent beneficiaries of the growers' activities. Growers refer to the fact that, although their children (already adults and with families of their own, often living far away from the *horta*'s location) appreciate the produce their parents grow and offer them, they do not show interest in initiating such

horticultural practices themselves, much to their parents' regret. With the difficult economic scenario Portugal experienced in 2008, but particularly from 2011 onward—the year in which the Portuguese government and the European Commission signed a Memorandum of understanding on financial assistance to Portugal—this "gift of food" is now even more welcome than before. Additionally, some of the growers do speak of selling their produce, but only to "people we trust." Even with this latter group, the main goal of the horticultural activity is never to sell. This importance of I-UAPs to low-income urbanites' sense of food security increased during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The second element that circulates through a gift economy is labor. The pooling of labor is a well-known social feature in agricultural societies at time of peak labor demand. Concerning the *hortas*, very often growers referred to the fact that if one of them is off sick and is not showing up regularly at their plot, they will carry out the necessary tasks so that the crop is not lost. Consequently, you very rarely find unattended plots in I-UAPs. In times of more intensive labor requirements, everyone receives help from their neighbor. Family or friends frequently help when it is harvesting season, when a structure needs to be put up (like the water management structures referred to above), or when goods need to be transported to and from the *hortas*. As one of the growers from *horta* A referred:

> I came to know of this man who had good potato seed [i. e., for planting], so I talked to my son, who has a car, and we arranged to go to Paranhos [a Porto civil parish on the opposite side of the city to where this *horta* is] and collect the sacks with the seeds.

Perhaps the most visible result of this communal pooling of labor is the water management structures built by these two communities and depicted in Figure 4:

> We all agreed on the need to build this tank. We agreed on which day to do the work, so we would all be available. The building materials were agreed upon and then bought by Ferraz. His daughter and son-in-law have a car and were available to help with the transportation. Then we divided the costs equally.

The third element that circulates through a gift economy is knowledge. Quite frequently there is a rural connection to these growers' biographical paths: Some have migrated to the big city, or if already born in Porto, their parents had migrated to Porto. Some of their agricultural knowledge comes from this ancestral-village connection, mostly as childhood memories or knowledge obtained via the parents and the occasional visits to their village. However, this does not happen with all of the growers: Some approached the initial settlers/pioneers, not only to ask permission to cultivate a section of the land but to learn from them how to grow things successfully. As one of the youngest growers, part of the community of *horta* A, said:

> I did not know much at the beginning….I learned everything from Costa: when to plant or seed; but also how to make solid frames out of cut canes for the beans to grow. I learned pretty much everything from him!

3. Formal Urban *Hortas* as *Topoi*

A strong trend in current city governance is the concept of sustainable city where the keeping of green areas is considered a key point in the assessment of the quality of life in an urban setting (Guilland et al., 2018). One of

the first F-UAPs programs in Portugal was initiated in 2003 by LIPOR, the inter-municipal entity managing the waste of eight municipalities in the north part of the PMA (Martinho da Silva, 2014). Additionally, on the southern part of the PMA, and across the river from Porto, we can find the municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia, which in 2014 had an urban garden allotments network constituted by six allotments (completed and in use) "that occupied 11,202m^2, plus three others to be completed…that will occupy 13,322m^2" (Martinho da Silva, 2014, p. 42). In 2014, with the already functioning in-project urban allotment gardens, the area encompassed in Vila Nova de Gaia was 43,435m^2 (Silva, 2014). In 2023, the Vila Nova de Gaia allotment gardens were fully functional (Pereira, 2023).

The process of becoming a member of an F-UAP is very different from the one taking place in I-UAPs. Since F-UAPs are created by the local City Council (often in partnership with other local entities), there is a formal enrolment process via an online application form that any citizen interested in accessing a plot will have to fill in and then wait to see if the application is successful. Upon acceptance, there is a small amount to be paid yearly (30 to 35 EUR). Also, following a successful application and ensuing enrolment, citizens will have to obey the Regulation Code that organizes the functioning of these F-UAPs. Part of the obligations are the following: attend educational courses on sustainable farming; use only sustainable farming techniques; comply with the working hours defined by the Council; make proper use of composting techniques; and keep communal spaces in good order. The entry of people with pets is prohibited (except service dogs), as well as using hoses for watering, making fires, building any sheltering structure, granting use of the plot to a third party, and having no agricultural activity for over four weeks (Regulamento nº 442/2018, 2018).

Several studies paid attention to Vila Nova de Gaia City Council's F-UAPs, namely Martinho da Silva (2014), Martinho da Silva et al. (2016), and Pereira (2023). Regarding the citizens' motivations collected by these studies—mostly taken from the application forms (Martinho da Silva et al., 2016) and a phone-contact survey (Pereira, 2023), but not from direct contact with the citizens/growers—we can find some similarity to the reasons expressed by the citizens of the I-UAPs communities in Porto this work focuses on. Thus, according to Martinho da Silva et al. (2016, p. 59), the reasons most frequently indicated for applying for an F-UAP plot were "to supplement family budget; occupation of leisure times; access to organic farming; practice of physical exercise; environmental concerns." The phone survey conducted by Pereira (2023, p. 37) to 117 users of Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs, indicated the following reasons: production of more healthy food (30%); occupation of free time (27%); and enjoyment of agriculture practice/contact with the land (24%). However, there seems to be a noticeable difference between the social universe of Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs and the I-UAPs this study focuses on. According to Martinho da Silva et al. (2016, p. 59), "more than 1/5 of the applicants (21%) have higher education or leading professional professions." Although the study on I-UAPs in this article follows a qualitative approach and, as such, quantitative data cannot be here offered, the fact is that the identification of such level of formal education within the communities of the I-UAPs contacted was almost non-existent (one case in *horta* A and two in *horta* B). Also, the vast majority of the individuals in the I-UAPs in Porto, met through the fieldwork carried out, were retired, while the numbers supplied by the studies on Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs indicate only 50% (Martinho da Silva et al., 2016 p. 59) and 46% (Pereira, 2023, p. 37) of retired people.

These differences notwithstanding, the information collected by Pereira (2023) on the F-UAPs is similar regarding the use of the produce, namely that (a) the whole of the production is for the growers' own consumption and not for sale (p. 42), that (b) when the yield is quite high growers end up offering produce to

relatives and friends (p. 43), and that (c) one the major benefits of the horticultural practice are the higher quality of their produce compared to supermarket-bought, the savings this allows in terms of household expenses, and the improvement of the quality of life through the occupation of free time and the carrying out of outdoor physical activity (p. 47).

Although this exploratory study is focused on I-UAPs, once fieldwork had allowed me to fully grasp the sense of community I-UAPs hold, I visited a couple of Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs to compare the two realities. Not only is the F-UAPs space very different (more formal and proto-urban, with perfectly aligned paths and numbered plots), but also the sense of community as witnessed in the I-UAPs in Porto was not *really* present, with neighboring plots presenting very different levels of care and attention to the produce being cultivated. In Porto's I-UAPs, due to the "economy of the gift" that inhabits them, all plots look fairly evenly cared for. This happens because, as already stated, not only knowledge on how to grow produce circulates, but also labour does, with holders of neighboring plots lending a helping hand whenever needed. Also, the much smaller area of Porto's I-UAPs when compared to the Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs, allied to the informal and socially interconnected way through which, in the Porto's I-UAPs, one can obtain a little plot to cultivate, lends itself to a much tighter community fabric than the formal online process of accessing a plot the Vila Nova de Gaia's F-UAPs use.

A third type of *hortas* has been emerging in the PMA that is the outcome of civic associations, constituted by middle-class citizens with a higher level of formal education who have come together propelled by environmentally conscious action and social solidarity. Although acknowledging their existence, a more detailed analysis of these *hortas* is not part of this article.

4. Chronicles of Destruction

The previous sections have highlighted how grassroots *hortas* (I-UAPs) and City Council *hortas* (F-UAPs) can actually be different social universes (i.e., the way the actual horticultural space comes to exist, the way one becomes a member of the community, the actual sense of community—or lack of it—and the formal layout of the cultivated space itself), even if holding similar horticultural practices. In fact, it is possible to acknowledge a tripartite typology of *hortas* by looking at the social universes that have brought them into existence: I-UAPs (informal grassroots plots) are associated with low-income individuals; F-UAPs (formal municipality allotments) are associated with low-income individuals and upper/intermediate/professionals; IF-UAPs (more informal/formalized pots) are associates with upper intermediate/professionals. Additionally, it is possible to identify different goals/concerns per type of community (Table 1).

The argument is that the official/formal instances of city governance relate better to both F-UAPs (which is to be expected, since these result from City Council initiatives) and IF-UAPs than to the grassroots I-UAPS. In fact, City Governance relationship with I-UAPs is one of total non-acknowledgment of the added value these communities have in producing a (sustainable) city. For instance, in April 2020, as the first confinement of the Covid-19 pandemic was in place, the growers of a Porto I-UAP located in a pocket of unbuilt land, in the central area of Francos, were faced with the entry of heavy machinery into the cultivated grounds. Once in, they proceeded to destroy it. This I-UAP was home to circa 24 growers who, in a matter of days, lost everything: their produce, infrastructures, tools, and even animals. A week before the arrival of the heavy machinery, a man—not from the community—appeared and told one of the elements of the community "they

Table 1. Goals per plot typology and respective growers' communities.

Goals/concerns	Low-income and intermediate professionals	Upper and intermediate professionals
Health concerns	I-UAPs F-UAPs	F-UAPs IF-UAPs
Recreation	I-UAPs F-UAPs	F-UAPs IF-UAPs
Food security	I-UAPs	—
Food safety	—	F-UAPs IF-UAPs
Environmental concerns	—	F-UAPs IF-UAPs
Education	—	F-UAPs IF-UAPs

had only a few days to take their things out of the cultivated grounds because construction was going to take place there." A week later, on the 28th of April, the front page of *Público*, one of the main national daily papers, had a piece on this destruction. This was the first time that a matter related to an I-UAP had made it to the front page of a national newspaper. The title read: *Porto: They Destroyed Their Community* Hortas *Leaving Them Even Poorer* (Pinto, 2020a). The piece described the aftermath of the destruction, voicing the growers' absolute grief for their loss. The images that accompanied the piece portrayed a landscape of destruction punctuated by isolated human figures who looked displaced in desolate grounds that were, until some days ago, a vibrant place, home to several forms of life, from plant to animal, to community.

In the face of the destruction of their *hortas*, members of this I-UAP did not claim for themselves the right to the land: They demanded a different way for this destruction to have happened, "with more time and with more humanity," as one of the growers put it (Pinto, 2020a). Even if the long and continued use of the land ascribed them some rights under Portuguese law—and the oldest and longest-standing grower in this I-UAP was an 89-year-old woman who had her plot there for over 40 years—respect for private property (a deep core value in northern Portugal) prevailed. Some historical context might help explain these urbanites' deep respect for private property. April 2024 marked 50 years since the 1974 Portuguese democratic revolution, which ended 48 years of a right-wing dictatorship. Back then, in the heated days of the revolutionary period, only southern Portugal saw a land reform in which the fields of large private agricultural estates were expropriated and given to the agricultural laborers, who had organized themselves into agricultural cooperatives. Back then, in the revolutionary period, no land reform took place in northern Portugal. In my conversations with I-UAP growers, whenever I approached the matter of land ownership, they always mentioned the fact that, at some point in the future, they would have to leave their *hortas*.

Nevertheless, after the destruction that took place in April 2020, one of the growers decided to fight back and hired a lawyer. As they stated, the loss of the *hortas* would always be a difficult blow to them, "but in the situation we are now in [i.e., the pandemic and its confinement, and related loss of jobs] these *hortas* were more important than never" (Pinto, 2020a). In the face of the limelight the unprecedented national-level news coverage shed over this community situation, Porto City Council was forced to step in. Although there was tacit evidence of the land owner accepting this community presence and its use of his land throughout the several decades of the *horta*'s existence, Porto's City Council said there was nothing it could do to revert

the situation. Recognising the important role the production of the *hortas* had for the livelihood of the low-income urbanites—but at the same time stating the absolute right of the owner to take full possession of his land—Porto City Council offered the growers the possibility of acquiring a plot in the now existing Porto City Council F-UAPs. However, the people who had lost their *hortas* in Francos had to join the several hundreds of urbanites on the waiting list for a plot in any of the Porto City Council F-UAPs. This meant that accessing a new *horta* would not take place soon, nor in a location near their homes, which made the offer totally ineffective regarding the losses suffered. And although the growers had identified a plot near the now destroyed *horta* location (and thus, near also to their homes/housing estate), the City Council stated that it could not cater to a specific group of citizens in the city: The Council's work toward increasing the offer of F-UAPs was for all of the Porto citizens (Pinto, 2020b). The legal action against the owner of the land fell through due to the inability of the growers to bear the costs that legal representation and litigation involved.

5. When Strategy Overruns Tactics: The Unavoidable Demise of the Urban *Horta* Heterotopia?

Throughout my fieldwork with I-UAPs, I had often feared the future that I viewed as almost certain: a future in which these fantastic community places would disappear. This certainty of mine derived from two elements: (a) the impossible relation between the liminal state of these territories and the growers' absolute respect for private property, a relationship often mirror in the growers' statements that eventually they might have to abandon their *hortas* because the land they cultivated was not theirs, and (b) because the formal instances of City Governance ignored these spaces and saw them as tinged by marginality (due to the illegal nature of the occupation of the soil). Therefore, when the *Público* article came out, I was confined at home, like everybody else at the time, and no longer in the terrain (to be noted, this *horta* was not part of the set of I-UAPs I had been in contact with).

At home, in confinement, reading the newspaper piece, as events unfolded I was saddened but (a) energized, reading that the growers were fighting back, (b) saddened that they could not take their legal fight through, yet (c) happy that the City Council had recognized the importance of I-UAPs to the communities that brought them into existence, and (d) saddened and angry (but not surprised) that the City Council took a formal, and consequently, ineffective approach to offering redress to these growers' losses. In *Público*'s first piece, one of the growers is quoted as saying: "I rebel against this because this shows only one thing: The powerful, the ones with money, they can do anything" (Pinto, 2020a). So, besides a neo-Marxist approach to this statement, how can the dynamics of this particular event (that is relevant beyond itself) be illuminated?

The forms of spatial behaviour defined by de Certeau (1984) might provide a useful frame to elicit this relation between the formal and informal domains of city life as objectified in the *hortas*. The following is de Certeau's definition of strategy and tactics, to which I've added references to the *hortas* following this exploratory study:

> I call *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power [Porto City Council]…can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its own [the legal framework, namely related to private property and urban land use] and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats [the I-UAPs]…can be managed. (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 35–36)

> By contrast with strategy,...a tactic is a calculation determined by the absence of a proper locus [the I-UAPs as liminal and invisible, as argued in this article]. No delimitation of an exteriority [their illegal status, namely as far as land property goes] provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy [see the destruction of the I-UAP in April 2020]. The space of the tactic is the space of the other. (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 36–37)

Strategy (the Porto City Council) works to limit the sheer number of variables affecting city governance by creating a place (the city as governed by the City Council) in which the environment can be rendered predictable if not properly tamed. By contrast, tactics is the approach taken when the subject is unable to take measures against the variables (the inability of growers to proceed with legal action against the destruction of their I-UAP in 2020). The modality of spatial performativity of tactics is most aptly put by Buchanan (2000, p. 89):

> Tactics are constantly in the swing of things and are as much in danger of being swept away or submerged by the flow of events as they are capable of bursting through the dykes, strategy erects around itself and suffusing its protected place with its own brand of subversive and incalculable energy. Tactics refers to the set of practices that strategy has not been able to domesticate.

The destruction of the I-UAP in April 2020 clearly shows how the spatial modalities of action of the City Council and that of the urbanites who constituted the horticultural informal grass-root communities not only speak different idioms, as the possibility of translation, and thus of communication and dialogue seem not to be conceivable. Additionally, although the eradicated *horta* was not part of the ones my fieldwork had taken me to, and if its destruction stands as the coming true of an anticipated fate, *horta* A presented in this article is now also facing oblivion. The construction of a new bridge is planned, one that will cross the River Douro from Vila Nova Gaia to Porto, carrying a new line of the Greater Porto subway network, and with it, the demise of this I-UAP, the beginning of which can already be seen (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Destruction of the shrubbery perimeter "wall" (© Paula Mota Santos 2024). Note: Compare this with Figure 1 (site A), which portrays this very section a couple of years before.

6. Conclusion

The previous sections have highlighted the differences between three types of UAPs that can be identified in the city of Porto. The differences underlined by this exploratory study were both in terms of how these *hortas* came to exist (from informal to more formal processes) and in terms of the needs they fulfill for each type of community inhabiting each type of UAP, namely: health concerns, recreation, food security, food safety, environmental concerns and education (Table 1). This article focused primarily on I-UAPs.

The three types of UAPs presented here (being constituted by different social universes, having different goals, and thus being the result of different social dynamics that brought these different UAPs into existence) have not constructed any forms of connectivity between them, despite sharing some goals/concerns, namely health concerns and recreation (Table 1). I posit here that this absence of connectivity between these types of UAPs is mostly rooted in the social class differences that can be identified in the constitution of the community of each type of UAP (Table 1). For instance, I-UAPs are inhabited/made to exist mostly by working-class urbanites, while IF-UAPs are mostly constituted by middle-class urbanites, often holders of university degrees. Additionally, these social class differences are themselves constitutive of the different processes at the root of each type of UAP, a characteristic that also contributes to this absence of connectivity between the three types of UAPs.

The study here presented was able to identify how the heterotopic spaces of I-UAPs are usually (mis)read as an urban emptiness, as urban black holes. From the outside (literally and metaphorically) it seems that "the city" does not exist there (Figure 1). But these places are immensely socially productive, as their inhabiting by a "gift economy" identified by this exploratory study clearly shows. A black hole in physics does not, in fact, refer to an emptiness but to a location of immense energy. In the same way, I-UAPs are not urban emptiness, but spaces in which there is a concentration and exchange of energy vital to making a city exist—and this characteristic is a clear and central contribution from this exploratory study, which works towards a better understanding of the social reality that these *hortas* hold within them.

This study also identified the creation of these I-UAPs as a coping mechanism created by urbanites who are the ones most at risk regarding food security, and thus, also at risk regarding social exclusion. However, because these grassroots *hortas* belong to the realm of the informal (*tactics*), they are placed at a clear disadvantage in the formal (*strategy*) urban governance system—a disadvantage that the chronicle of the 2020 destruction of an I-UAP presented in this article so clearly highlights.

If, according to Zukin (1995, p. 7), building a city depends on how people combine the traditional economic factors of land, labor, and capital, with the look and feel of cities reflecting concepts of order and disorder, the question that begs for a productive answer is: How does a formal system of territory management (city governance) embrace an informal system (the I-UAPs horticultural communities) without annihilating it? Because as Harvey (2012, p. xvi) states:

> Only when it is understood that those who build and sustain urban life have a primary claim to that which they have produced, and that one of their claims is to the unalienated right to make a city more after their own heart's desire, we will arrive at a politics of the urban that will make sense.

The first step in this desired future would be, firstly, the recognition by city governance of how much these communities build the new city that is in the desired present-day urban charters, followed by the recognition of the rights to the soil these long-standing communities might have acquired. Ideally, also, these I-UAPs should formalize themselves and acquire legal status and existence, so that they would become a subject with will and power able to claim the right to maintain the city more in line with their own hearts' desires. However, both paths would imply the ability to move away from the dichotomy tactics–strategy that de Certeau (1984) delineated. The overcoming of this dichotomy is the real challenge urban governance needs to face if these *hortas* and their working-class communities are to be removed from the margins and brought into the city proper while keeping their form of community.

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Conflict of Interests

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About the Author

Paula Mota Santos has a PhD in anthropology from UCL (UK) and is an associate professor at Universidade Fernando Pessoa, Porto, Portugal. She is an associate researcher at the Centre for Administration and Public Policy (CAPP), Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal. She has researched and published on immigration, urban systems and minorities, tourism, heritage, and museum practices. She is also interested in anonymous photography and documentary filmmaking. She has made two documentaries. She was a visiting scholar at the Department of City and Regional Planning, University of California at Berkeley, in 2008, having also collaborated with the Portuguese Studies Programme at the same university.