MONSANTO FOREST PARK

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MONSANTO FOREST PARK

Located in the western part of the city of Lisbon, the Monsanto Forest Park (PFM) occupies most of the Serra de Monsanto. It covers the parishes of Campolide, S. Francisco Xavier, St. Maria de Belém, St. Condestável, Alcântara and Ajuda. It is bordered by the CP Sintra railway line to the north, Avenida de Ceuta to the east, and National Road No. 6 to the west. The PFM is surrounded by the following neighbourhoods: Boavista neighbourhood; Calhau neighbourhood; Alto da Serafina neighbourhood; Liberdade neighbourhood; Alvito neighbourhood; Caramão neighbourhood, Ajuda neighbourhood; the National Republican Guard neighbourhood; and the Caselas neighbourhood. (Camara, 2012; Jácome, 2013).

In 1868, the first intention to create a forest park in the bare Monsanto mountain range, in Lisbon, was born, but it was only in 1934 that the Decree-Law of the Minister of Public Works, engineer Duarte Pacheco (1899-1943), created the Monsanto Forest Park, which is still the largest park in the city of Lisbon today, occupying an area of around 900 hectares.

In 1946, the first plantations were carried out and leisure and recreation areas were created for the population. Also in that year, the first accesses, the Alvito Children's Park, the tennis club and the Montes Claros restaurant-viewpoint were inaugurated, designed by the architect Keil do Amaral (1910-1975).

Since 1939, several afforestation plans have been proposed with the aim of planting the ideal species that would best adapt to the climate, soil and geological conditions of the Serra de Monsanto. Pilot projects include the contribution

of studies such as the development of afforestation maps by forestry engineer Joaquim Rodrigo (1912-1997), landscape architect Viana Barreto (1924-2012), forestry engineer Souto Cruz and forestry engineer Fernando Louro Alves, among other important contributions. In 2010, the Monsanto Forest Park (PFM) was considered a Model Forest (CML, 2010).

Since 2012, it has been part of a green corridor, which is one of the most notable achievements of landscape architect Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles. The implemented concept is a fundamental part of the city's ecological structure, interconnecting green spaces and creating a continuous natural structure in Lisbon, which is 5km long and 51ha in area. The creation of the park in the Serra de Monsanto on the outskirts of the city reveals a striking approach to urban green spaces integrated into the wider scale of the metropolitan area and the city's expansion. Considered its “green lung”, it represents a landmark park fulfilling a vital role in the city of Lisbon.

From a historical point of view, the Monsanto mountain range holds a very rich legacy from the prehistoric period, when people discovered the mountain’s unparalleled potential for settling there. The proximity of the Jamor and Alcântara rivers and the Tagus river, the existence of flint quarries, and the protection offered by the dense forest made Monsanto an ideal place to live. Testimonies of this past are the archaeological discoveries from the Paleolithic period at the Casal de Monte and Moinho das Cruzes stations, and from the Neolithic period at the Vila Pouca station. During the Roman Empire, the agricultural area increased due to the need to supply Lisbon, and there was a need to “destroy” the forest, giving way to wheat cultivation and livestock farming (Barreto, 1952).

In the 16th century, the Mata de S. Domingos de Benfica, in the 17th century the Mata do Palácio dos Marqueses de Fronteira and the Mata do Paço Real de Alcântara (today the Tapada da Ajuda) occupied the half-slope of the Monsanto mountain range as hunting grounds and woodlands where the nobility of Lisbon would spend their leisure time. In the 18th century, King João V had the construction of the Águas Livres aqueduct passed through this mountain range and the first idea of reforesting the bare Monsanto mountain range was born in 1868. However, it was only almost 60 years later, in 1926/27, that the doctor brothers MacBride and the French urban planner Forrestier presented the first proposals for the mountain range. The main objective of the MacBride brothers' project was to

give Lisbon a “green lung”, create leisure areas for the population, develop communication routes and transport and improve or implement infrastructures, such as sewage, gas, water, telephone and electricity. There were also concerns about afforestation, hygiene, public health and street planning in the development of new neighbourhoods in the city. (Matoso, 2002/2003) The suggestion put forward by the MacBrides sought to enrich the city with a ring of forest from Campo Grande to Monsanto, similar to other modern foreign cities. The urban planner Forrestier proposed a more centralised solution of a large forest with gardens and playing fields. (Tostões, 1992).

These proposals were ultimately rejected by the Lisbon City Council, but their dissemination may have helped to ensure the rapid completion of the Park, as in 1934 Duarte Pacheco issued a decree-law creating the Monsanto National Park, and in 1936, as Mayor of Lisbon, he put the project into action. In 1938, the need to create a western exit from Lisbon and an access to the Costa do Sol, in accordance with Gröer's Master Plan, forced a review of the project, and the forestry engineer Joaquim Rodrigo (1912-1997) and the architect Keil do Amaral (1910-1975) were invited to take part in this project. This was also the year of unprecedented expropriations in the country, for public utility services, of land adjacent to the park (Tostões, 1992). This entire process took five years and in 1943 the entire extension of the Monsanto Forest Park was finally defined, with an area of around 1000 hectares (Rodrigo, 1943).

To draw inspiration for the park's design, architect Keil do Amaral visited parks in France, England, Germany and the Netherlands. The Fontainebleau Forest, the Vérrièrres Forest on the outskirts of Paris and the Amsterdam Forest were the ones that Keil felt best suited to Monsanto. It was therefore decided that the park would be a natural forest, with various sports and leisure facilities and viewpoints. (CML, 1998).

In 1946, the first plantations were planted and many areas were prepared for the public. The first accesses, the Alvito Children's Park, the tennis club and the Montes Claros restaurant-viewpoint were built based on a project by architect Keil do Amaral. The latter was designed by Keil do Amaral in 1939. It is considered a symbol of Monsanto as a leisure area. “It has a classic composition, with a rigid structure following an axis of symmetry that determines the circular pergola, where there is a play of shadow and light on one side and the Tea House on the other. It is

centred by a water mirror surrounded by grass and adapted to the land of the old fort." (Grilo, 2014) The most commonly used materials are brick, wrought iron and stone, with a mark of robustness and simplicity that dates back to the early days of modernism.

There are also other viewpoints, from the end of the 1930s, which had as their concept the use of the mills and platforms of the forts (Grilo, 2014), namely: Moinhos do Mocho Viewpoint, Luneta dos Quartéis Viewpoint, Moinho dos Alferes Viewpoint and Pedreira do Penedo Viewpoint.

The Alvito Children's Park, also designed by Keil do Amaral, covers an area of approximately 3 hectares. The initial project included only a playground, but it later received an innovation for the time: a children's pool (Tostões, 1992). Between 2003 and 2005 it was remodelled to better meet the needs of those who used it. It is now a multipurpose area, divided into several levels, with children's equipment arranged according to age groups. In addition to these facilities, it also has an Adolfo Simões Children's Cultural Centre, a sports centre and a picnic area (Grilo, 2014).

There are also other structures and spaces that make up and enrich the park, such as: the Montes Claros Tea House, the Tennis Club and the Panoramic Restaurant. In 1970, in view of the strong urban pressure that the PFM was being subjected to, a decree law was published reinforcing the concept of "public use" of the park, for the installation of educational, informative and other public utility infrastructures (Alves, 1983; Alves, 1990). In May 1979, the strict delimitation of the Park was defined, which was approved by the CML and by the General Directorate of Forests, which definitively prevented the expansion of the urban fabric over the park area (Cruz et. Al, 1988).

Around fifty years later, new recreational areas were opened, such as the new Alto da Serafina and Calhau park (1992); the Moinhos de Santana Recreational Park (1997); the Alameda Keil do Amaral fitness circuit (2003); several picnic parks (Mata de São Domingos, Calhau Recreational Park, Alvito Picnic Park, Pedra Park, Moinho do Penedo Picnic Park, Vila Guiné); sports areas; restaurants and a campsite; the Monsanto space (1996), the Monsanto interpretation centre and biodiversity space (1997) and the Monsanto Green Corridor (2012). This last project is part of the ecological structure of the Lisbon metropolitan area and establishes the connection between Eduardo VII Park and the PFM.

The Monsanto Forest Park offers very attractive shelter and food resources. We can find specimens of 60 different species of birds, reptiles, butterflies and small mammals that find in the park and its vegetation (planted in the 1940s) a suitable habitat for the growth of various species of fauna. As for the vegetation, the most significant populations are based on: Pinus pinea (stone pine); Pinus halepensis (Aleppo pine); C. lusitanica, C. sempervirens and C. Macrocarpa (cupressus spp.); Quercus suber (cork oaks); Quercus rotundifolia (holm oak); Quercus faginea (Portuguese oak); Quercus robur (Portuguese oak); E. globulus, E. camaldulensis, E. rostrata, E. saligna. E. sideroxylon, E. viminalis, (eucalyptus spp.); Acacia melanoxylon, A. longifolia. The karoo, A. dealbata, A. decurrens etc. (acacia spp.); Pinus canariensis (Canary pine); Platycladus orientalis (thuja from China); Olea europaea (olive and olive trees), Ulmus minor (elm trees), Fraxinus angustifolia and Fraxinus ornus (ash trees).

The Monsanto Forest Park is a very attractive place from a landscape point of view, with a contrast of dense forest and occasional openings over the river and the city, which provide great views. It offers a wide range of activities, spread across the various spaces that constitute it and is recognized for its ecological, aesthetic, social and recreational value and as a relevant hotspot of urban biodiversity (Cruz, et.al., 2012; Semenzato, et.al, 2010; Soares, AL; Castel-Branco, 2007).

Includes EFIP - Forest Species Classified as Being of Public Interest, Monsanto Forest Park - patches 1, 2 and 3 - mixed cork oak/holm oak groves, Notice No. 8952/2005, DR, 2nd series, No. 198 of 14 October 2005 / Monsanto Forest Park - patches 4 and 5 - wild olive groves, Notice No. 8952/2005, DR, 2nd series, No. 198 of 14 October 2005 / Monsanto Forest Park - patches 6, 7 and 8 - mixed cork oak/holm oak groves, Notice No. 5/2007, 2 January 2007 / Monsanto Forest Park - patch 9 - cork oak massif, Notice No. 5/2007, 2 January 2007 / Monsanto Forest Park - spot 10 - Canary Island pine massif, Notice No. 896/2000, DR, 2nd series, No. 15 of 19 January 2000 / Monsanto Forest Park - spot 11 - Portuguese oak massif, Notice No. 13/2009, 9 November 2009. Includes Águas Livres Aqueduct / Quinta dos Marqueses de Fronteira / Forte do Alto do Duque.

Inventory Text: Ana Luísa Soares – 2020; Teresa Grilo and Ana Raquel Cunha – 2020.

Adaptation: Cristina Castel-Branco – 2020.

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Non-profit organization aiming to contribute to the study, defense, conservation and dissemination of historic gardens.

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