



# Characteristics and motivations of potential users of urban allotment gardens: The case of Vila Nova de Gaia municipal network of urban allotment gardens



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## ABSTRACT

Demand for urban allotment plots has recently increased in Portugal but little is known about the characteristics and motivations of the demanding population, and if and how its characteristics affect its motivations.

In this article, we use the Municipal Network of Urban Allotment Gardens (MNUAG)<sup>1</sup> launched by the Portuguese municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia for an exploratory Case Study research. Based on the data collected in the MNUAG application forms submitted in the period 2012–2013, we describe the characteristics and the motivations of the population demanding for urban allotment gardens (UAG)<sup>2</sup> and run a logit model to find if and how the motivations are influenced by the characteristics.

The population of applicants to the MNUAG is quite diverse. It has a balanced gender distribution and an average age of 47 years. Most of the applicants are between 25 and 64 years old, and belong to households with 2–4 members.

To supplement family budget, occupation of leisure times, and access to organic farming are its most important motivations, followed by environmental concerns, the practice of physical exercise, and education.

Motivations are influenced by the characteristics. This study has identified two groups of applicants with contrasting motivations. Food security is the only significant motivation for the unemployed and low-income applicants. Food safety, health concerns, environmental concerns, recreation, and education are common and frequent motivations among the upper and intermediate professional groups.

Results can have future implications on the MNUAG, namely on the UAG location and typology, plot number, and plot size. To meet the demand of all the types of applicants, while fostering social cohesion, the municipality should reinforce its current small UAG structure and add to the MNUAG one or two productive parks.

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## 1. Introduction

According to the United Nations (2014), world population exceeded 7 billion on March 12, 2012. More than one-half live in

urban areas with limited or no access to agricultural land (European Environmental Agency, 2015). In this context, UAG constitute, to millions of city's inhabitants, the only opportunity to engage with activities related with gardening and cultivation.

UAG are not a new phenomenon in urban areas. The movement began to gain momentum worldwide with the Industrial Revolution and continued to gain strength over the years in many countries, especially in times of war and economic crisis.

In Portugal, the first UAG arose as a consequence of the rural exodus of the 1950's and 1960's. This large-scale migration to the urban areas located in the littoral, especially Lisbon, caused

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<sup>1</sup> MNUAG – Municipal Network of Urban Allotment Gardens.

<sup>2</sup> UAG – Urban Allotment Gardens.

the construction of many new neighborhoods and several 'urban areas of spontaneous occupation'. The lack of green spaces in the newly created urban areas together with the rural background of its inhabitants led to the creation of many illegal allotment gardens or 'allotment gardens of spontaneous occupation', as they are currently designated. According to data of the municipality of Lisbon, in 1967 there were about 128 ha of UAG in Lisbon. This number rose to about 301 ha in 1987. To this increase contributed largely migrants from the former Portuguese colonies in Africa.

Until recently, most of the Portuguese urban population disliked UAG, as they have been associated with social inferiority and non-integration in the urban lifestyle (Martinho da Silva, 2014). This attitude has been changing since the advent of the planned UAG in the country.

According to Gonçalves (2014), in 2013 there were 107 legal and planned urban allotment gardens in Portugal, distributed by 16 of its 18 mainland districts. The first planned UAG were promoted in 2003 by LIPOR, an inter-municipal entity responsible for managing the waste in eight municipalities of the Porto Metropolitan Area. LIPOR's program of organic urban allotment gardens (Horta à Porta) puts a great deal of emphasis on waste management through the promotion of domestic composting. Currently, it encompasses forty-five UAG, distributed by the eight counties (LIPOR, 2016).

After Porto, Lisboa is the Portuguese district with a higher number of urban allotment gardens – 15 UAG in 2014. The first UAG of this district were created between 2009 and 2011 in the county of Cascais (Gonçalves, 2014). In 2007, the Lisboa municipality launched the Horticultural Parks Project (Projeto dos Parques Hortícolas), a program dedicated to the construction of multifunctional gardens or parks with areas dedicated to urban gardening. The first two Lisboa horticultural parks were inaugurated in 2011. In 2014, the city had ten Horticultural Parks with about 400 plots in 2014 (CML, 2016).

### 1.1. Motivations to participate in UAG—background

Motivations to engage in UAG have been changing over the years (Armstrong, 2000). UAG started as a movement to increase food supplies in response to scarcity. But motivations have expanded far beyond the initial food security concerns and presently include food safety, environmental and health concerns, recreation, education, and social cohesion, among others (Golden, 2013).

There are two types of motivations to be engaged in UAG: the initial motivations and the secondary or unexpected motivations. The initial motivations are the ones that lead people to get involved in an UAG for the first time. The secondary motivations are the ones arising from the experience itself. Growing food is often the initial motivation to join an UAG, but awareness of its therapeutic effects or recreation potential can work as secondary motivations to keep gardeners involved in the project (Henryks, 2011).

Many authors suggest that food production is one of the most important motivations to participate in UAG (Irvine et al., 1999; Alaimo et al., 2008; Corrigan, 2011a; Kelly, 2012) as, in some cases, it can provide an important complement to household income (Holland, 2011; Guitart et al., 2012). Some gardeners are even willing to walk long distances to grow food motivated to eat cheap (Ilyniak and Khuns, 2013). However, food production does not arise only by food security motivations but also as a response to growing concerns over food safety. People want to be able to consume natural, fresh and trustable food in order to supply part of their nutritional needs (Meenar and Hoover, 2012).

Personal wellbeing is since long referred as a powerful motivation to participate in UAG (Kaplan, 1973; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1990).

Personal wellbeing and other therapeutic effects as well as direct health benefits (Van den Berg et al., 2010) can be associated with the sense of accomplishment resulting from the gardening activities (Blair et al., 1991; Glover, 2003). In this range of motivations the enjoyment of nature (Clayton, 2007) is often mentioned relating the connection with nature with an increasing sense of spirituality (Kingsley et al., 2009).

Other relevant motivations are recreation and exercise (Corrigan, 2011b; Holland, 2011). Gardeners also find in their plots a space where they can develop their individual creativity in a way not possible in other aspects of their urban life (Domene and Saurí, 2006).

Education, training and the development of skills are motivations that began to be more frequently mentioned (Augustina and Beilin, 2011; Bendt et al., 2012), highlighting the importance of engaging the youngest members of the community in positive activities. According to Meenar and Hoover (2012), the development of skills can be associated with better conditions to find a job. However, few authors referred employment and business or job opportunities as a motivation to be involved in UAG (Irvine et al., 1999; Holland, 2011).

Important social motivations to engage in UAG are the opportunity for social interaction (Ilyniak and Khuns, 2013) and the possibility to develop a sense of belonging (Guitart et al., 2012; Kelly, 2012). Glover (2003) claims that UAG 'are often more about the community than they are about gardening. They offer places where people can gather, network, and identify together as residents of a neighborhood.' UAG can also play an important role in migrants' adaptation to a new country or place, namely by providing a space where they can preserve and share their cultural identity (Baker, 2004; Teig et al., 2009; Augustina and Beilin, 2011).

Motivations are often connected and most gardeners have more than one purpose to engage in UAG. Holland (2011) found links between education, health, food provision and leisure; area protection, community development and leisure; skills and training; and health and community development. While the literature generally indicates food production as the main motivation to engage in UAG, in some situations it appears that what is grown is secondary to what else is achieved (Scheromm, 2015).

Finally, there are also some reasons that negatively affect the motivation to participate in UAG: difficult access (Holland, 2011), theft and vandalism (Ilyniak and Khuns, 2013; Teig et al., 2009), racism, and lack of time or availability to devote to the garden (Meenar and Hoover, 2012).

Broadly, there is a lack of characterization of the populations using UAG in all the studies. Usually the nationalities of the gardeners are referred but there is little information about their employment, age, and other characteristics. They are often characterized in a general way, for example as 'populations of low income houses' or 'immigrants' or just 'residents of the neighborhood'. Also, the literature seldom explores if and how the characteristics of the gardeners affect their motivations to engage in urban gardening.

This paper intends to identify the characteristics and the motivations of the population applying for urban allotment gardens in Portugal, by exploring the following research questions: i) What are the main characteristics of the population applying to urban allotment gardens? ii) What motivations lead urbanites to apply to urban allotment gardens? and iii) Do the characteristics of the potential urban gardeners influence their motivations, and how?

These questions were addressed resorting to an exploratory research and taking as case study the Municipal Network of Urban Allotment Gardens (MNUAG) recently launched by the Portuguese municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia, a county located in the Porto Metropolitan Area, northwest Portugal.

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