

Glaziou and Burle Marx: lessons for a sustainable landscaping in Brazil

Glaziou e Burle Marx: lições para um paisagismo sustentável no Brasil

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Abstract

When we consider some of nowadays sustainable ideals of landscape architecture, we find out that Glaziou and Burle Marx were men ahead of their time. Both of them began to use and spread the use of native vegetation, introducing into their design some tropical plants that were not valued at the time and were absent in Brazilian gardens; while Glaziou participated in Brazil's first reforestation project in the mid-19th century, Burle Marx spread his concern about deforestation and its environmental risks in the following century; both designed spaces that can be used by all people nowadays; both were aware of the importance of Brazilian native flora. In this way, these landscapers left important lessons for the development of sustainable landscaping in Brazil.

Resumo

Ao considerar alguns dos ideais atuais do paisagismo sustentável, constata-se que no Brasil Glaziou e Burle Marx foram paisagistas à frente de seu tempo. Ambos utilizaram e difundiram o uso da vegetação nativa, introduzindo em seus projetos algumas plantas tropicais que não eram valorizadas na época e não apareciam nos jardins brasileiros; enquanto Glaziou participou da primeira proposta de reflorestamento do Brasil em meados do século XIX, Burle Marx expressou publicamente sua preocupação com o desmatamento e suas consequências ambientais no século seguinte; ambos projetaram espaços livres públicos que podem ser utilizados por todos na atualidade; ambos tinham consciência da importância da flora nativa brasileira e valorizaram as espécies autóctones. Dessa forma, esses paisagistas deixaram lições importantes para o desenvolvimento de um paisagismo sustentável no Brasil.

Introduction

The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) identifies the following aspects as indicative of sustainable landscape design: use of native species to attract local wildlife, reuse of materials, creation of rain gardens, use of drainage paving, and restoration of biodiversity, citing a text from the Reuse Alliance as an example:

In a sustainable rebuild, building materials are reused or recycled, drastically reducing waste. For example, a new park can be created from old building materials. After separating the materials, some are kept at the construction site and reprocessed. Reclaimed soil, concrete, glass, wood and steel debris can be reused or recycled to serve new functions [...]. In a sustainable landscape, everything old becomes new again. (Reuse Alliance *apud* ASLA, s.d.)

In Brazil, the question of the absence of native and tropical plants in Brazilian gardens appeared in 19th-century travel writings, such as those by Auguste Saint-Hilaire (1799-1853). The French botanist examined specimens of the Brazilian flora and, encountering a great variety of colors, shapes, and textures, wondered why these plants did not appear in the Brazilian garden instead of those commonly used in Europe (SAINT-HILAIRE, 1974, p.57-8).

While Saint-Hilaire pointed this out as a botanist and researcher of the Brazilian flora, Auguste François Marie Glaziou (1828-1906) and Roberto Burle Marx (1909-1994) did so as landscape designers. Thus, the appreciation of native flora, with the use of native species in public and private gardens, considered one of the aspects of what is now defined as "sustainable landscaping", was one of the characteristics of Glaziou and Burle Marx's projects - in the first case still with a significant mixture with exotic species; in the second one, with a more expressive use of tropical and native species.

As for the reuse of building materials, this can be identified in some projects, but certainly not according to the vision of sustainability that exists today, but mostly to reduce the cost of the work, to avoid wasting resources that were still usable and sometimes also to recognize the possibility of creative arrangement of these elements that would otherwise be thrown away.

The recovery of biodiversity is a contemporary concept, but Glaziou was already concerned about the issue of the devastation of the Brazilian forest, and Burle Marx in his lectures was concerned with the preservation of Brazil's biodiversity and landscape resources, denouncing the process of devastation of vegetation and the extinction of fauna: "[...] In recent decades, logging has left entire regions deserted.... Who pays the unscrupulous hunters of alligators, monkeys, birds and butterflies?" (BURLE MARX, 1987, p.79-80). Perhaps the best example of biodiversity recovery in Burle Marx's work is his site in Rio de Janeiro, in the same way that the contribution to the reforestation of Tijuca is the best example in this sense with regard to Glaziou.

Glaziou

Auguste François Marie Glaziou was a French landscape designer and botanist who came to Brazil in 1858, at twenty-five, to work as director of parks and gardens in Rio de Janeiro, at the request of D. Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil. Later on, his duties were expanded, becoming general director of public gardens and forests in the state of Rio de Janeiro – role he assumed until 1895, when he returned to Europe (Notice biographique..., 1906, p.365). Among his works are the requalification of the Passeio Público, the project for the Campo de Santana, and the reforestation of the Tijuca Forest. In all of these - although in the first two, together with the exotics -, Glaziou used native species, putting into practice one of the lessons that Saint-Hilaire and Matius (1794-1868) had taught him in their travel writings: that the Brazilian native flora is absolutely beautiful and should be in the Brazilian garden to enhance it. In the Campo da Aclamação Landscaping Plan, prepared by Glaziou and Francisco José Fialho in 1871, landscapers committed to collecting native species throughout the province, to create "a national garden with the largest possible collection of representatives of the rich flora of Brazil" (Glaziou and Fialho *apud* BELÉM, 1980, p.411). There are some other examples of Glaziou's use of Brazilian native flora, such as in the gardens of Quinta da Boa Vista where he created an avenue of sapucaias - trees native to Brazil, characteristics of the Atlantic Forest and the Amazon Forest (TRINDADE, 2014, p.63), and outside the cave arranged cacti and agaves (Idem, *ibid.*, p.67).

In order to find out new species, Glaziou made scientific expeditions to collect plants that could be used in the gardens. According to Hetzel (HETZEL e NEGREIROS, 2011, p.41), Glaziou collected around 12 thousand species of plants in Brazil.

[Glaziou] was a tireless collector of plants in our territory, classifying them according to their species. Some of them are named after him, such as a genus of Bignoniaceae, *Glaziovía*, as well as the "maniçoba," *Manihot glaziovii*. An active worker, he was always collecting new botanical specimens and, when he had some time left over, he would make long and fruitful scientific excursions.

Although he only knew about botany and was not a true phylogist, he left us with "News on Applied Botany" and the "Numerical Summary of the Species of Plants Harvested in the Commission of Exploration of the Plateau of Goiás". (TERRA, 2000, p.60)

Enchanted by Brazilian tropical vegetation, Glaziou traveled around Rio de Janeiro (from Serra dos Órgãos to Serra de Itatiaia) and through the provinces of Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Espírito Santo and Goiás, composing his exsicata of twelve thousand species (Notice biographique..., 1906, p.366).

As a matter of interest, in Brazil, Glaziou was the first landscaper to use materials that would otherwise be discarded as waste. In his book *The Garden in Brazil in the 19th Century - Glaziou Revisited*, Carlos Gonçalves Terra highlights this aspect of his work, along with the "appreciation of autochthonous flora": "the use of demolition materials - from the old Teatro Fluminense, located in Campo de Santana" (TERRA, *Op. cit.*, p.87-8). Glaziou also asked for permission to use some old iron rejected by the engineers found nearby Campo station - the first station on the D. Pedro II railway. Although the author does not specify how or in which spaces these demolition materials were used, this is probably the first reuse of construction materials in landscaping projects in Brazil, already in the 19th century, and was recorded in some of his letters:

[...] I ask you for permission to show, as soon as possible, to the person in charge of selling these objects [wood used in the construction of the Teatro Lírico Fluminense], which should be positively reserved, because of the savings in the execution of the important work, which he wanted to carry out with good faith, order and dignity. (GLAZIOU *apud* TERRA, *Op. cit.*, p. 137)

Regardless of this material, I still wish that Your Excellency would facilitate a personal interview with the Hon. Mr. Director of the D. Pedro 2nd Railway, which would have the purpose of obtaining some more pieces of old iron rejected (au début) by the engineers, and which are found in such large quantities in the vicinity of Campo Station. A small part of this unused waste would save the State a few contos de réis on the rustic buildings in Jardim do Campo da Aclamação, which must be made of cement, brick and iron. (GLAZIOU *apud* TERRA, *Op. cit.*, p. 136)

Glaziou was described as a "simple and dignified" human being, who planted palm trees with his own hands in the gardens he designed. He was an "intrepid herbalist", always seeking to discover and catalog new species and propagate his knowledge (Notice historique..., 1908, p.121). When he wasn't working, he was collecting plants for gardens in Rio de Janeiro and to send them to gardens in Europe (Idem, *ibid.*, p.122). His care for plants highlights his concern for nature and the collection of seeds made it possible to create plant seedlings, contributing to the maintenance of biodiversity.

Burle Marx

His concerns in the 1980s already reflected a deep concern for respect for Brazil's sustainability. (LEISTER, 2016, p.140)

Burle Marx was one of the most important landscape designers of the 20th century. His contribution to the qualification of several urban landscapes was extremely significant. From the 1960s onwards, he began to hold conferences and lectures that promoted the need for an ecological vision in landscape design. In a 1967 conference entitled "Garden and Ecology," Burle Marx stated that it was also part of the landscaper's social mission to spread "a feeling of appreciation and understanding of the values of nature through contact with the garden and the park" (BURLE MARX, *Op. cit.*, p. 43). At that time, the term "sustainable landscaping" was not yet in use - there was more talk of ecology or even ecogenesis, as proposed by the landscape architect Fernando Chacel, a student of Burle Marx.

[...] Burle Marx combined his skill in designing spaces with a sense of preserving natural ecosystems, which is of great importance in maintaining the ecological balance. Burle Marx's work was fundamental to the emergence of these concepts in landscape design. But the landscaper's thought went beyond his professional activities, as he participated in the establishment

of the ecological idea in the country. Over the years, the association of these issues with his design work has matured, constituting a path to be followed. (FARAH, 2010, p. 83)

The biography of Roberto Burle Marx is well known to anyone who works in the field of landscape architecture. Born in Brazil in 1909, it was during his frequent visits to the Dahlem Botanical Garden in Berlin that he discovered the richness of his country's native flora and decided to use Brazilian tropical species in his projects (Fig.1):

It was in the botanical garden that I discovered the flora in all its exuberance [...]. Then I thought: I don't see these plants in the gardens. Why don't we plant them in the gardens? (BURLE MARX, 1989)



Figure 1. Dahlem Botanical Garden in Berlin, with a great variety of tropical vegetation, including some cacti. It was there that Burle Marx discovered the beauty of Brazil's native flora.
Photo: Author, 2016.

Before Burle Marx, most gardens in Brazil followed European aesthetics, not only in their design but also in the choice of plants. The species used were not indigenous. Tropical plants were considered bushes of no importance. Burle Marx drew our attention to the richness of the native Brazilian flora - and designed gardens and parks with these plants - using textures, colors, nuances in the color green, flowering times, plant densities, shadows, and so on.

Unfortunately, in Brazil, exotic plants still predominate in gardens, while autochthonous plants are rarely used. These are seen as weeds by the people. And since few people use them because they are accustomed to seeing them in nature, they think they are unworthy of being in a garden. (BURLE MARX, 2004., p. 99)

His degree in Fine Arts contributed greatly to the artistic quality of his work and gave him a keen eye for the visual effects of his native flora. The compositions he created using masses of vegetation and the elaborate mosaic paving designs in his projects can only be explained and understood through his academic training, which gave his landscape design the rich expressive quality of a work of art.

Burle Marx, like Glaziou and Saint-Hilaire, would travel inland to search for and catalog new species; some were named after him.

Between the late 1930s and the 1940s, as the demand for his projects grew, Burle Marx became increasingly involved in obtaining Brazilian and tropical species that were little known or unusual for ornamental use.

At that time, he used three means: the collection of specimens in natural places, the acquisition of seedlings in the Botanical Garden of Rio de Janeiro, and the importation of tropical specimens grown in Germany. (DOURADO, 2009. p. 60)

Regarding his career, in 1934 Burle Marx began to work as Curator of Parks in Recife (Pernambuco, Brazil) and had the opportunity to apply his research on the Brazilian flora in every square he revitalized or created. During this period he designed the following squares: Casa Forte, Euclides da Cunha, Derby, República, the garden at Campo das Princesas, Entroncamento, Artur Oscar, Dezessete, and Pinto Damaso or Várzea (SÁ CARNEIRO *et al.*, 2007, p.173).

The Casa Forte Square, whose project was centered around a cactus garden - using cacti native to the *caatinga*, a semi-arid region in northeast Brazil - presents circular

blades of water with flowering *Victoria* spread throughout. The square is characterized by a large mass of trees surrounding the central area.

The square consists of two rectangular gardens and a square containing a wealth of plant species: Brazilian arboreal plants of the Amazon, Atlantic Forest and exotic plants. (PESSOA; SÁ CARNEIRO, 2003)

In Euclides da Cunha Square there was a central flower bed full of cacti - the reason for its name "*Cactário da Madalena*." In this work, he was extremely innovative in his appreciation of a collection of cacti with the creation of a public square. In some 19th-century Brazilian gardens, it was possible to find one or two species of cacti, but isolated from each other and surrounded by many other species. In this square, the landscape designer brought together many different species, creating a unique landscape.

Like the two previous examples, the other Burle Marx's projects in Recife in the 1930s consisted of native and tropical plants, such as cacti and many palm trees, to be enjoyed by ordinary people - so that they could learn and understand their value. Unfortunately, some of these projects are far from being as preserved as they should be. According to Ana Rita Sá Carneiro, a specialist in Burle Marx's work in Recife:

Most of these gardens or squares are in a state of regular conservation; some have undergone significant changes and are uncharacterized, and there are cases of total abandonment. (SÁ CARNEIRO *et al.*, *Op.cit.*, p. 174)

From a historical perspective, these gardens and squares are extremely important for understanding the importance of native vegetation in landscape design in Brazil.

In the 20th century, Burle Marx would defend the use of native species in the design of open spaces, would present an ecological proposal for the production of the garden, and would reveal a deep awareness of the need to preserve our forests: "We could see the perplexity, the lack of love, the immediacy and brutality of man in using nature as if it were inexhaustible. The devastation we observed was immense" (BURLE MARX, *Op. cit.*, p. 100). The landscaper also defended the planting of native vegetation in urban areas: "If in each city the elements of the regional landscape were brought into the urban environment, the cities would be

better integrated into their sites and the autochthonous flora, or at least part of it, would be perpetuated" (BURLE MARX, *Op. cit.*, p. 100).

In some of his projects, such as Sítio Santo Antônio da Bica, the landscaper's residence, Burle Marx reused pieces of granite from old buildings in the composition of walls that were true works of art, as Sima Eliovson highlights in her book *The Gardens of Roberto Burle Marx* (ELIOVSON, 1991. p. 84). There are walls that can be seen next to the path that leads to the building and, on the opposite side, next to a reflecting pool, creating a contemporary setting using elements from ancient buildings. In other projects, such as Fazenda Vargem Grande, in Areias (1984-1989), the artist worked with local stones, creating gardens at different levels with overlapping circular bases composed of these stones (Idem, *ibid.*, p. 201). Peter Walker also notes that:

[...] Some small Brazilian towns, too poor to pay cash for his park, plaza, or garden designs, give him their 'junk' - stones, plants, and architectural fragments from demolished buildings. These items are then recycled in his own garden or that of another client. The results, romantic or haunting, add another layer of meaning to surreal juxtaposition. (WALKER, 1994, p.65)

Another aspect that can be related to some projects by Burle Marx is equity. When a landscaping project is designed for the interior of a lot, its use is often restricted to certain people or social groups. But this does not happen when landscaping is designed for public spaces, defined as a place for everyone, which can be enjoyed by the entire society. In this case, it becomes a democratic and egalitarian project, like some of Burle Marx's works.

One example of it, not to mention all the squares and parks he designed, is Flamengo Park, situated on the shores of Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro, and planned in the 1950s by the architect Affonso Eduardo Reidy, with gardens and parkways designed by Burle Marx (ADAMS, 1991, p. 70). This project is dominated by an abstract play of shapes and lines that defines the grounds and flowerbeds. According to Murillo Marx, it "is the revelation of our magnificent flora, treated without chauvinism by the genius of one of our greatest artists" (MARX, 1980. p. 63). In fact, Flamengo Park, located along Guanabara Bay (on about four miles of waterfront), demonstrates the possibility of combining art and landscape, and the positive perception people have when using this space daily or seeing it for the first time.

As William Howard Adams mentioned, this area was planned not only to accommodate the city's growing traffic, but also "to provide space for new recreational and cultural facilities" (ADAMS, *Op. cit.*, p. 33). And most importantly, it was a democratic project aimed at all of the city's inhabitants.

The use of Portuguese stone also characterized Burle Marx's work, particularly in the paving patterns. There are several examples of this, mainly in urban areas: in the gardens of the Ministry of Education and Health building in Rio de Janeiro, in Praça dos Cristais in Brasília, in the landscaping of the Safra Bank in São Paulo, in the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, among many other notable examples of this application of Portuguese mosaic.

Everything considered, it is also interesting to mention his Sítio de Santo Antonio da Bica as a way to put his ecological issues into practice. Situated on a 365,000m² piece of land he acquired in 1949 in Barra Grande de Guaratiba, on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, the property includes a 17th century house and chapel, which Burle Marx restored.



Figure 2. The plants grown on the Burle Marx site, in Barra Grande de Guaratiba, in Rio de Janeiro. The different species and their varied shades of green. Photo: Author, 2018.

The site served as the landscape designer's laboratory and research center, where he cultivated mainly native tropical plant specimens collected during expeditions into the Brazilian rainforests in the company of botanists, landscape architects, and researchers. The place houses more than 3,500 species of plants in its gardens and greenhouse. It is one of the most important collections of tropical and subtropical plants in the world. Many of the species are rare even in Brazil (Fig. 2).

Year after year, a large number of autochthonous species were introduced to the estate, some of them unknown to science and later named after Burle Marx. [...] By the end of the 1960s, it was already home to the most representative collection of Brazilian ornamental plants, as well as to rare species from the tropics in general. (DOURADO, *Op. cit.*, p. 68)

According to Guilherme Mazza Dourado, the Sítio was a visionary project that aimed to change the sensibility of the Brazilian people by drawing attention to the national flora; however, it was also a way for Burle Marx to materialize an aesthetic renewal of landscape design practices (DOURADO, *Op. cit.*, p. 77).

Burle Marx eventually donated his property to the Brazilian federal government. His wish was that the donation be made while he was still alive, as he was concerned that if the place was opened to the public only after his death, there would be no staff with the skills and knowledge necessary to maintain the place as it should be. His wish was granted. In 1985, nine years before his death, Sítio Roberto Burle Marx was donated to the Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (Iphan) - Ministério da Cultura, to house a School of Landscape Architecture, Botany and Art, and was opened to the public. By then, a well-trained team was in place to take care of one of Burle Marx's most important legacies. He also passed on to the team his passion for nature and his desire to appreciate and preserve the lush Brazilian flora.

Conclusion

It is interesting to consider what Glaziou and Burle Marx had in common. Both of them followed in the footsteps of the French naturalist Saint-Hilaire and traveled to various places in Brazil in search of seeds and new plant species. Both have species identified with their names due to this search and cataloging activity. Both used native species in their designs for parks, squares and gardens - Glaziou mixing them with exotic species, Burle Marx with tropical species from other regions. Both were concerned with preserving biodiversity, planting native species and

conserving forested areas. Both were landscapers and left their mark on the Brazilian landscape. They were precursors and disseminators of more sustainable landscaping, of a more ecological vision of the landscape, of a greater concern for the environment and the preservation of plant species.

Nowadays, when we think about sustainable landscaping there are perhaps more restrictions or more rules than in Glaziou and Burle Marx's time. For example, according to sustainable landscaping, it is necessary to work with native species not from a country, but from a region (CARDIM, 2022) - which increases the specificity of the species and restricts the possibilities of choice in favor of local biodiversity.

But it is important to remember, as Alfredo Bosi (2009) emphasizes, that every artist is a man of his time. And both of them by then were very important and innovative, presenting an environmental concern, a concern with the perpetuation of biodiversity, a concern with the recovery and preservation of native flora and often chose materials that favored soil permeability. In this sense, they were men of their time with a vision of the future based on a very in-depth vision of the landscape and nature itself.

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