

## **Planeamiento sectorial: recursos hídricos, espacio rural y fronteras. 1ª ed., diciembre 2018**

30. Natural and semi-natural habitats in the design of urban open spaces – an approach to the challenges of contemporary cities (CATARINA ARCHER DE CARVALHO, RUTE SOUSA MATOS, MARIA DA CONCEIÇÃO CASTRO y CARLOS PINTO-GOMES)

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### **30 Natural and semi-natural habitats in the design of urban open spaces – an approach to the challenges of contemporary cities**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The introduction of potential vegetation in the urban space is a fundamental feature both in the cities' identity and in the intensification of ecological efficiency. Its use, as part of a landscape structure in the urban space, is supported by contemporary cities' strategy with the following objectives: promote wellbeing, be sustainable, be resilient and adaptive facing future uncertainty, namely regarding climate change.

Considering the contemporary city sustainable planning and recent studies on urban spaces, ecological systems and their aesthetical values, the aim of this essay is the inclusion of natural and semi-natural habitats of Community Interest (Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC), based on potential natural vegetation assessment, in innovative design approach to the city's open spaces. It is defined by the ecological systems, working with the site ecological conditions, aiming at improving the efficiency of multifunctional land uses (production, protection and leisure) and increasing biodiversity. This design approach simultaneously ensures the articulation of these spaces with urban interfaces bringing the natural processes near to the «urbanscape». The connection with nature is also promoted, improving the wished sense of identity and belonging. The use of this methodology in the design of a landscape infrastructure to the city of Évora, that assures the articulation with its open spaces and the connection between them and the countryside, had an experimental character with development of a pilot project, which implied the introduction of several non-generalizable, site-specific variables.

**Keywords:** Biodiversity; Potential Natural Vegetation; Natural Habitats; Cities identity; landscape and urban design; sustainability;