

Ornamental Flower Meadows vs Traditional Lawns in Mediterranean Climate: general public preferences and perception

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Abstract.

In Portugal lawns are used everywhere, even in small places where they are just to be seen. This creates a problem because in a Mediterranean climate turf-grass has to be watered to stay green. But people's preferences seem to influence the design of green spaces using lawns everywhere, not considering the fact that lawns are more expensive economically and ecologically than other alternatives as ornamental flower meadows

Over the last years an effort has been made to use alternatives to turf-grass, environmentally more sustainable, as ornamental flower meadows, trying to apply their ecological and aesthetic qualities and to influence the general public.

In this work we intend to test these ideas, trying to get people's preferences and perception of this different herbaceous vegetation cover. To do this, three different groups of people: landscape architects, landscape managers, and general public - will be asked about their perception and preference concerning different types of herbaceous vegetation cover. The method used is photographs with different sceneries using landscapes with different types of herbaceous vegetation cover that will be shown to the groups. The answers will be separated by gender and age groups. The different variables studied are the colour (one colour or multi-colour), the flowers (presence or absence), the management techniques, and the biodiversity.

In this study we attempt to explore current attitudes towards the use of both lawns and ornamental flower meadows in public urban green spaces. The importance of biodiversity and sustainability in people's preference and perception will be discussed.

Methods

A comparative research strategy is developed in this study, based on the idea that the use of images of herbaceous vegetation cover would allow the identification on public perception and preferences of a more natural or formal urban green spaces. This required the development of a special survey method, sample and site selection strategy (Özgüner, 2001).

The method consists on surveys sent by e-mail to people (landscape architects, landscape managers, and general public) with different gender and age groups. The survey has an initial explanation about our goal followed by three phases:

- in the first phase four figures (figures 1 to 4) will be shown, one per page, and people will be asked to write a word to describe it.

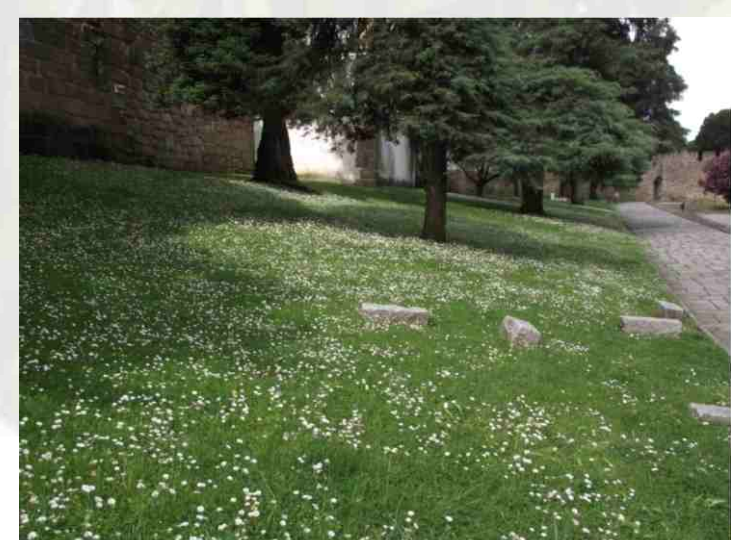


Figure 1. Lawn with daisies.



Figure 2. Spontaneous meadow.



Figure 3. Ornamental flower meadow.



Figure 4. Traditional lawn.

- in the second phase four groups of numbered figures (figures 5 to 8) will be presented in the same page and people will be asked about their preferences concerning colour, flowers, diversity, organization and sustainability.



Figure 5. Traditional lawn.



Figure 6. Ornamental flower meadow.



Figure 7. Spontaneous meadow.



Figure 8. Lawn with daisies.

- in the third phase two groups of figures (figures 9 to 10) will appear together and people will be asked to choose one of the pictures knowing that they have been collect during summer, in Alentejo region (south of Portugal), were there is a Mediterranean climate.



Figure 9. Brown meadow.



Figure 10. Green lawn.

The population sample of the survey consists of 104 persons.

Conclusions

The perception showed in this survey confirms that the interest in traditional lawns comes from the green and the fresh sensation that they provide in a hot dry Mediterranean summer.

People seem to prefer herbaceous vegetation cover with flowers to traditional lawns. However, traditional lawns are viewed as more organized. In terms of colour, flowers, diversity, and sustainability people identify the meadows with flowers as their preference, without distinguishing the ornamental flower meadow from the spontaneous meadow. However, the spontaneous meadow was perceived as a rural situation. We don't know if people would accept this image in urban context. It is a theme to explore in a future work.

The preference for a brown meadow or a green lawn shows that people prefer the green lawns, probably because they are not completely informed about the costs of keeping a green lawn in the summer in Mediterranean climate. This is an issue that has to be worked with the landscape architects, the landscape managers and the general public in order to create more sustainable urban landscapes and increase the urban quality of life.

Acknowledgments

We thank the University of Évora, the Institute of Agricultural and Environmental Mediterranean Sciences (ICAAM), and the Institute for Advanced Studies and Research (IIFA) - for the PhD Grant from the "Bento de Jesus Caraça" Program.

References

Özgüner, H. & Kendle, A. D. (2006). Public attitudes towards naturalistic versus designed landscapes in the city of Sheffield (UK) In *Landscape and Urban Planning* 74:139-157.

Results

The surveys population sample consists in both genders as described in table 1.

Table 1: Survey's population sample (in percentage).

Age groups	Gender	
	Feminine	Masculine
< 30	10	10
30-60	60	16
> 60	3	2
Total	72	28

The results obtained in the survey's first phase were catalogued and grouped. For figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 the survey participants referred 60, 52, 52, and 59 different words. The result is presented in figure 11.

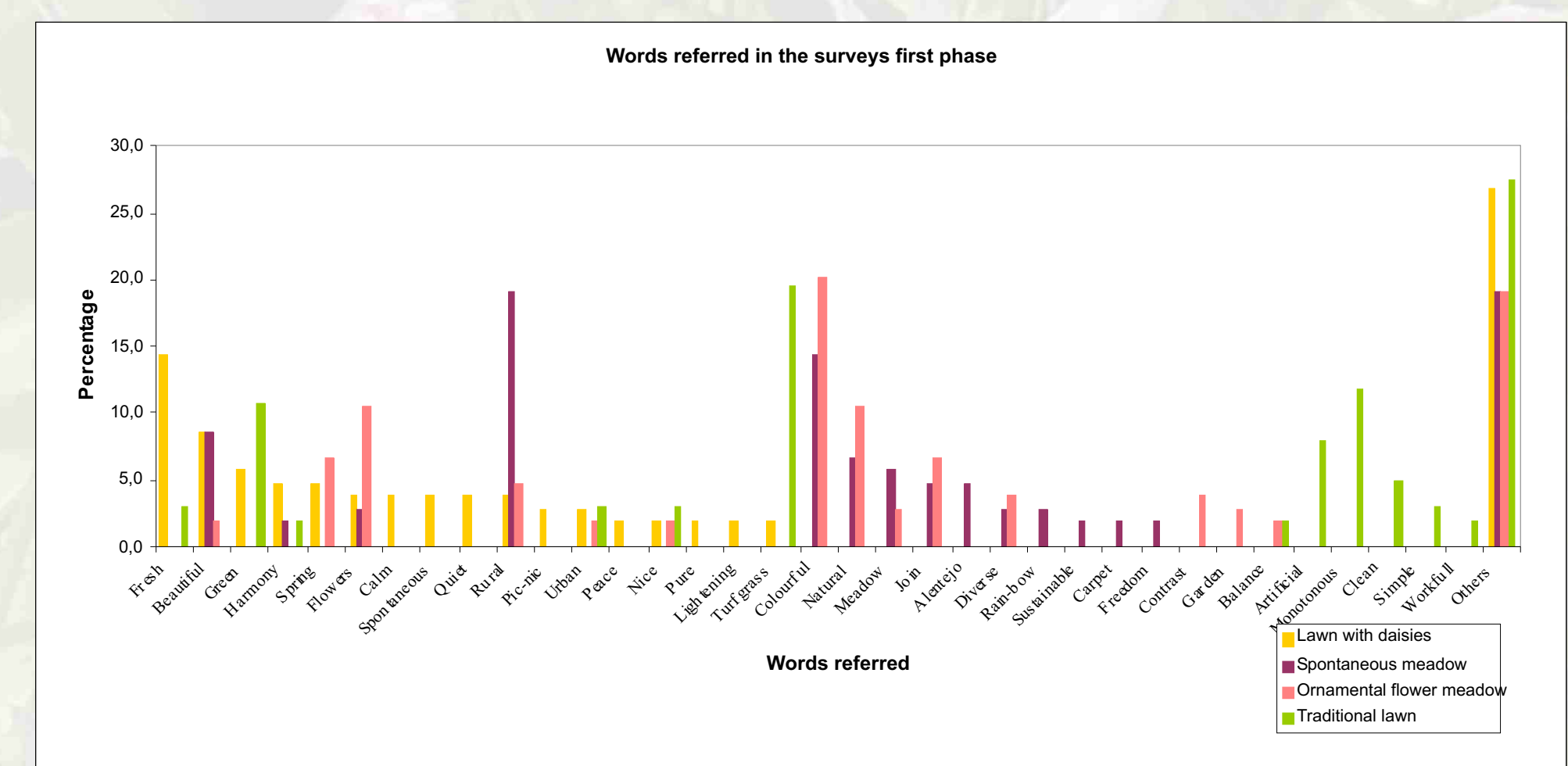
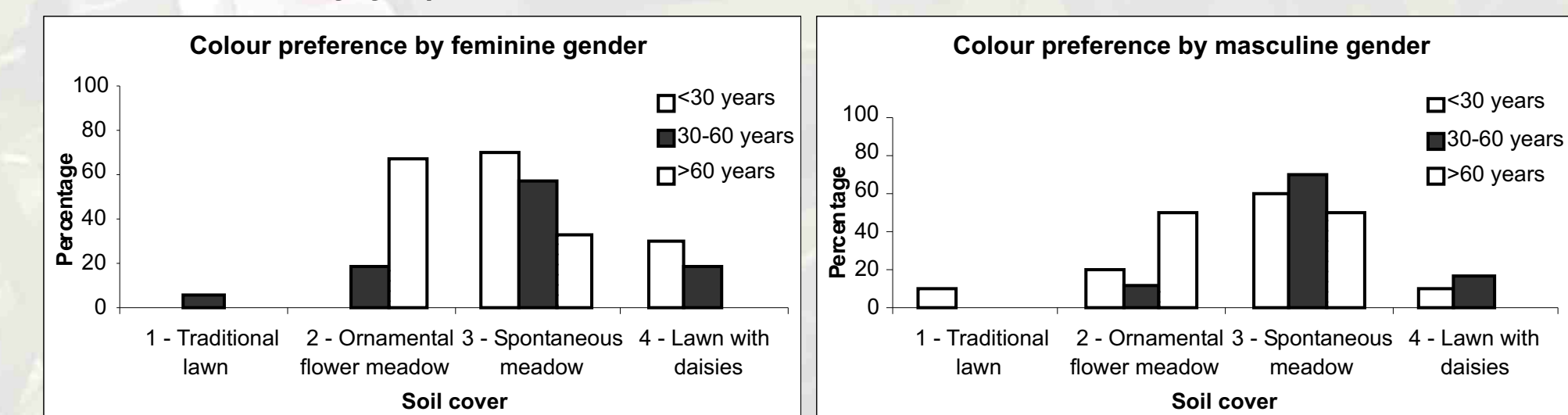
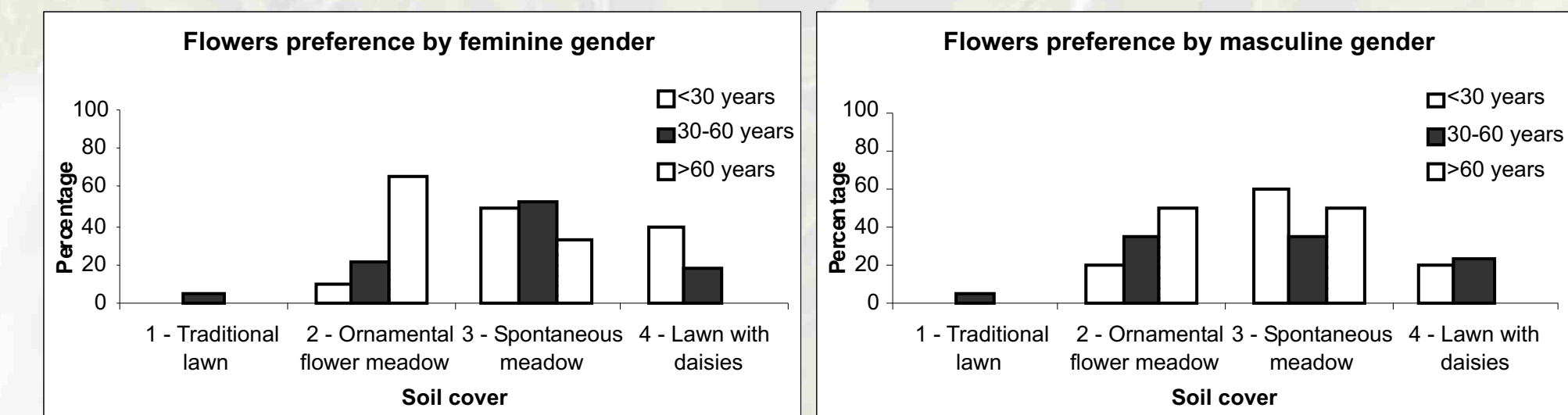


Figure 11. Words referred in the surveys first phase (in percentage).

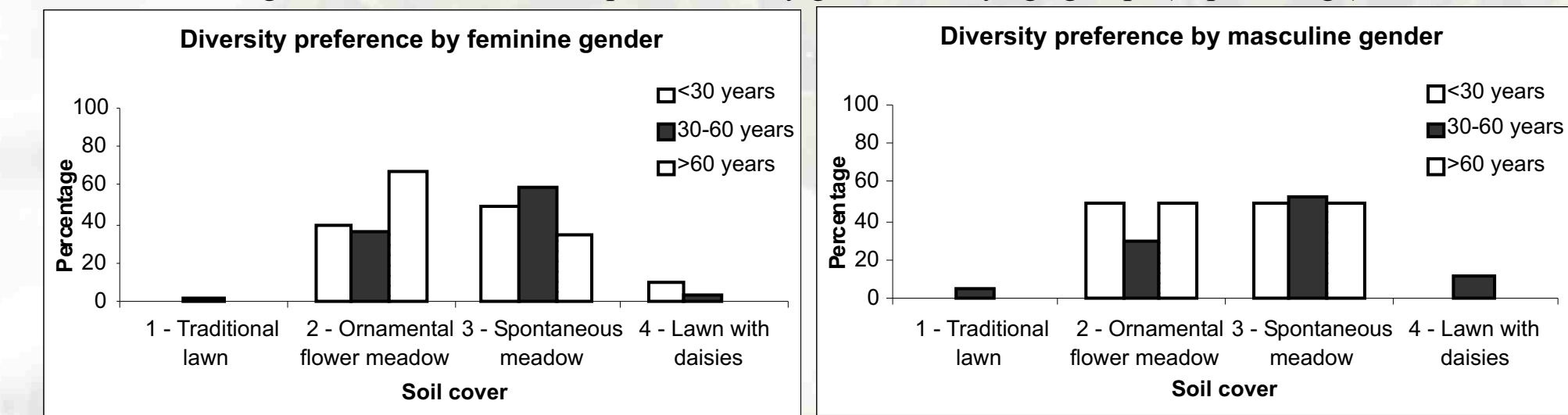
The results obtained in the survey's second phase were separated by gender and age groups. The results are presented in the following graphics.



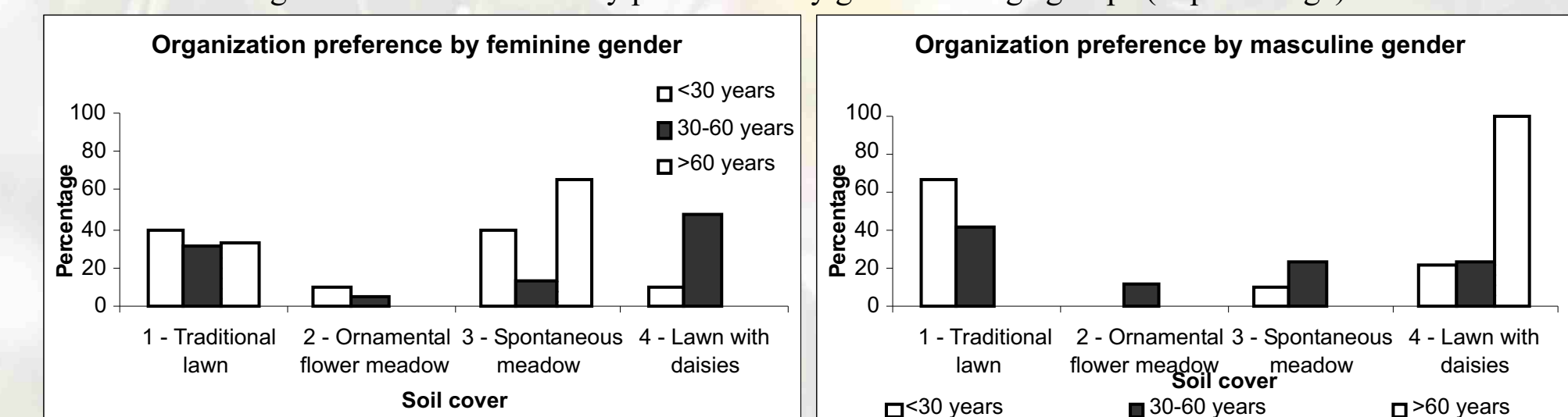
Figures 12 and 13. Colour preferences by gender and age groups (in percentage).



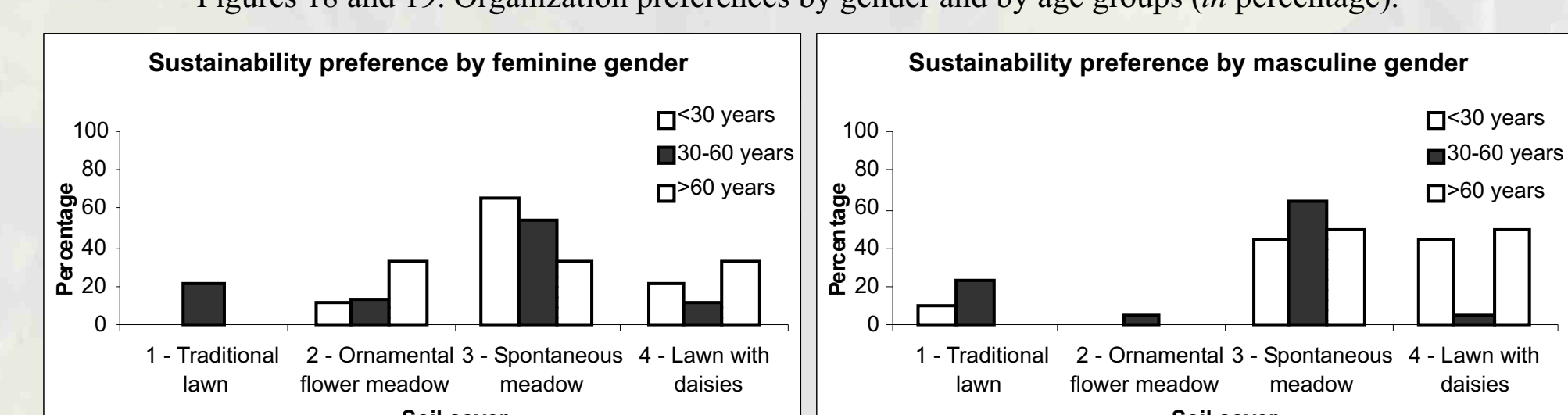
Figures 14 and 15. Flowers preferences by gender and by age groups (in percentage).



Figures 16 and 17. Diversity preferences by gender and age groups (in percentage).

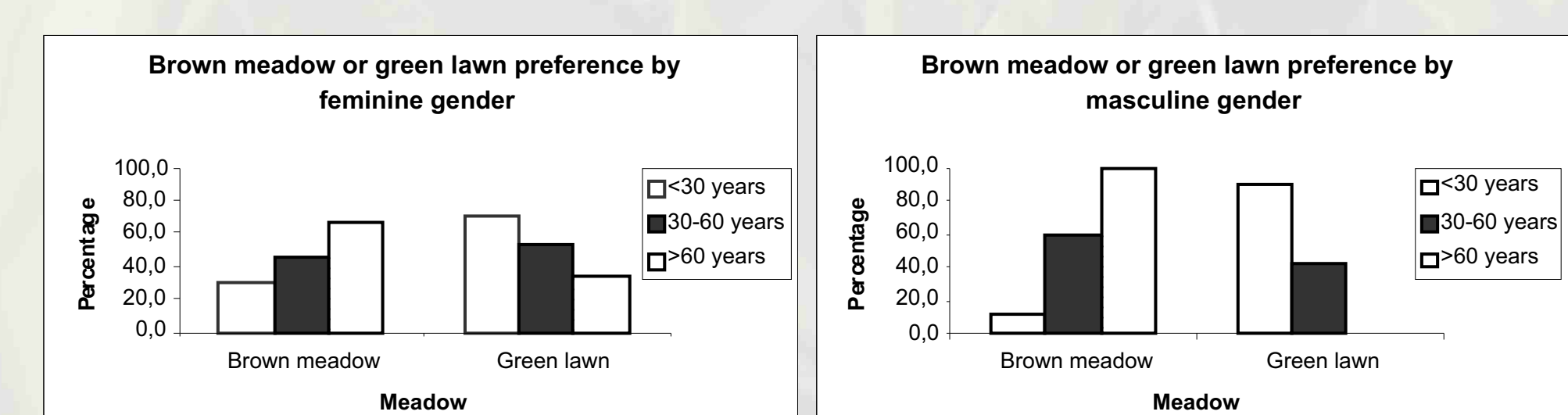


Figures 18 and 19. Organization preferences by gender and by age groups (in percentage).



Figures 20 and 21. Sustainability preferences by gender and age groups (in percentage).

The results obtained in the survey third phase were separated by gender and age groups. The results are presented in the following graphics.



Figures 22 and 23. Brown meadow or green lawn preferences by gender and age groups (in percentage).