THE TOURIST POTENTIAL OF THE ROAD AFFORESTATION OF MARINGÁ/PR FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TOURISTS

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the influence of urban road afforestation as a touristic attraction factor. The city of Maringá – Paraná state, Brazil – was chosen for its attributes such as the street afforestation, associated to the fact that this city is a “corridor” for many crossing tourists going to Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil), Argentina and Paraguay. The theoretic/methodological referential is based on a field and exploratory research, proposing to investigate the reality about a complex activity of this “green” potential. For that purpose, we interviewed 450 tourists hosted in four major hotels in downtown Maringá. The structure and semi-structured questions allowed to identify the social-economic profile of the participants, as well as to obtain quantitative and qualitative data about their perception of road trees in Maringá. The results allowed to observe that for 90% of the tourists interviewed, road afforestation in Maringá is considered an attractiveness to tourist. Based on this significant percentage, it is recommended the establishment of a public policy to cooperate with the tourism industry in Maringá/PR.

Keywords: Road afforestation; Urban infrastructure; Tourism; Maringá/PR

O POTENCIAL TURÍSTICO DA ARBORIZAÇÃO VIÁRIA DE MARINGÁ/PR SOB A ÓTICA DOS TURISTAS

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RESUMO

A presente pesquisa trata de conhecer a influência da arborização viária na cidade, componente da infraestrutura urbana, enquanto fator de atração turística. Como meio para o desenvolvimento da mesma, a cidade de Maringá/PR foi escolhida pelos seus atributos no que diz respeito à arborização de acompanhamento viário, associado ao fato de ser essa cidade “corredor” de passagem para turistas que se dirigem a Foz do Iguaçu, Argentina e Paraguai. O referencial teórico-metodológico está centrado em pesquisa de campo e de caráter exploratório, propondo-se investigar a realidade de uma atividade complexa do potencial desse “verde”. A inclusão sobre o potencial turístico das árvores viárias foi realizada através da aplicação de um formulário de entrevista junto à 450 turistas hospedados nos quatro maiores hotéis centrais de Maringá. As questões estruturadas e semiestruturadas permitiram identificar o perfil socioeconômico dos atores assim como obter dados qualitativos e quantitativos sobre a percepção dos mesmos em relação às árvores viárias maringaenses. Por meio das entrevistas constatou-se que, para 90% dos turistas entrevistados, a arborização viária de Maringá pode ser considerada um atrativo turístico da cidade. A partir desse significativo percentual, recomenda-se o estabelecimento de políticas públicas que possam vir a colaborar com o incremento do turismo em Maringá/PR.

Palavras-chave: Arborização viária; Infraestrutura urbana; Turismo; Maringá/PR.

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Cities thrive in a busy environment, with noise and environmental pollution, causing physical and mental burden to their citizens. Urban spaces containing green area can mitigate air and noise pollution, improving quality of life for citizens (LOMBARDO, 1990; CAVALHEIRO, 1991); intercept sunlight; exert effect on air humidity; filter elements and retain particulates suspended in the atmosphere, as well as impact physical and mental health of humans (HEISLER, 1974; LAPOIX, 1979; BERNATZKY, 1980).

Thus, it is questioned why urban green area, which generates benefits to the population and attract tourists, does not justify appropriate investments. What problems lead to the underuse of these spaces? What are the main factors taken into account by users whether dwelling in the place and/or visiting it? According to Ornstein et al. (1994, p. 29), “when mapping free areas of a city, it is usual to note that they occupy a larger area than the number of existing buildings.” In this context, the positive potential of the local vegetation, whether natural or worked landscaped, becomes a considerable alternative to attract tourists. Understanding the relationship between humans and trees, based on the landscape function, taking into account conflicts with urban infrastructure and the role it plays in the context of cities, requires the understanding of the significance and relevance of trees in urban landscape. The magnetism of the tree lies in its functions, benefits, symbolism and significance that have been part of human life since its inception.

Currently, characterized by a predominantly urban world population, the growing tourism industry and the increasing concern with the environmental issues, afforestation of urban areas can be equated with quality life and tourism potential. In this sense, the municipality of Maringá – Paraná state, Brazil – was chosen for this study. Privileged for having an original urban planning based on the urbanistic model of garden cities, attributes of worked landscape (parks, squares and road afforestation) which earns the city the codename “green-city”. Maringá stands out in the national scenario as one of the cities with the highest per capita green area – 27 m² (SAMPAIO, 2006). Thus, this research aims to investigate the tourist potential of road afforestation in Maringá city.

According to Rodrigues (2001, p. 72), “landscape is a noted tourist resort, revealing some objects and concealing others, through the observer's perspective, when it is attempted to charm or seduce.” Based on this assumption, the city of Maringá corroborates its codename “green-city” with its attributes of worked landscape represented by parks, squares and road afforestation that can result in an efficient alternative for attracting tourists. However, having high rates for the city’s features is not enough. It is crucial to know their potential and direct them in a systematic and organized way. It is, therefore, necessary to know the tourists’ perception of a green area in order to figure out this interaction between green area and tourists. Thus, the main objective of this research was to analyze the influence of road afforestation as a potential for tourist attractiveness in the city of Maringá – Paraná state, Brazil. Furthermore, it was possible to characterize the profile, satisfaction level of visitors about road afforestation in Maringá and to identify its strengths and weaknesses from visitor’s perspective.

This exploratory research is justified by a general and deeper view of the phenomenon, favoring a more accurate formulation of problems and hypotheses for future studies.

To obtain answers to the central questions of the research, the following points are considered:

- The concept of “tourist attractiveness” is complex, given that attractiveness of certain
elements significantly varies from one tourist to another;

- Attractiveness is related to reasons for a tourist to travel and to the evaluation that they make of the elements;

- Tourist attractiveness has, in general terms, higher significance when the element has greater differential characteristic.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

For this research, it is necessary to primarily understand the significance of trees to humans since ancient times. For that purpose, it is proposed to analyze historical documents, where we can see different values, significances and symbolism attributed to trees by different cultures and contexts. Furthermore, it is a challenge to analyze documents from literature, music and painting, since the sensitive vision of the authors may collaborate with subjective aspects, but no less important about trees.

From this reflective process, we move on to the next step, which is the collection of primary data. Therefore, by formulating the problem-question – Can road afforestation in Maringá exert influence on attractiveness to tourists? – it becomes clear the need to hear tourists who come to Maringá, at the risk of disqualifying all the work, otherwise. Thus, the present research is focused on the potential component, i.e., tourists to Maringá city.

To obtain qualitative data, we used interview techniques as a strategy to obtain tourists’ opinions. For that purpose, we conducted a survey consisting of structured and semi-structured questions applied by the researcher, who, in addition to obtaining quantitative and qualitative data, contributed to a more detailed insight on tourists’ perception. In this phase, interviews were performed every day (Monday to Sunday) during two periods (morning and afternoon) in the month of March, 2010, to 450 guests of four major hotels in the downtown area of Maringá city –Bristol Hotel, Golden Ingá, Hotel Elo and Hotel Deville. The reason for choosing these hotels was not just because of their size or number of rooms that rank them as the largest hotels in the area, but also due to the fact that these hotels have a higher number of tourists and are similarly ranked (four to five stars). Moreover, we decided to conduct the survey in March, because in this month, the city does not host great events or festivals that could induce the predominance of the reason for a visit to city, and therefore, determining a tourist’s profile.

At Elo and Golden Ingá hotels, we interviewed 100 guests in each, while at Deville and Bristol, we decided to interview 125 guests in each, because these hotels had a greater number of reservations and, therefore, guests during the survey period.

We adopted the criteria to interview guests 18 years old plus, as long as they were capable of answering the questions in the form. The guests were approached in the hotel lobby while they were socializing, reading or waiting for taxi.

The sample used in this survey was not absolute probability judgment, i.e., the sample in which the researcher or interviewer considers more adequate to obtain answers to the questions applied (MATTAR, 1997; MARCONI; LAKATOS, 2002).

The interview form (Figure 1) comprises questions about the socio-economic profile and perception of the tourists. The questions were about sex, place of origin, schooling, reason for the trip and opinion about road afforestation in Maringá and its tourist potential. The use of yes-no and multiple choice questions was necessary to prevent gaps that might interfere in the results.

Figure 1. Interview form used among tourists
HOTEL: ______________________________ FILE N°.:______

DATE: ___/___/___

PERIOD: [ ] Morning [ ] Afternoon

TOURIST IDENTIFICATION

Sex: [ ] Male [ ] Female
Place of origin:_________ State:_________ Country:_________
Schooling
[ ] Middle school [ ] High school [ ] College degree
[ ] High school unfinished [ ] College unfinished [ ] Post- graduation

TRIP CHARACTERISTICS

Reason for the trip
[ ] Business [ ] Visit to relatives and friends
[ ] Events [ ] Health
[ ] Tourism [ ] Study

OPINION ABOUT ROAD AFFORESTATION OF MARINGÁ

Regarding road afforestation in Maringá city, do you consider it as tourist attractiveness?
[ ] Yes [ ] No

On a scale from 1 to 5, how much does road afforestation in Maringá appeal to you?
[ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5

After data collection, all information was organized and afterwards, the data were analyzed. All information obtained was tabulated and categorized and the yes-no questions of the structured interview were coded and electronically tabulated in the statistical program Excel, characterizing, therefore, the quantitative phase of the research.

The answers to open questions were analyzed quantitatively. In this phase, we tried to relate the contents of the answers to the reference basis adopted for the current research, which was the approach on the importance of green area for attracting tourists.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reflections over the significance of trees for humans, based on the symbolism of trees since ancient times under the several insights and perceptions allow to affirm that green area has great importance to people. Regardless of the culture, the fact is that trees have sustained magnetism to all until present days. Nowadays, with the world population predominantly urban, trees still remain surrounded by symbolism and significance, mainly in millennial cultures, however, a series of functions are attributed to trees. From urban infrastructure to landscaping, trees, in the current urban concept, play several roles such as ecologic, landscaping and physiologic capable of turning an urban environment more pleasant and attractive. The accelerated, in many cases disorganized, urbanistic process leads to cities with more and more reduced spaces for green area. Thus, the main everyday activities such as living, working, commuting and

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enjoyment are performed in a highly artificial and disturbing environment from an environmental perspective. The desired quality of life leads cities that offer green areas, such as parks, squares or road afforestation to become most wanted places for living or visiting.

The search for urban environments with more “natural” features along with the growth of the tourism industry makes green area in cities an element of attractiveness.

The “green” urban tourism corroborates current demand and promotes improvements to the environment where they are inserted, pleasing both residents and visitors alike. In this context, Maringá city, a.k.a., “green-city”, because of its peculiar attributes regarding its worked landscape demonstrated in parks, squares, and mainly, road afforestation, was chosen to investigate the main question of this research:

**Can road afforestation in Maringá city be considered attractiveness to tourists?**

Concerning the tourists’ socio-economic profile, of the 450 interviewed in this study, 356 are male and 94, female, representing respectively 79% and 21% of the total. As for their schooling, 13% had middle school, 6% middle school unfinished, 53% had a college degree and 28% had post-graduation (Figure 2). These results allow to affirm that, in the sampling context, the percentage of tourists with college degree is highly significant (53%). No less important, it is highlighted the number of tourist with post-graduation, mainly in a country where the number of post-graduation is insignificant in a universe of people that have a college degree.

Most participants (98.5%) in the survey were of Brazilian origin. Among the foreigners, seven tourists from seven different countries were identified: Chile, Peru, France, Italy, Portugal and Singapore. Foreign tourists accounted for 1.5% of the participants.

The interviews showed that Maringá city received tourists from most regions of Brazil, with at least one city representing each. Southern Region: Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Paraná, Southeastern Region: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais; Central-Western Region: Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás and Federal District, Northern Region: Rondônia, Tocantins, Pará and Amazonas and Northeastern Region: Rio Grande do Norte, Pernambuco, Ceará, Paraíba and Bahia (Figure 3). There was a predominance of tourists from Paraná state with 59% of respondents.

**Figure 2. Education levels of interviewed tourists.**

**Figure 3. Number of Brazilian tourists by state**

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Therefore, the percentage of tourists from the Northern, Northeastern, Central-Western, Southern and Southeastern Brazilian regions corresponded to 1.3%, 2.7%, 3.1%, 65.6% and 25.8%, respectively.

Figure 4. Origin of tourists (Brazilian regions and foreign countries)

A survey conducted in 2006 by the Department of Statistics of the State Secretariat of Tourism of Paraná state and results released by the State Government of Paraná delineated the profile of the tourists to Maringá city.

According to the survey, 51.3% of respondents said they visit Maringá on business. This result corroborates the condition of the city as the business center in the Northwest of the state (SETU, 2007). This current survey reinforces the predominance of business trips (77% of respondents) to Maringá.

The other reasons for trips include events 11%; tourism 5%, study matters 4%, visits to relatives and friends 2% and 1% of the respondents stated that they come to the city for health reasons (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Reason to travel

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After delineating the profile of tourists visiting Maringá, we posed the main question concerning the survey: Can road afforestation in Maringá be considered attractiveness to tourism? Overall, the answers were rather positive.

Ninety percent of the 450 tourists interviewed answered “yes”. They consider that road afforestation in Maringá can be tourist attractiveness of the city and only 10%, think otherwise. Forty-five respondents that gave a negative answer justified it in the following ways: despite being beautiful and essential to the urban context, they should only be considered as elements that constitute the urban feature, with no purpose of tourism. The open question – What do you think of road afforestation in Maringá/PR? – allowed us to know, from the tourists’ perspectives, a diversity of viewpoints and attributes concerning urban trees planted around the city.

Due to the subjectivity and similarities of qualities given, we opted to associate the adjectives considered similar (Table 1).

Table 1. Perception of road afforestation in Maringá/PR and its respective percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPTS ABOUT ROAD AFFORESTATION IN MARINGÁ/PR</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE (%) OF RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GREAT (Marvelous; excellent; pretty; beautiful; very beautiful; spectacular; essential; rather tropical; fantastic; modern; unbelievable; sensational; perfect; impressing; pleasant – synonym to life quality)</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOD (Good; satisfactory)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGULAR (Indifferent; regular)</td>
<td>0,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAD (excessive)</td>
<td>0,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTIVENESS OF MARINGÁ (strong aspect of the city; differential of the city; attractiveness of the city; attractive; tourist potential)</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEEDS MAINTENANCE</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In general, we found that 92% of the concepts presented by respondents concerning road afforestation in Maringá are very positive. The concepts considered negative were: “needs maintenance” (7%), “regular” (0.7%) and “bad” (0.3%). We emphasize that these concepts are part of 10% of respondents who do not consider road afforestation attractiveness for tourist in Maringá.

The concepts classified as “great” and “exemplary” were accompanied by statements like: “If I could I would live in Maringá city mainly because of the urban afforestation”, “green area is the best Maringá city has to offer”, “I take off in São Paulo city and when I land in Maringá, I breathe fresh air”, “from the view of the plane, it looks like a city in the middle of the forest”, “it’s amazing how a city of the size of Maringá combines urban development and afforestation”, “I travel to Brazil from north to south because of my profession, and I can say that Maringá is the most beautiful city that I know and it’s mainly due to road afforestation in the city”.

These statements were made by Brazilians, who are presumably used to seeing, even on television, tropical landscapes. However, the statements of foreign tourists were even more emphatic about afforestation in Maringá, mainly road afforestation, classifying it as lush and attractive. These concepts assigned by tourists allowed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the urban afforestation in Maringá.

The last question of the interview form aims to evaluate how much road afforestation attracts the respondent. Therefore, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 – nothing; 2 – little; 3 – average; 4 – much; 5 – very much), the following results were obtained (Table 2):

![Table 2. Range of attractiveness of road afforestation in Maringá, PR for tourists.](attachment:image)

The opinion of the tourists interviewed (Table 2) allows to affirm that road afforestation in Maringá is a significant element of attractiveness for those who come to the city, regardless of the reason for the travel. Results in the Table 2 show that 91% of respondents said that urban afforestation in Maringá attracts them at intensity between “much” and “very much”.

The 450 respondents from the different regions of Brazil and foreign countries provided, through the interviews, insights of a new perception of urban afforestation in Maringá. Most respondents who stated that afforestation can be considered attractiveness to tourists, corroborated the tourist potential of afforestation in urban areas. The intensity of the

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attractiveness that road afforestation in Maringá has on tourists reaffirms the symbolist vision, the modern relationship between humans and trees, and the importance of this symbiosis in the urban environment. Residents’ perception of road afforestation in Maringá may not show as much contemplation and attractiveness as it does for tourists, since urban afforestation is part of the everyday landscape in Maringá and local residents are aware of problems related to urban trees. However, residents are also able to admire and contemplate road afforestation, however at less intensity due to the daily contact with it. Tourists’ viewpoints on road afforestation in Maringá is based on the duration of time they stay in the city, which induces a predominantly aesthetic perception of these trees and prevents tourists from experiencing the main problems that compromise the trees’ health. Despite the precarious survival conditions of many urban trees, the survey allowed to reaffirm that the marketing codenamed for Maringá as “green-city” still predominates.

Although road afforestation in Maringá is considered tourist attractiveness for 90% of the tourists interviewed, it is not the aim to use this feature to turn it into the main reason for tourists to visit the city. It is hoped that the city’s afforestation feature, which promotes Maringá as one of the greenest cities in Brazil, become an important element that the city offers to its tourists.

CONCLUSION

From a mythic element wrapped in symbolism and significance to an important integrator of urban environment, it is a fact that afforestation attractiveness transcends time and presents itself in the most diverse social and cultural contexts. In urban areas, there is the triad urban life/tourism/afforestation as an idea that, if systematized and contemplated by urban planning, it can become an instrument for improving life quality, since urban tourism is a sector that requires investment in urban and tourism infrastructure keeping urban landscape as its main attractiveness. In addition to revitalizing urban areas, this type of tourism improves the image of the city and thus attracts more visitors. Trees in this context, while urban tool and major landscape element, start to draw more attention from governments and entrepreneurs in the sector and a greater appreciation from residents. Therefore, due to the several functions and benefits of road afforestation, it is necessary to change the idea that afforestation is just the planting of trees in the city. Afforesting should be the subject of studies and city planning and therefore, contemplated in urbanistic projects.

Even though Maringá is a relatively new city, average size and a regional and national reference due to its attributes of road afforestation, life quality, business opportunities and events, it shows potential to consolidate the triad urban life/tourism/afforestation. Information from Maringá Convention and Visitors Bureau (MRCVB, 2010) allows to affirm that the city is on the right path for strengthening and expanding urban tourism aiming to offer tourists a variety of attractions. This development of urban tourism in Maringá is contemplated by a landscape characterized by a profusion of trees planted along sidewalks, streets, avenues and medians, which reinforce the codename “green-city” that the city earned along the years and illustrates its post cards. Therefore, the role of road afforestation in

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Maringá may no longer be part only of the urban scenario, but also integrate the number of attractiveness for tourists that the city has to offer. For that purpose, it is necessary to hear tourists’ viewpoints about afforestation in Maringá.

The interviews carried out during the month of March 2010 with 450 guests of four major hotels of downtown area of the city (Bristol Hotel, Golden Ingá, Hotel Elo and Hotel Deville) allowed to analyze the importance of road afforestation as an attractive factor for tourism in Maringá. In addition, the results of the survey allowed to characterize the profile, demand expectation and satisfaction level of tourists regarding road afforestation as an attraction for tourists, as well as, to identify its strong and weak points from the tourists’ perspective. The results allow to affirm that road afforestation in Maringá city exerts attractive influence on tourists. To corroborate that, 90% of respondents state that road afforestation may be considered an attraction to tourists. However, the aesthetic perspective and fleeting permanence in the city does not allow tourists to observe the effects to the quality of part of urban trees in Maringá. Studies show a great incidence of pathogens (termites, pests, diseases); inadequate pruning; irregular planting and absence of replanting, mainly in the central area of the city where the major hotels are located. Slogans promoting the image of Maringá disseminated by the municipal government does not represent the actual condition of the afforestation in the city. The reality marked by contradiction between health and aesthetic of road afforestation in Maringá has not received enough attention from the municipal government. Despite the interest to promote the label “green-city” in Brazil and showing off post cards highlighting road afforestation, to date, there are not effective actions towards a recovery and improvement of the historic, cultural and environmental asset of Maringá that may ultimately be solidified as a tourist asset of the city.

It is hoped that based on the current study, road afforestation in Maringá be contemplated by municipal planning and management through measures aimed at mitigating issues that compromise the city’s afforestation. Moreover, it is necessary to elaborate a master plan for road afforestation to develop methods and actions to better manage and preserve urban trees. An inventory of street trees allows to make plans and guidelines for planning, producing, implementing, conserving and managing the trees.

Therefore, the current study allows to identify the tourist potential of road afforestation in Maringá city under the perspective of those who visit the city and to create opportunity for solidify the image of city as “green-city” in the national scenario and confer the city a competitive position in the urban tourism sector.

In addition to the responsibility placed on the municipal government to care for the city’s assets, the population should be educated, through environmental educational campaigns, about inadequate pruning and other damages caused to trees in order to integrate the population as a stakeholder in the process to ensure quality for urban trees.

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