

RECREATING (N)A TERRA IN THE MIDST OF URBAN "VOIDS": THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY GARDENS IN THE SOUTHEAST REGION OF TERESINA



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ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand the motivations for the implementation of the community garden project in the Itararé neighborhood, located in the southeast region of the capital Teresina, as well as the initial reverberations after the "launch of the project" in 1987, the focus of this research. The sources used include official documents, newspapers and interviews, in an attempt to achieve a broader view of this historical process. Theoretically and methodologically, the article interlocutes with the research of Verena Alberti (2005) and Paul Thompson (1998) on Oral History, and Michael Pollak (1989), with their writings and contribution on memory, in addition to dialoguing with studies that discuss the history of the Dirceu Arcoverde Housing Complex, based on the research of Cláudia Fontineles and Marcelo de Sousa Neto (2017), on the city, with Henri Lefebvre (2001), the countryside-city relationship, with Raymond Williams (1989) and the perspective of Edward Palmer Thompson (1998; 2002), on work and experience. Finally, the study concludes that, although the implementation of the gardens initially had a commercial or educational focus, the discontinuity of assistance by the city government led the horticulturists to develop multiple resistance strategies to ensure the continuity of their work. This scenario directly impacted their trajectories and influenced the development of the project.

Keywords: History. Work. Community Gardens. Agriculture. Social resistance.

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*Caress the earth
Knowing the desires of the earth
Heat of the earth, the propitious season
And fertilize the ground
(Buarque; Nascimento, 1977).*

INTRODUCTION

The horticulturists of the community gardens of the Itararé Housing Complex³, protagonists of this study, are an example of what was defined by the French historian Michel de Certeau as "tactics of the weak" (Certeau, 2004, p. 101). This definition helps to understand the mechanisms of survival and collective organization of these workers, who have resignified the urban space through their daily practices.

We will discuss the idealization and implementation of the community garden project in the Itararé neighborhood, located in the Southeast zone of Teresina (PI), and the repercussion on the historical and social context in which the initiative is inserted. One of the first of its kind in the capital, the project was implemented in 1987 and has become one of the largest vegetable gardens in Latin America⁴. Its creation emerges as a collective action to minimize urban problems, such as unemployment and hunger, reflecting the search for better living conditions in a period of renewal and recovery after the civil-military dictatorship.

The research has an empirical character and is constituted from the analysis of documentary and hemerographic sources, such as journalistic articles and documentation (minutes, cards, manuals, etc.) of the period, articulated with historiography, in addition to the use of the methodology of Oral History, through thematic interviews with horticulturists in the region.

³ According to Cláudia Fontineles and Marcelo de Sousa Neto (2017), the name "Itararé", of Tupi origin, means "underground course of the waters of a river through limestone rocks" and referred to the Itararé Farm, located in the area where the São João neighborhood is located today, in Teresina (PI). Subsequently, with the construction of the second stage of the housing complex, during the government of Lucídio Portela (1979-1983), the complex was renamed Dirceu Arcoverde, in honor of Governor Dirceu Mendes Arcoverde (1975-1979). For an in-depth analysis of the housing complex, including the contexts, origins, transformations and political and social resistances, we recommend reading the book *Nasce um bairro, renasce a esperança*, by Cláudia Cristina da Silva Fontineles and Marcelo de Sousa Neto (2017).

⁴ According to Joana Aires da Silva (2014, p. 183), the Community Gardens of Dirceu Arcoverde are among the largest in Latin America. In addition, the *Horticulturist's Manual – Recommendations for the Organic Cultivation of Vegetables* (Teresina, 2019) reinforces the relevance of Teresina's vegetable gardens in the context of urban agriculture. According to the manual, in December 1999, Teresina was included among the six cities in South America and the Caribbean selected to present urban agriculture projects at the meeting of the United Nations (UN) – Urban Agriculture Program, held in April 2000, in Quito, the capital of Ecuador. In addition to Teresina, only Brasília represented Brazil at the event, along with the cities of Texcoco (Mexico), Havana (Cuba), Cuenca (Ecuador) and Camilo Aldao (Argentina).

This study is based on the contributions of Michael Pollak (1989; 1992) on History and memory. According to the author, "these expressions refer more to notions of memory, that is, to perceptions of reality, than to the positivist factuality underlying such perceptions" (Pollak, 1989, p. 201). Thus, the interviews with the horticulturists are not restricted to the facts, but seek to understand how these individuals perceive and interpret their own trajectories, their experiences with the project and their personal cultivations, revealing the complexity of their experiences and worldviews.

For this purpose, we base the use of Oral History on Verena Alberti (2005, p. 24), who conceives it as "a research method [...] which privileges interviews with people who participated in, or witnessed, events, conjunctures, worldviews, as a way of getting closer to the object of study". Based on this approach, we interviewed horticulturists who have been working in the vegetable garden region since the early years of the project, and we identified a common aspect to these people: the migration to Teresina in search of better living conditions.

To define the criteria for selecting the interviewees, we conducted an initial dialogue with those who joined the gardens in the first years of the project. In this article, we quote five of these horticulturists. The interviews took place in the cultivation plots themselves, with the permission of the participants, who preferred to answer while they worked. In addition, they authorized the photographic recording of these moments, which allowed the visual documentation of the activities and environments.

The interviews were structured to map the trajectories of the interviewees to the city of Teresina and the path of each one of them to their insertion as horticulturists. The survey covers their experiences in the countryside before migration, the motivations for making the move, the beginning of life in the Itararé neighborhood and the impacts of the work developed in the community gardens. We sought to understand how the project contributed to the maintenance of the daily lives of the interviewees and how it transformed them into public figures within the community where they live.

With regard to analytical approaches, we turn to Raymond Williams (1989) and Henri Lefebvre (2001), whose reflections, although developed in different contexts, offer important conceptual and historiographical contributions to this study.

Williams (1989), when analyzing the historical relationship between the countryside and the city in England, demonstrates that these spaces are not opposite realities, but interdependent and in constant transformation, a perspective that allows us to understand

community gardens as territories that materialize this dynamic, since they integrate agricultural practices into the urban environment.

Lefebvre (2001), in turn, when discussing the production of urban space in France, conceives the city as a social product, and enables the interpretation of community gardens as forms of collective appropriation of the territory, in which horticulturists resignify the use of land in urban space.

The analysis of the knowledge transmitted by these workers elucidates an essential character, since such knowledge was not only preserved, but served as a tactic for the insertion and survival of these people in the city. Although the aforementioned authors do not specifically analyze the scope of the present research, their approaches provide fundamental analytical tools to examine the interactions between rural and urban, as well as the social and spatial impacts of this process in the city of Teresina.

In this sense, we resort to the Thompsonian category of experience (Thompson, 1998; 2002) to understand how these workers shape the conditions imposed by the State, and how their daily experiences, both in the countryside and in the city, are intertwined in the construction of a collective identity. By sharing the struggles for family maintenance and work, these experiences not only reinforce class relations, but strengthen collective action, revealing how the shared experience of an interconnected urban and rural context is fundamental for the resistance of these groups to external impositions.

The understanding of the social, geographic and political configuration of the studied environment is based on an interdisciplinary approach, based on research from multiple areas of knowledge. In the field of History, Cláudia Fontineles and Marcelo de Sousa Neto (2017) analyze the processes of formation and permanence of the neighborhood, while, in Geography, Joana Aires da Silva (2014) investigates the spatial organization and territorial dynamics of the place. In addition, Juliana Monteiro (2005), when studying the relationship between development and the environment, examines the interactions between urbanization and sustainability. These were the studies that provided essential subsidies for the analysis of the context in which the community gardens were inserted.

POSSIBLE FIELD: TACTICS AND REINVENTIONS OF WORK IN THE CITY?

Initiatives such as community gardens are configured as "possible fields" in the urban fabric of the city of Teresina, spaces to which collective experience, rural memory and multiple forms of work are articulated. In these territories, horticulturists – mostly migrants in

search of better living conditions in the capitals – develop creative subsistence tactics, which reinvent agricultural practices in the urban context. Despite the challenges and limitations, these gardens resignify urban dynamics and recreate forms of social organization in Teresina. It is on this border, between the rural and the urban, between tradition and reinvention, that the space for permanent negotiation between urban structures and workers' survival strategies is configured, as we will observe below.

According to researcher Juliana Monteiro (2005, p. 15), the Municipality of Teresina (PMT) implemented community gardens with the objective of promoting food production and the generation of employment and income for needy families living in areas of the urban and rural areas of the municipality identified as pockets of poverty.

Those responsible for the implementation, as we will see in the course of the article, affirm the search to mitigate problems such as hunger, unemployment, high prices of fruit and vegetables and abandonment of minors. However, these initiatives are configured as palliative solutions in the face of the structural exclusions that marginalized these subjects. To understand them, it is necessary to take an analytical step back that situates the geographical, social and economic contexts, both at the local and national levels.

The search for better living conditions, housing and decent food boosted the migratory process, aggravated by the problem of drought and the ineffectiveness of public policies. This rural exodus intensified during the authoritarian governments between the 1960s and 1980s, highlighting the need for alternative occupations for the growing urban population that was unable to enter the labor market.

Table 1 illustrates this movement by presenting the population evolution of Teresina between 1960 and 2000. The data show a significant growth in the urban population accompanied by a progressive reduction in the rural contingent.

Table 1 – Population Evolution of Teresina from 1960 to 2000

Years	Total	Urban		Rural	
		Hab No.	%	Hab No.	%
1960	142.691	98.329	68,91	44.362	31,09
1970	220.520	181.071	82,11	39.449	17,89
1980	377.774	339.042	89,75	38.732	10,25
1991	599.272	556.911	92,93	42.361	7,07
1996	655.473	613.767	93,64	41.706	6,36
2000	714.318	676.596	94,72	37.722	5,28

Source: IBGE – Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. Demographic Censuses. Adapted by: Lyra (2025).

It can be seen in the table that in 1960 the rural population still represented 31.09% of the total, but this percentage fell drastically in the following decades, reaching only 5.28% in 2000. The decline reflects the continuous displacement of families from the countryside to the city, motivated by the difficulties of survival in rural areas. In addition, from 1970 onwards, there was an accelerated growth in the urban population of Teresina, indicating that the city became the main destination for migrants.

Faced with the precarious conditions in the countryside, marked by the lack of access to land for housing, cultivation and sustenance, as well as adverse working conditions, starting over in an unfamiliar urban environment seemed a more promising alternative than remaining on other people's lands under intensified exploitation. However, this urban growth has not been accompanied by effective housing policies, resulting in the occupation of neglected areas and a lack of infrastructure.

Antônia Jesuíta de Lima (2003, p. 194) points out that most of the migrants came from the interior of Piauí, although a significant contingent also came from neighboring states, such as Maranhão, Ceará and Pará. The displacements were driven by the difficulties faced in the countryside, such as exploitation at work, lack of land for cultivation and scarcity of opportunities. Despite sharing similar origins, the trajectories varied: some migrated with the entire family, others alone or accompanying their parents; all in search of better living conditions. In the new space, it was common for them to sell the few possessions they had to buy a house, even if precarious, or a small plot of land to start over – a reflection of the sacrifices and challenges of the migratory process.

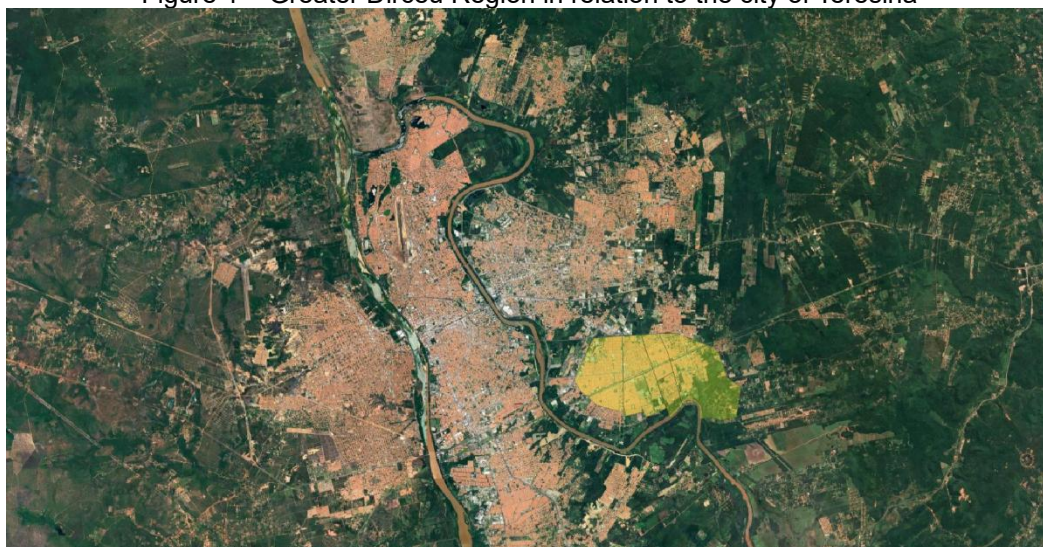
The construction of the Itararé Housing Complex, in 1976, exemplifies the contradictions of authoritarian "developmentalism". Financed by the National Housing Bank (BNH) and executed by the Popular Housing Company of Piauí (COHAB-PI), the project followed the logic of the regime of the period: while promoting the idea of modernization and progress, in practice, it segregated migrants in peripheral areas without adequate infrastructure. As historians Cláudia Fontineles and Marcelo de Sousa Neto (2020) point out:

The new residential represented part of the segregated urban space, which profoundly altered the spatial and social organization of the city by separating people, concealing the solution to the problem of access to housing by delivering the houses without the primary urban infrastructure for the implementation of a healthy and safe housing (Fontineles; Sousa Neto, 2020, p. 5).

From this perspective, under the pretext of solving the housing deficit, the State continued to move subjects to spaces far from the "urban center", a strategy of social hygiene that prioritized a developmental aesthetic to the detriment of basic conditions and dignified daily life, evidencing the precariousness of the conditions of insertion of these workers in the city.

The occupation of the Southeast region of Teresina in 1977, with the construction of the Itararé I Housing Complex, accounted for a total of 3,040 housing units (Fontineles; Sousa Neto, 2020, p. 9), followed by the second part of the project, in 1980, with 4,254 units (Lima, 2011, p. 24). The significant number of houses boosted the population growth of the Itararé neighborhood, which in 2000 was already the most populous in Teresina, registering 40,751 inhabitants, which represented a little more than 33% of the population of the Southeast region (IBGE, 2000).

Figure 1 – Greater Dirceu Region in relation to the city of Teresina



Source: Google Maps. Developed in *QGIS software*. Adapted by: Lyra, 2025⁵.

Figure 1 illustrates the location of the region of the so-called "Grande Dirceu" in relation to the city of Teresina, formed by the neighborhoods of Parque Ideal, Itararé, Colorado, Novo Horizonte, São Sebastião, Parque Poti and Renascença, highlighting its strategic position within the municipality. In his thesis, Paulo Lima (2011) finds that the population contingent of the region consolidated the area as an important urban subcenter,

⁵ The maps presented in this work were prepared in the *QGISgis software*, based on available satellite images, and adapted by the author.

marked by the predominance of low-income residents and the growing influence on the socioeconomic dynamics of the city.

The report of Mr. Antônio Maria dos Santos⁶ adds new layers to the understanding of the migratory process, highlighting the opportunities and challenges faced by the workers who arrived in Teresina in the 1970s. He describes how the search for a job was one of the main factors that drove his change, highlighting the growing demand for cheap labor in the context of accelerated urbanization and developmental ideas that marked the country at that time.

I was born in the municipality of Barras, in the "countryside". My life was farming and farming. A little access to education, if it had been practiced it would be higher, right. But as I left it in my hands... I studied at that age of 12, 13 years old, it ended and never again. The *guy* didn't have practice, he didn't understand very well. I'm almost 81 years old, I've been without practicing since that time. Today I am an art grower [...] Life was very precarious, I made a vegetable garden on other people's land, paying rent... Really precarious, of poverty [...] I came due to the very difficult financial condition, at the time I came here, I was already living here in José de Freitas, when I decided to come, it was to see if I could find a job to improve the condition. Job in civil construction, then I worked for the carrier, ATA Transportadora, receiving cargo from São Paulo. Before that, I went to Tucuruí to work on the Tucuruí dam, in those 80's days. When I left ATA, I went to JET Confecções, owned by José Elias Tajra, there in Cristo Rei, where I spent some time and that's when I discovered the gardens, and here it has always been better than working in a job (Santos, 2022).

As a "framed memory", the narrative of Mr. Antônio Maria dos Santos condenses an individual life story, which, according to Pollak (1989, p. 13), can be reported in different ways according to the context, but always within certain limits. At the individual and collective level, "coherence and continuity" are hallmarks of a credible memory and a sense of identity.

Thus, the testimony of Antônio Maria dos Santos (2022) allows us to observe a specific dynamic of the labor market at the time, especially for men, who found employment mainly in civil construction and other activities associated with the expansion of urban infrastructure. However, many migrants maintained ties to the countryside, periodically

⁶ Santos, Antônio Maria dos. *Interview given to Iarah Gabrielly de Sousa Lyra, in the interviewee's garden.* Teresina, 30 ago. 2022.

Originally from the interior of Barras (PI), Mr. Antônio Maria reported having migrated to Teresina in search of better working conditions, accompanied by his wife and seven children. In the initial period, he lived on rent in the São João neighborhood until he got financing for a house in the Dirceu Arcoverde II Housing Complex. In his professional career, he worked in civil construction in Teresina and in the construction of the Tucuruí Dam, in the state of Pará, whose work began in 1976 and was completed in 1984. Despite having moved through different areas of work throughout his life, he declares that he finds his true satisfaction in the activity he currently develops in community gardens, which he affectionately calls "art culture".

returning to their homelands to supplement their income and ensure their families' food supply. This relationship between the rural environment and the city reveals a survival strategy adopted by those who, even inserted in the urban space, still depended on agricultural practices for sustenance and economic stability.

This picture emphasizes what Raymond Williams (1989, p. 78) highlights when he states that the dynamics between city and countryside should not be seen as a simplistic contrast, where the city represents "corruption" and the countryside, "purity". On the contrary, the author stresses that the behaviors observed in the city are often shaped by the needs of the rural ruling class, revealing a historical interdependence between these two spaces.

In the case of Itararé, for example, the practice allowed many residents to maintain small crops within the limits of the neighborhood, raise small animals and cultivate vegetable gardens, which complemented the family's subsistence, integrating a rural practice into the urban fabric (Monteiro *apud* Fontineles; Sousa Neto, 2017, p. 105). This phenomenon evidences the adaptations to the limitations of the city, as elucidated by Henri Lefebvre (2001), who highlights the presence of "rural pieces" or "rural spaces" within the cities. According to the author, "among the meshes of the urban fabric, islets and islands of ruralities persist" (Lefebvre, 2001, p. 19).

UNDER THE HIGH VOLTAGE WIRES: THE COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT IN ITARARÉ

The community garden project was implemented in idle areas under the high voltage network of the São Francisco Hydroelectric Company (CHESF), originating green beds bordered by an avenue. Next, we will address how these spaces, provided by the energy concessionaire, became emblematic of the tensions and possibilities of Itararé, transforming previously underused land into productive territories.

As mentioned earlier, family subsistence cultivation already existed in the neighborhood before the implementation of the community garden project. To differentiate these practices, we resorted to the classification of Leocádio de Souza Camargo (1992 *apud* Monteiro, 2005), who categorizes gardens according to their purpose and scale of production. Home or home gardens are cultivated in small areas, for family consumption, while intensive gardens have a larger scale and aim at commercialization. The main distinction between them is in the purpose: to directly meet food needs or generate income.

In the case of community gardens, Camargo (1992 *apud* Monteiro, 2005) highlights essential aspects for implementation, such as the choice of land with a slight slope (0.5% to 1%) to avoid water accumulation, good luminosity and protection against strong winds. The proximity to the consumer market is also relevant, given the perishability of vegetables. In addition, the water must be clean and abundant, and the chosen area must be far from trees, to avoid competition for nutrients, and from roads, reducing the risk of theft and contamination.

The first reference to community gardens in the Piauí press was in an article in the newspaper *O Dia*, on February 11, 1987, entitled "Agriculture will implement educational gardens". At the time, the first community gardens in Teresina gained prominence as educational, welfare and production projects on a commercial scale. Implemented by the then newly created Municipal Department of Agriculture and Supply, during the government of Mayor Wall Ferraz, these initiatives aimed to qualify labor and reduce the import of fruit and vegetables, as highlighted in the article.

The Municipal Department of Agriculture and Supply is developing two community garden projects. In one of them, educational or welfare gardens will be implemented and, in the other, production gardens on a commercial scale. The information came from Secretary Augusto Matias Matos, adding that the second project aims, above all, to reduce imports of fruit and vegetables, which currently reach 95 percent of the products consumed in Teresina. The educational community gardens project aims to prepare qualified labor. To this end, the City Hall will begin to train a new generation in existing gardens in hospitals, barracks or in any free area of the city, where there is interest from the community or the association to implement this type of work. There will be implanted a workforce for a more lasting and commercial agricultural activity. In the commercial garden project, it is the intention of the City Hall to implement larger programs, with a constant supply planning of the most consumed products in Teresina, so that it can deviate a little from the axis that today is located in Ceará and Pernambuco, from where 95 percent of the products consumed here arrive. Secretary Augusto Matos believes that the supply of vegetables in Teresina will increase in February compared to December, when the existing gardens produced more than 4 tons (AGRICULTURE will implement educational gardens. *O Dia*, 11 fev. 1987, p. 2).

It is evident that Teresina faced urgent challenges that required public policies focused on the occupation of idle areas and the generation of employment and income. Quoting David Harvey, when he states that "there is a multiplicity of practices in the urban world that is ready to overflow with alternative possibilities" (Harvey, 2014, p. 12), community gardens emerge as concrete examples of this multiplicity, by transforming marginalized urban spaces into areas of cultivation and coexistence.

In this sense, the gardens are not only an economic response, but also a reflection of the "rich needs that await objectification, realization", as Lefebvre (2001, p. 124-125) points

out. These social needs go beyond the production of material goods, as they generate new spaces for interaction and collective work, resignifying the use of the city.

The project, which gained prominence in the headlines of the time, was probably promoted as an advertisement for the city hall, especially after the creation of the Municipal Secretariat of Agriculture and Supply, in 1986, which began to focus on initiatives of this type. In this context, community gardens have emerged as a strategic solution, revitalizing abandoned regions, boosting the local economy, and offering opportunities for income generation.

In the specific case of the southeast zone of the city, the community gardens were implemented in four stages over the years, with emphasis on the years 1987, 1994, 1996 and 1999, totaling 12 community gardens. Among the first implementations, the Itararé vegetable garden stands out, inaugurated as the first, in 1987, followed by the Renascença, still in the same year. In subsequent years, new gardens were implemented in the neighborhoods of Parque Ideal, Monte Horebe, Bel Terra, Ferroviária, Vila Paris, Alto da Ressurreição, Vila Poti, São Raimundo and Nossa Senhora da Guia (Silva, 2014, p. 182).

Table 2 – Gardens planted in 1987

Name (Year)	Zone	Useful Area (ha)	No. of Tubular Wells	Type of Culture	Binding
Itararé (1987)	Urban Southeast	9,0	03	Olive	Term of Assignment of Use (CHESF)
Renaissance (1987)	Urban Southeast	3,2	02	Olive	Term of Assignment of Use (CHESF)
São Francisco Norte (1987)	Urban North	1,0	01 (cacimbão)	Olive	Own Area (PMT)
Promorar (1987)	Urban South	2,0	01	Olive	Own Area (PMT)

Source: IBGE – Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. Demographic Censuses. Adapted by: Lyra (2025).

Table 2 illustrates the gardens implemented in 1987 in the city of Teresina, detailing information such as location, useful area, number of tubular wells, type of crop and linkage, essential aspects to understand the initial development of these gardens and the organization of the resources available for implementation in their respective zones.

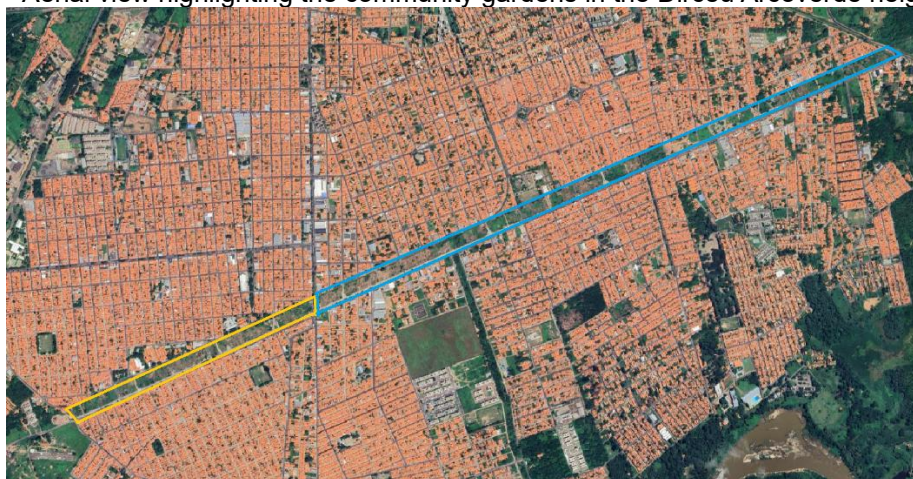
Within the local community, the gardens located along Avenida Noé Mendes are often called "Hortas Comunitária do Grande Dirceu". These gardens occupy a total area of 9 hectares, divided into 135 lots, and are considered one of the largest in Latin America,

due to the extension of 4 kilometers bordered by Avenida Noé Mendes, in the center of the Dirceu Arcoverde Housing Complex (Silva, 2012, p. 183).

However, it is important to highlight that, for the purposes of the study, we carried out a systematic among the gardens, because, although they share the same geographical space, they were implemented in different periods and have specific leaderships for each "sector", which gives a particular character to each one of them, such as the configuration of the workers.

These gardens have distinct organizations, with multiple management formats, but also with common elements, such as responsible bodies and assignment agreements. In other words, although there is a community unit, there are individualities that make each garden unique in terms of structure and functioning.

Figure 2 – Aerial view highlighting the community gardens in the Dirceu Arcoverde neighborhood



Source: Google Maps. Developed in QGIS software. Adapted by: Lyra, 2025.

In Figure 2, we highlight the extension of the gardens of Dirceu Arcoverde, using two colors to facilitate identification. In yellow, the gardens of Itararé, the focus of the present study, are indicated. These extend along Avenida Noé Mendes to the roundabout at the intersection with Avenida Joaquim Nelson, totaling 1.4 kilometers. These gardens were implemented with financial resources from the Municipality of Teresina (PMT) and the National Foundation for the Welfare of Minors (FUNABEM).

The land intended for the implementation of the garden was ceded by CHESF, according to a statement by the Municipal Secretary of Agriculture at the time, Matias Augusto Matos, in an article published in the newspaper *O Dia* in March 1987. According to interviews, the land was idle and presented risks of environmental degradation, irregular

occupation, formation of open air dumps and use for criminal activities. This collective initiative, now successful in other regions of the country, was pioneered in the state of Piauí. It is a joint effort that involved several bodies, entities and associations, as detailed in the excerpt below, published in the newspaper *O Dia*, under the title "CHESF cedes land for vegetable garden":

[...] "For this to be possible," said Matias Matos, "it would be necessary to have several meetings and the preparation of lending documents between the City of Teresina, CHESF and the Itararé Residents' Association (AMI), with a view to jointly complying with the requirements of the legislation in force on the subject." This permission of use, according to the secretary, is a pioneer in Piauí and has the purpose, as an experience, of taking advantage of the areas arranged below the electrical networks for an economic and social activity. As soon as he learned of the CHESF concession, Matias Augusto Matos, asked ETURB to speed up the cleaning, earthmoving and construction of a protective fence in the area where the community garden will be implemented. Together with SEMTAC and the Residents' Association, the Department of Agriculture selected 100 families to bring a training course in horticulture, scheduled to start on April 4. "The costs of implementing the project will be financed by FUNABEM, which has been making every effort to make the idea viable, in its new conception that the occupation of minors should occur in an integrated way with their families", emphasizes Matias Matos, adding that the head of the agency's office in Piauí, Manoel Emílio, has been following all the stages of implementation of the project that "will be the largest in the Northeast financed by FUNABEM". The municipal secretary of Agriculture also declared that, throughout this year, two more projects similar to the Dirceu Arcoverde community garden will be carried out, with the aim of generating more jobs and contributing to improve the city's supply. Finally, he said that, with these gardens, depending on the dedication of each family, it is possible to have an income of more than two minimum wages, monthly per lot. (CHESF cedes land for vegetable garden. *O Dia*, 30 mar. 1987, p. 7).

Regarding the care of the electrical network, according to article 5 of the Community Gardens Regulation, described in SDR Ordinance No. 02/2013 in the Horticulturist's Manual (Teresina, 2019), in gardens located in areas under the CHESF high voltage network, horticulturists must observe specific rules to ensure the safety and integrity of the activity. Among these, the following stand out: the careful use of hoses to avoid electrical induction; the construction of individual shelters (houses) with a maximum height of 1.6 meters, built and covered with non-conductive materials; the prohibition of staying in the garden during rains; and the sealing of manure accumulation at the base of electrical wiring towers (Teresina, 2019, p. 40).

Thus, the practical application of the rules cited in the regulation depends on efficient and continuous inspection, since the safety of workers can be compromised by the absence of regular monitoring to ensure compliance with these measures, highlighting the need for greater attention to these risk areas and the support offered to horticulturists.

According to the aforementioned journalistic article, a training course in horticulture would be offered, which in fact occurred in the initial stages of the project according to the interviews with the horticulturists, but which, over time, had an increasingly reduced performance. As Mr. José Alves de Lyra⁷, horticulturist in the gardens of Dirceu Arcoverde and resident of the region, narrates, the first steps in the community garden program were accompanied by qualified technical support (engineers and technicians), with the constant presence of agronomists guiding the horticulturists on the management of vegetables and the necessary care for cultivation. He describes:

It was I who asked Mrs. Maria, she was the first horticulturist in the gardens. Then she gave it to me and I went to work without enrollment, then I went to the city hall. The land already had plots of land, so there were just no people working. Then I took my lot, I took another [...] At that time, in the beginning there was an agronomist. Everyone came to help us in the gardens, yes, there were agronomists [who] spent all day with us teaching [how to] plant cilantro, onions... Everything, fertilizer, teaching everything (Lyra, 2022a).

The report shows that, in the beginning, horticulturists had resources such as tools, seeds, fertilizers and even gloves, provided for production. However, over time, this support became less frequent, as well as the presence of the association, whose participation was more significant in the initial stages.

This process reflects what Pollak (1989, p. 8) describes as the existence of "zones of shadow, silences, 'unsaid'" in memory. The reduction of technical and institutional support over time has not only transformed the reality of the project, but also influenced how it is remembered. As Pollak (1989) observes, the boundaries between what is remembered, forgotten or silenced are constantly shifting, showing that memory is not a fixed record, but a dynamic process, crossed by individual and collective experiences.

According to the Horticulturist's Manual (2019), the Municipality of Teresina, through the Secretariat of Rural Development (SDR), remains responsible for managing the program, ensuring the assignment of land. Since the creation of the project, the process to

⁷ Lyra, José Alves de. *Interview with Iarah Gabrielly de Sousa Lyra, at the interviewee's residence*. Teresina, 10 ago. 2022a.

Born in Águas Belas, in Altos (PI), José Alves de Lyra was raised in the countryside, where he worked in farming and animal husbandry. When he decided to move to Teresina, he sought job opportunities to ensure the livelihood of his wife and daughters. He worked as a street vendor, initially selling goods door to door. But it was as a "watchman" at the oil terminal, in the Itararé neighborhood, that he got his COHAB-PI card. Thus, he won his own home in the Dirceu Arcoverde II Housing Complex. José Alves de Lyra reiterated during the interview that, thanks to the work in the gardens, he was able to retire together with his wife.

access the program has remained the same: interested families (who live in the neighborhood) register and receive a plot of land to start cultivation.

However, horticulturists often need to organize collectively to acquire inputs. Therefore, it is essential to create mechanisms for dialogue with the public administration, such as a participatory council and more regular meetings. In addition, the (re)activation of a cooperative would facilitate both the collective purchase of materials and fertilizer and the implementation of security improvements, such as lighting, monitoring, and support from the Municipal Guard, which would contribute to the reduction of thefts.

COOPERATION, ORGANIZATION AND (R)EXISTENCE

Community gardens are often associated with social movements and are configured as spaces for production relations and social interactions among workers. Going beyond the simple act of cultivating and selling, these spaces house a diversity of experiences, which include solidarity, survival, conflicts and resistance, becoming places where the social is in constant construction, organization and recreation, reiterating that, in addition to access to land, the maintenance of gardens requires collective cooperation in the face of their fissures.

One of the interviewees, Mrs. Fátima Maria da Paz Silva⁸, narrated the importance of the Horticulturists Association in the early years of community gardens. During Wall Ferraz's tenure, the association played a central role in organizing work, with a joint account managed by the "presidents." Each member contributed with a card, the value of which, according to Mrs. Fátima Maria da Paz Silva, was accessible to all: "The association went into decline, the hope is to return. It really went bankrupt, now we are trying to get back, let's see. At the time, I paid a separate bill, there was a 'little meat' that everyone paid separately, it was on a cruise, a reasonable rate that everyone could pay" (Silva, 2022).

The report of Mrs. Fátima Maria da Paz Silva illustrates not only the organizational structure that supported the gardens in the past, but also the desire to rescue this collective experience. In the broader context of interviews as a research method, Paul Thompson

⁸ Silva, Fátima Maria da Paz. *Interview with Iarah Gabrielly de Sousa Lyra, in the interviewee's garden.* Teresina, 21 Aug. 2022.

Retired from her work in community gardens, she was 63 years old when she was interviewed. She left her hometown, Campo Maior, at the age of 17, accompanied by her husband and two children. Initially, he settled in Timon, Maranhão, where he lived on rent for six months. Later, he moved to Teresina, the capital of Piauí, where he also lived on rent for a period. Later, she got a house through COHAB-PI, in the Dirceu Arcoverde II neighborhood. It was there that Mrs. Fátima began her work in the community gardens, even before the official implementation of the project, in 1987.

(1998) points out that "what happens, in fact, is that, in general, the more you know, the more likely it is that you will obtain important historical information from an interview" (Thompson, 1998, p. 255).

This statement does not refer specifically to community gardens, but to the potential of the interviews to bring to light fundamental aspects of a given historical context. Thus, by combining reports like that of Mrs. Fátima Silva with official documents and press records, it is possible to build a deeper understanding of the trajectory and challenges faced by community gardens over time.

In this sense, the researcher Joana Aires da Silva (2012), on the organization of horticulturists, presents that one of the main difficulties faced by horticulturists is the lack of associativism. The absence of collective organization characterizes them as disjointed and disorganized in this regard, making it difficult to claim rights and fight for better conditions.

About the horticulturists' association in Teresina, according to the SDR representative, there has been an association before, but over almost thirty years there have been many conflicts that have led to the dismantling of the entity. A new association was created in 2012, but is still in the organization phase. Horticulturists are trying to organize themselves to obtain resources from PRONAF, which necessarily leads them to associativism (Silva, 2012, p. 192).

We identified that organized and unionized farmers tend to obtain more external investments and guarantee production, which provides them with continuous resources. An example of an agency in this support is the Rural Workers Union, which helps in obtaining benefits and incentives. However, in the observed community gardens, many horticulturists lack this level of organization, which makes it difficult to access opportunities, amid the challenges to collective cooperation.

Since the beginning of the project, relationship barriers among the horticulturists have favored individual work, despite the community proposal. Although there are moments of cooperation, such as in the collective purchase of inputs, this collaboration does not extend to all the needs of the group. An example of this is the hiring of watchmen, credited only by the horticulturists, to the exclusion of other members.

In addition, planting usually takes place individually, with some occasions of mutual help. This dynamic is also reflected in marketing, since each producer is exclusively responsible for selling his own production. This demonstrates that, despite the benefits of collective organizing, there are still obstacles to strengthening cooperation among participants.

It is relevant to highlight some more aspects about the cooperative and organization of horticulturists in Itararé. The report of Mrs. Benedita do Nascimento Lyra⁹, wife of Mr. José Alves de Lyra mentioned above, contributes to the broader reflections on the cooperative and the Association of Horticulturists of Itararé. According to her, initially, the horticulturists received benefits or discounts for being "members", but, over time, the representatives responsible for the management of the cooperative collected the accumulated amounts and withdrew, causing the dismantling of the organization, as Mrs. Benedita do Nascimento Lyra reported in an interview:

The city hall came to us, the boys came to us to register. Put the name and that's it. That there, whoever entered that there already knew: garden such-and-such, garden number so-and-so, here's the name in the register, *everything is* in the city hall preserved there. There was a cooperative, we bought seeds there. Everything was there, I searched for everything was there. Sometimes they even gave the fertilizer to us for free. In the beginning the garden was very good, they even gave manure. We took a truck, went out into the world hunting for manure for free. Each one picked up a percentage of manure, everything was divided. There in the cooperative, we bought seeds, but then there was also the little cup for us to put money in every month, which was to make a little savings. When we needed it, we would go there or they would go there and buy what they needed or fix something. But, as there are some smarter than others, they gave their hands on the money. One left for Parnaíba and the other *is still* here in the gardens. But we didn't open our mouths to say who was and who wasn't. Then it was said for not said, that's it. It was something we lost, the money, and the cooperative ended (Nascimento Lyra, 2022b).

The report confirms the dismemberment of a cooperative that could have contributed to the struggles and claims of the horticulturists in the neighborhood. However, the lack of a solid alliance and an effective association to represent their needs before the public authorities led to the disarticulation of the group.

When analyzing organizational dynamics among economically fragile groups, Eric Hobsbawm (2000) points out that "they need not only a strategy of effective pressures, but also action plans and organisms capable of executing these plans. They are not hammering home from outside the system, but from within, with the potential to transform it" (Hobsbawm, 2000, p. 414-415).

⁹ Lyra, Benedita do Nascimento. *Interview with Iarah Gabrielly de Sousa Lyra, at the interviewee's residence. Teresina, 22 Aug. 2022b.*

Born in the rural area of Altos (PI), Benedita do Nascimento Lyra says that she left her region of origin after marriage, accompanying her husband, who received job offers outside the peasant sector. At first, they lived with relatives and, later, they got a residence in the Dirceu Arcoverde II Housing Complex, in the second stage organized by COHAB-PI. When interviewed, she was 72 years old. Mother of three daughters and grandmother of four grandchildren, she says that they were all raised, fed and educated through the work developed by her and her husband, José Alves de Lyra, in the community gardens. Both retired thanks to urban agriculture.

Although Hobsbawm (2000) refers to a broader context of political and union mobilization, his reflection helps to understand the fragility of the organization of horticulturists in Itararé. Without an efficient collective structure, these workers were vulnerable, reducing their ability to demand improvements and promote significant transformations.

The weakening of the cooperative and the association contributed to the withdrawal of many horticulturists and the abandonment of the lots. Reports indicate that, where there was once a collective space next to the Association of Residents of Itararé (AMI), today there is a private space used for parties and housing.

The difficulties that lead horticulturists to give up lots in the gardens are related to the bureaucratic issues of the government, which do not always meet their needs in relation to the operation of the well and the transportation of manure, which are basic elements for the work in the gardens. Without these, horticulturists end up organizing among themselves, under certain circumstances (Silva, 2012).

Some horticulturists reported that they took their children to accompany them in working with the land and, mainly, to help them sell vegetables. This is the case of Mrs. Teresinha Soares dos Reis¹⁰, one of our interviewees, when asked about the process of enrolling in the gardens, and whether her children helped her at work or stayed in a specific place where children and adolescents were welcomed. She replied:

Here were the registrations, people made the registrations, then they were drawn. Especially for those who had children at that time, right? He could work at that time, and today he can no longer work. Then we registered and some people were drawn. We didn't go first, we were on reserve. Then, when people gave up on the first batch, we were drawn. In the beginning it was me, my husband, my children. The boys helped even when they left the house. They went to school, one in the morning would help me sell parsley, I went out selling around and there, until I *got fed up* here. Sometimes I was selling through the doors, putting the boys in the doors, until I got organized (Reis, 2022).

The report of Mrs. Teresinha dos Reis reinforces the importance of family involvement in the work of community gardens, showing how, in contexts of vulnerability,

¹⁰ Reis, Teresinha Soares dos. *Interview with Iarah Gabrielly de Sousa Lyra, in the interviewee's garden.* Teresina, 30 ago. 2022.

Teresinha Soares dos Reis migrated from the municipality of Barra do Corda (MA) in search of better living conditions. At first, she lived on rent, while her husband worked as a construction worker. When interviewed, she was 75 years old. Her children initially followed her work trajectory in the community gardens of the neighborhood, which she joined on August 20, 1987, the year of the implementation of the project. The interviewee is active in courses and training provided by the Federal Institute of Piauí (IFPI) and reiterates the importance of initiatives like this for awareness and guidance on better ways for the management and sale of vegetables.

the children collaborated in the production and marketing of products. In addition, the horticulturist's speech confirms the provisions of SDR Ordinance No. 02/2013, which regulated registrations with the Superintendence of Rural Development (SDR) of the Municipality of Teresina. These registrations could be made individually or through the Association of Residents of Itararé, horticulturists or cooperatives.

When interviewed in 2022, Mrs. Teresinha dos Reis demonstrated this connection with horticulture in a symbolic way. Paul Thompson (1998), when discussing memory and identity, states that "most people retain some memories that, when recovered, release powerful feelings" (1998, p. 205). Perhaps moved by this affective bond, she spontaneously attended wearing the shirt of a horticulture and development training course at the Federal Institute of Piauí (IFPI), and taking her horticulture card, which recorded the link with the SDR. Teresinha's gesture reaffirmed her pride in what she produces and the connection with the community, demonstrating strength and belonging.

According to Juliana Monteiro and Maria do Socorro Monteiro (2006), in Teresina, of the 240 people involved in horticulture in 43 production units, 149 were women, representing 62.08% of the total. In addition, 65.24% of the horticulturists were over 46 years old, indicating the accessibility of the activity for this age group and the low adherence of young people.

With regard to schooling, 87.61% of the horticulturists did not complete elementary school, and 33.33% were illiterate, which made it difficult to enter the formal market, leading many to resort to vegetable gardens as an alternative for sustenance. Horticulture, predominantly family-based, involved the collaboration of children and spouses in 68.37% of the cases, while 31.2% of the workers worked without family support and only 0.41% hired sporadic help.

The community gardens project was initially funded by the National Foundation for the Welfare of Minors (FUNABEM), an agency that played an essential role in the implementation of the program and in supporting families. At the time, child labor was not regulated, as the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA) was only instituted on July 13, 1990, by Law No. 8,069, which established guidelines for the full protection of children and adolescents in Brazil.

The work in the community gardens contributed significantly to the livelihood of the families, especially in the early years of the project. Despite the difficulties, the

horticulturists interviewed emphasized that they encouraged their children to stay in school, seeking to offer opportunities that they themselves did not have in the past.

In that period, it was common to sell products in markets, outdoors and on the streets of nearby neighborhoods, door to door, often organized in "aluminum basins", which women carried on their heads and on foot, or together with their companions, on bicycles. As Mrs. Benedita do Nascimento Lyra narrates about her sales trajectory:

I started selling in the garden, then I went *to the* market. When it was one day, I put it on the market, it didn't work. Then I took the basin, put it on my head and threw myself into the world. It was in Monte Castelo, Piçarra, Redenção... I know that in these neighborhoods here, around Teresina: Mafuá, Poragora, everything I walked with the basin of parsley on my head, and I was not ashamed of anyone. I took the subway, I took the bus, I walked to Piçarra... There was a woman who went with me too, who I invited. One said she wouldn't go, the other said: 'I'm in.'. 'Well, let's both go.'. For São João, Vila da Paz... Vila da Paz was where I walked the most, rode, Cidade Nova, Morada Nova, for Rádio Clube, I surrounded everything that is in Monte Castelo, already going down *towards* Miguel Rosa. At Miguel Rosa, I sold everything, that's it. Then, when it was a while, the bandits wanted to catch me, so I let go, I started to walk in fear. Then I was selling only here in the garden and making deliveries here and there. Then I make my deliveries to the shops and sell them in my garden, but it's enough to make my change, thank God. I thank God very much (Nascimento Lyra, 2022b).

Mrs. Benedita Lyra's account highlights the sales trajectories of the horticulturists, confirming how the gardens contributed to the food of the neighboring neighborhoods. The daily journey between markets, streets and distant neighborhoods, carrying aluminum basins on her head, reveals an urban geography made of bodies that inscribe, in space, stories of resistance and survival. "The paths that respond to each other in this intertwining, ignored poems that each body is an element signed by many others, escape legibility" (Certeau, 2014, p. 171). These daily routes, although apparently marginal, carry within them a web of meanings that challenge the hegemonic reading of the city.

We also emphasize the difficulties faced by the workers, such as the lack of adequate urban mobility, which forced them to walk long distances carrying vegetables on their heads and arms, and the absence of basic security, as factors that limited the options for selling in more distant areas.

This context leads us to reflect on the relationship of these workers with the time of cultivation and with the time regulated by the urban clock. E. P. Thompson (1998) discusses how the perception of time, between the natural and the regulated, has changed throughout history. As the author states: "When you wear the watch around your neck, it is closer to the less regular beats of the heart" (Thompson, 1998, p. 268).

In the case of horticulturists, it is observed that the link with the time regulated by the clock is more fragile. Their days begin in the dark of their homes, starting to work on the lots, a habit that dates back to their youth in the countryside, where they don't even call it "city".

E. P. Thompson (1998) observes that work from dawn to dusk may seem "natural" in an agricultural community, especially during harvest, because nature imposes its own rhythm: grains must be harvested before storms. This principle is reflected in the routine of horticulturists, who organize their activities according to the needs of the plantations, taking advantage of the most favorable periods for the growth of seedlings to ensure future harvests, since each vegetable requires specific care.

However, climate and social challenges directly impact work. During the warmer months, too much sun can burn vegetables, while periods of heavy rainfall result in significant crop losses. In addition, the interviewees report recurring thefts of vegetables during the night, which further compromises production. In the face of these difficulties, solidarity among horticulturists is strengthened, manifesting itself in outbursts and cooperation in shared daily life.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

When we investigated the process of implementation and reverberation of community gardens in Itararé, in the southeast of Teresina, we identified a path full of challenges and reinventions, crossed by social, political and economic transformations. To this end, the analysis of the sources, including the interviews conducted with some of the first horticulturists in the region, allowed us to understand how the relationship between the countryside and the city is manifested in the memory and experience of these urban farmers, who, despite the lack of continuous government incentives and the disarticulation of cooperatives, managed to build productive spaces and consolidate community gardens as places of resistance and collective reinvention.

Community gardens emerge as territories of memory and experience, where the connection between the rural and the urban reflects not only subsistence, but also the search for autonomy, belonging, and continuity. The analysis shows that the implementation of the community garden project was decisive for the population settlement and for the development of the housing complex, moving workflows, sociabilities and an economic dynamic of its own.

Horticulturists, in this context, consolidate themselves as active agents in the conformation of urban space, transforming vegetable gardens into a model of urban agriculture that articulates economic, social and political dimensions. However, the absence of efficient coordination between organizations and public managers still imposes challenges to the expansion and permanence of this practice. Furthermore, we noticed in the journalistic discourses an absence of connection between the state service and the subjects who would become the main agents of the gardens, revealing a mismatch between institutional expectations and the concrete hopes placed in the future of the project by the community itself.

In view of this, the need for actions that promote awareness of the importance of urban agriculture among municipal administrators, planners and civil society organizations is highlighted. In addition, it is essential to strengthen the organization of the horticulturists themselves and expand research on the potential and challenges of this practice in the city of Teresina, ensuring the continuity and recognition of this activity as an essential strategy for sustainable urban development. The oral narratives and the documents analyzed elucidate how these subjects reinterpret their trajectories, keeping alive a social memory that resists the oblivion of tactics.

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