

Commentary

Walking through Memory, Myth, and Heritage: A Socio-Cultural Animation Framework via Cultural Walks and Reflective Journals at Quinta das Lágrimas

Fernando José Sadio-Ramos¹

1. Coimbra Education School, University of Coimbra, Polo das Ciências da Saúde, Portugal

This theoretical-pedagogical article explores the intersection of socio-cultural animation, heritage education, and reflective practice through the implementation of structured cultural walks. Grounded in critical pedagogy^{[1][2]} and experiential learning theory^[3], the methodology engages diverse demographics—ranging from adolescents and youth to adults and seniors (incorporating principles of geragogy,^[4])—using Quinta das Lágrimas in Coimbra, Portugal, as a living pedagogical object. By combining walking, sensory contemplation, station-based analysis, and the creation of personal reflective journals (*cadernos reflexivos*), participants bridge historical fact, literary myth, and lived experience. This framework transforms cultural heritage from a static tourist site into an active catalyst for lifelong learning, critical consciousness, and personal memory construction.

Correspondence: papers@team.qeios.com — Qeios will forward to the authors

1. Introduction

Socio-cultural animation (*animação sociocultural*) functions as a dynamic pedagogical and social intervention tool designed to foster civic participation, cultural democratization, and personal empowerment across the lifespan. Grounded in the foundational principles of critical pedagogy—most notably aligned with Paulo Freire’s vision of *conscientization*—socio-cultural animation seeks to awaken

the individual's critical relationship with their environment, history, and community, recognizing that "culture is not the monopoly of a privileged elite, but the product of human labor and historical consciousness"^[1].

When applied to heritage spaces, this methodology transcends traditional, passive museum or site visits. Instead, it reclaims the territory as an open-air classroom where history, literature, botany, and human emotion intersect, acting as a mediating praxis that reconnects individuals to their spatial and historical roots^[2]. This paper outlines a comprehensive pedagogical framework structured around a **cultural walk** (*passeio cultural*), utilizing **Quinta das Lágrimas** in Coimbra as an evocative case study^[5]. By integrating physical movement (walking), structured observation stations, differentiated cohort activities, and the long-term practice of reflective journaling, this approach provides a scalable model applicable to formal, non-formal, and informal educational settings^[6].

2. Setting the Scene: Quinta das Lágrimas – History, Heritage, and Educational Valences

Geographical and Historical Context

Situated on the left bank of the Mondego River in Coimbra, **Quinta das Lágrimas** is an 18-hectare historic estate defined by its lush botanical gardens, medieval architecture, and natural springs. Historically tied to the estate of the Paço das Lágrimas, the site served as a private retreat for royalty and religious orders, most notably the Jesuits, who shaped its agricultural and landscape features. Over the centuries, the gardens evolved into a romantic landscape architecture masterpiece, featuring rare exotic trees, romantic fountains (*Fonte dos Amores* and *Fonte das Lágrimas*), and neo-Gothic ruins.

Educational Valences and Multidisciplinary Potential

From a socio-cultural animation standpoint^[5], Quinta das Lágrimas presents a rich nexus of educational valences:

- **Multidisciplinary Intersection:** The site naturally bridges botany (dendrology, rare species), hydrography (natural spring systems), architecture, history, and literature.
- **Sensory and Emotional Immersion:** The acoustic landscape (flowing water, rustling leaves) and aesthetic density of the gardens foster a receptive psychological state, aligning with Kolb's^[3] experiential model where concrete sensory immersion unlocks deep cognitive processing.

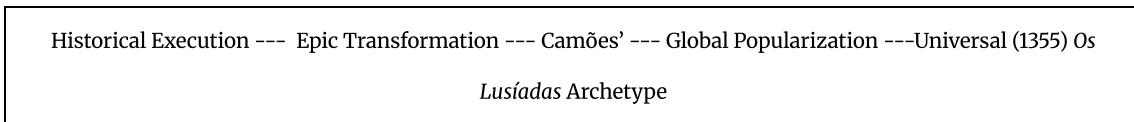
- **Intergenerational Accessibility:** The physical infrastructure, when navigated via thoughtful pacing, accommodates diverse age groups, establishing a shared baseline where seniors, adults, and youths engage with heritage on equal emotional footing.

3. The Myth and Reality of Pedro and Inês

A deep pedagogical exploration of Quinta das Lágrimas requires unpacking the complex duality between its literary myth and its historical reality. Socio-cultural animation uses this dichotomy to teach critical thinking, demonstrating how narratives are constructed, manipulated, and preserved across centuries through collective memory processes^[7].

A. The Literary Myth and Cultural Spread

The immortalization of the tragic romance between Crown Prince Pedro and Inês de Castro is anchored primarily in Portuguese literature.



Luís de Vaz Camões^[8] cemented the narrative in Canto III of his epic masterpiece *Os Lusíadas*, transforming a brutal political assassination into a timeless allegory of eternal devotion. Camões famously linked the tragedy to the landscape itself, writing that the crystal waters of the fountain were forever stained by Inês's blood and tears.

Following Camões, the myth permeated European and Portuguese culture, proliferating across multiple media forms:

- **Theater:** From early Renaissance plays (e.g., António Ferreira's *Castro*) to contemporary dramatic adaptations.
- **Music and Opera:** Folk laments, classical symphonic poems, and modern lyrical compositions.
- **Visual Arts and Cinema:** Romantic paintings depicting her execution or posthumous coronation, alongside 20th- and 21st-century cinematic retellings.

This widespread dissemination turned the tragic couple into a cornerstone of the Portuguese collective imaginary, serving as a powerful lens through which participants can examine how societies immortalize love, loss, and trauma.

B. The Historical Reality: Power, Politics, and Tragedy

Stripping away the romantic veneer reveals a tense 14th-century political thriller. Inês de Castro arrived in Portugal in 1340 as part of the noble entourage accompanying Constança Manuel, the bride of Crown Prince Pedro. Inês belonged to a powerful, factionalized network of Galician-Castilian nobility whose expanding political footprint within the Portuguese court threatened national sovereignty and the indigenous nobility.

- **The Political Threat:** As King Afonso IV aged, the pro-Castilian faction surrounding Inês and Pedro posed an acute dynastic risk, potentially subordinating Portugal to Castilian political influence.
- **The State Execution (1355):** Acting on counsel and driven by state security concerns, King Afonso IV ordered Inês's execution on January 7, 1355, at the Convent of Santa Clara-a-Velha in Coimbra, while Prince Pedro was away hunting.
- **The Aftermath and Uprising:** Enraged by the murder, Prince Pedro launched a bloody civil war against his father. Upon ascending the throne as King Pedro I (*O Justiceiro*), he enacted brutal retribution against the assassins. The legend that he exhumed her corpse, dressed her in royal garments, and forced the court to kiss her hand—though heavily mythologized—symbolizes the extremity of his political and emotional reprisal.

4. Methodological Design: The Cultural Walk and Pedagogical Itinerary

The core methodology relies on the **cultural walk**, structured as a deliberate movement through space paired with specific contemplative and analytical stations. Through the integration of the *caderno reflexivo*, participants engage in reflective praxis, translating external heritage into internal biographical capital^[9].

A. Support Materials & Toolkit

- **The Reflective Journal (*O Caderno Reflexivo*):** An A5-size, unlined notebook with recycled paper pages, symbolizing a blank canvas for life memory collection and narrative identity construction.
- **Writing & Creative Kit:** Pencils (HB/2B), a black fine-liner pen, a small watercolor brush pen, and a compact glue stick for pasting physical tokens.
- **The Heritage Field Bag (*Bolsa de Campo*):** A cloth tote bag provided to each participant containing a laminated map of the estate, a pocket-sized excerpt booklet of *Os Lusíadas* and 14th-century chronicles, and a folding waterproof sit-pad.

B. Station-by-Station Itinerary and Differentiated Activities

Station	Location	General Pedagogical Objective	Activity: Adolescents & Youth (Schools/Universities)	Activity: Seniors (55+, U3A, Day Centers, Senior Residences)
1. Arrival	Estate Gate / Entrance	Grounding and transition	Setting initial expectations; writing down pre-walk emotional and intellectual baseline in the journal.	Gentle grounding; recording initial physical sensations and anticipations regarding the shared space.
2. Contemplation	Botanical Gardens & <i>Fonte dos Amores</i>	Sensory awareness & nature connection	<i>The Soundscape Geo-Tagging & Haiku</i> : Mapping acoustic environments and writing micro-poems contrasting romanticized silence with political violence.	<i>Sensory Time-Travel</i> : Slow, deep-breathing contemplation; recording autobiographical memories triggered by scents, damp earth, or running water.
3. Confrontation	Near the <i>Fonte das Lágrimas</i>	Literary and historical analysis	<i>The Historical Mock Trial</i> : Splitting into factions to debate Afonso IV's state security rationale vs. Pedro's dynastic rights directly at the site.	<i>The Human Tapestry</i> : Guided discussion on how life experience alters the perception of Camões' verses on love, grief, and human resilience.
4. Synthesis	Upper Woods / Viewpoint	Broadening perspective & mapping	Mapping personal milestones and modern societal structures onto the landscape of Coimbra observed from above.	Connecting generational histories; reflecting on personal life archives through structured landscape mapping.

C. Conclusion of the Walk (Same-Day Debriefing)

The walk concludes with a circle gathering (*círculo de partilha*) in a designated open-air area or indoor hall of the estate. Facilitated by the socio-cultural animator, participants engage in **"The Open Page"**

exercise, sharing a single sentence, sketch, or profound realization from their journals. This verbalization anchors the day's experiences, moving individual contemplation into shared collective consciousness.

D. Follow-up Activities (Subsequent Days)

- **Journal Consolidation:** Participants spend time pasting physical artifacts (leaves, photographs, ticket stubs) into their journals, writing a structured synthesis entry.
- **Institutional Exhibition & Sharing:** Curating a display of selected journal pages (with explicit consent) within the hosting institution, or organizing an intergenerational sharing circle where seniors and youth exchange perspectives. For senior cohorts, journals may also integrate oral history voice notes or open letters to their younger selves.
- **Methodological Habituation:** Establishing the *caderno reflexivo* as a standard recurring tool for future socio-cultural animation excursions.

Conclusion

The integration of socio-cultural animation principles with the cultural walk methodology at Quinta das Lágrimas offers a robust, reproducible framework for heritage education across all generations. By deliberately interweaving the literary myth of Camões with the rigorous historical realities of 14th-century Iberian politics, participants move beyond passive sightseeing. Through the tactile medium of the reflective journal, visitors do not merely consume history—they internalize it, connect it to their own life trajectories, and transform a heritage site into an enduring monument of personal and collective memory.

Footnotes

¹ "Andragogy" is an unfortunate occurrence that has had unlimited consequences among the most relevant authors. It is ineffective to contest it because its effects are extremely powerful, but the etymological inaccuracy is always worth pointing out. If something in this sense is to be used, "anthropagogy" would be the correct term, as capable authors argue (e.g., Manuel Ferreira Patrício).

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