

Exploring Human-Environment Relationships: The Emergence of the 'Benfeita Bubble'

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Abstract

This dissertation explores human-environment relationships in Benfeita, an area in central Portugal. The area has had a significant transformation in the past fifty years with the emigration of a younger generation of Portuguese being replaced with an influx of 'eco-immigrants'. The valleys in the Benfeita area creates a bowl like shape, subsequently resulting in it being referenced as the: 'Benfeita Bubble'. I conducted my fieldwork over 5 weeks in July to August of 2017 gathering information through participatory experiences on the quinta I stayed and extensive interviews with the Benfeita community. Since I have been gathering information in reflection of the forests fires that hit the community in October 2017 through online correspondence with my key informant Wendy.



I explore human-environment relationships in Benfeita through the anthropological concept of emergence (Kirksey, 2015). I present this emergence through an assemblage of parts varying in scale from a plant, to a forest. I explore this emergence developing and evolving slowly over time but also unpredictably after a disruption. I suggest human-environment relationships in the 'Benfeita Bubble' are interconnected in a complex web of relations that encompass individual, local and global agents (Tsing, 2005). I aim to demonstrate that human-environment relationships are fundamentally temporal and relative (Ingold, 2000) which subsequently questions human agency and moral responsibility toward the environment.