Exploring Ecosystem Services of the Macaronesian Laurel Forest Through Transmedia Storytelling

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Humanity benefits in a multitude of ways from natural ecosystems; collectively, these benefits are known as ecosystem services. LauraSilva, a transmedia storytelling project developed in the context of the EU-funded Future Fabulators project at Madeira-ITI, is a technologically mediated effort aiming to create awareness, disseminate knowledge, and engage its audience in learning about and respecting the importance of the UNESCO-protected laurisilva, an outstanding relic of primary laurel forest now found only in Madeira, the Azores, and the Canary Islands. The project takes the shape of a mobile-based, context-aware narrative that unfolds in the village of Ponta do Sol. The story takes place during the 18th century, when Madeira served as a busy port for transatlantic trade. Our heroine, Laura Silva, is a young woman who discovers in Madeira’s unique forest plants and flowers with healing properties. She uses these plant-based remedies to heal the people of the island, and catalogues her findings in a vast herbarium – a book containing samples of medicinal plants – but the book goes missing and the audience must find it. The audience is encouraged to explore the narrow, historic streets and alleyways of Ponta do Sol in search of the fabled herbarium and the valuable historic, cultural, and scientific knowledge contained within. The experience is mediated through a custom-made mobile application that provides location-aware sensing to guide the audience in its quest to discover the book. The story is presented in the form of audiovisual content and interactive artefacts placed in significant locations around the village. Although we have designed the experience for visitors, we intend to set up web-based contact points to encourage Madeirans to share and exchange knowledge about local traditions, folktales, and remedies. The project is currently in the development stage, having gone through its first iteration as an experience prototype.

Keywords: Natural heritage, Human-computer interaction, Interactive storytelling, Ecosystem services

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