

VALENCIAN HERITAGE: VALORISATION OF THE AYORA GARDEN

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This article describes a historical and technical study I conducted as part of a research project about the Ayora Garden, located in Valencia, Spain. The Ayora Garden is a monumental complex containing both a palace and its associated grounds. I present a didactic proposal developed designed to promote visitors engagement in order to put the value of the garden in perspective. Through associated work and study at the Museum of Roman and Dacian Civilization in Deva, Hunedoara County, Romania, I have adapted the methodology developed in this project to the municipality of Deva. This study was conducted in order to value a part of our cultural heritage and to render it accessible to the public while respecting its integrity and history.

The Ayora Garden is a monumental complex that comprising a palace and its associated grounds. The *Generalitat Valenciana* declared it “Good of Local Relevance”¹. The primary building was originally constructed in 1900 as a holiday house for José Ayora and conceived by the architect Peregrín Mustieles, and was acquired by the Valencia Town Hall in 1976². It has been used as a discotheque, as a day nursery and by the Municipal Police. Since 1986 the garden has been managed and maintained by the Municipal Public Foundation of Singular Parks and Gardens. Today, the house is part of the Popular University of Valencia³; the University has also published a book discussing the history of the complex and the various roles it has filled in the community, past and present. The book is called *Chalet de Ayora, Villa Vergel, Palauet d'Aiora*, and was published by the Universitat Popular, Ajuntament de Valencia in 2017. A close reading was integral to the development of this project. The building exists as a symbol for the neighborhood and it is beloved by the local residents. As a result, knowledge of its past is integral to any understanding of the history of the community.

This history begins with a Valencian family called Ayora, composed of José Ayora, his wife Ana María and their son José Ayora Olcina. The Ayora family was one of the most important in XXth century Valencia. They were originally from Cuenca, and relocated to Valencia in 1850, where they established themselves in the petrol business and acquired significant wealth. In 1878 a daughter was born, María de los Dolores Ayora Olcina, and she was raised by her older brother upon the death of their parents.

¹ *Palacete y Jardín de Ayora* 2005. Description of the Ayora garden as a part of Valencian heritage.

² M. J. Girona Garcerán, *Els Ayora, una fortuna unida al petroli*, see: <http://www.almussafes.es/sites/almussafes.portalesmunicipales.es/files/la-fortuna-dels-ayora.pdf> (Accessed: 20.11.2017). Girona Garcerán [s.a.], I learned a lot about the history of the Ayora family from an article written by this author.

³ *Palacete y Jardín de Ayora* 2005.

María de los Dolores was more commonly referred to in the community as *Senyoreta*, which means “Miss” in the Valencian language. When her brother died she inherited their house in the village of Almussafes as well as the main home at the palace of Valencia. She was extraordinarily well-educated for the time, speaking both Italian and French, and was known for her strong character and somewhat domineering personality. During the Spanish Civil War she relocated to *Les Champs Elisées*, in Paris, taking all of her jewelry she could and the family car. She returned to Valencia in 1939, where the family resided until the death of the last descendant in 1962. Upon their death management of the garden was retained by the local administration and the complex was used for a variety of different purposes, as discussed above. Although the palace changed its aspect over time, the atmosphere of the garden was carefully maintained⁴.

The three-story Palace presents a very colorful and dynamic exterior. The first two floors are active and the third serves as an attic, through which you can access the tower. The building is surrounded by a balustrade. The overall structure of the Palace is symmetrical and reminiscent of a cube, with equivalent measurements on all sides. The interior is well-lit by large windows set into each wall. The construction could most aptly be termed Baroque, though this impression is given more through the interaction of multiple influences than from explicit dedication to a particular style. The building is constructed primarily of brick, with ceramic engravings on the superior portion reminiscent of a modernist style. In contrast to the overall structure, the decorative elements are noticeably diverse and asymmetrical. Window moldings and casements differ from floor to floor and include rectangular, oval, and curved pediments. The facades are divided into three sectors and dominated by the center, creating a more dynamic aesthetic. The primary facade of the palace as it appears today can be seen in Figure 1⁵ (**Fig. 1**).



Fig. 1. Ayora Palace (Photo: L. Almazán Morales)

⁴ Girona Garcerán [s.a.], *passim*.

⁵ Estal 2017. Study of the Ayora garden and its transformations over time, very good for understanding its history as well as its modern significance.

The aesthetics in the interior of the palace are markedly different from the exterior, reflecting the changes in use over the years. A monumental marble staircase with a wooden balustrade dominates the interior; it is one of only a few original elements. Its local environment, however, has changed considerably. One of the things we cannot admire anymore is the mirrors surrounding the stairs, it used to be full of mirrors. Historically, upon entering the building visitors would be received in the first room on the right, which was used solely for this purpose. The stair adjoined this receiving room, along with the kitchen and pantry – areas originally used primarily by the household servants. To the left of the entrance a large hall occupied the remainder of the ground floor. The original layout of the upper floor was very similar, with two large areas: one for gaming and billiards, and one that served as the private chambers of María de los Dolores. Her rooms originally contained a large dressing area filled with handmade gowns; she employed a private dressmaker for her personal wardrobe. The attic space is perhaps the best preserved. Originally used as a room for the workers of the house, today it hosts University lectures.

The many purpose-driven changes to the interior of the house has made it difficult for the modern visitor to understand the historical design. The above description of the Palace's original interior layout and function is the result of an extended interview⁶ with my grandmother, Amparo García Alarcón, who served as a maid for María de los Dolores Oleina. As it is very difficult to reconstruct the building's interior and the plan of its gardens before it became part of the public administration, the assistance of local people is crucial for this research. My grandparents lived at Ayora garden for three months in 1959 following their marriage while they worked for *La Senyoreta*, María de los Dolores.

The gardens proper form the second portion of the monumental Ayora Garden complex, separated from the Palace building by a wall. The Ayora Garden covers 17.000 sq²⁷ and is divided into two parts. The first part comprises the areas immediately adjacent to the Palace; this area is accessible via the main entrance and includes a children's park. The Palace building is surrounded on all sides by this part of the garden, and is only accessible via a single central staircase and a ramp situated on the primary facade of the building. In the promenade that abuts the vegetation are a number of preserved original ceramic modernist benches, one of which is shown in Figure 2 (**Fig. 2**). The second area is an enclosed garden containing many vegetable species along with many decorative elements, such as benches and fountains.

There are two playgrounds on two sides, relics of the villa's previous use as a day care center. From these the historic gardens can be accessed through a wrought-iron fence. The garden has four points of egress, though not all of them are in use today. Numerous benches are deployed throughout the space (**Fig. 3**), so that visitors can relax and enjoy the wonderful garden, its peace and tranquility.

⁶ Interview done during 30 minutes in May 20th 2018 to Amparo García Alarcón.

⁷ Ajuntament de València, *Jardines Valencia. Jardín de Ayora*, see: <http://jardinesvalencia.es/jardin-de-ayora/> (Accessed: 20.07.2019). Jardín de Ayora [s.a.], *passim*.



Fig. 2. Modernist bench (Photo: L. Almazán Morales)



Fig. 3. Ayora Garden (Photo: L. Almazán Morales)

The overall form of the garden⁸ is sinuous, like that of a snake, with paths that open between different plant species. Species distribution is ordered, with a clear separation between the vegetated area and the walking path. In many cases, plants from the same family are arrayed in groups, with enough variation in species to give the visitor the impression that they have entered a “wild” space. Many of the trees are quite large, contributing to the sylvan atmosphere⁹. When combined with the stone walls this aspect has a soundproofing effect that allows visitors to feel calm and relaxed inside the garden despite its proximity to busy *Santos Justo y Pastor* street. In the center of the garden there is a fountain with a rounded shape and an iron sculpture of a woman on a marble pedestal. Though it is unclear who this sculpture is meant to represent, her appearance is similar to that of a Roman goddess carrying an amphora full of water (**Fig. 4**).

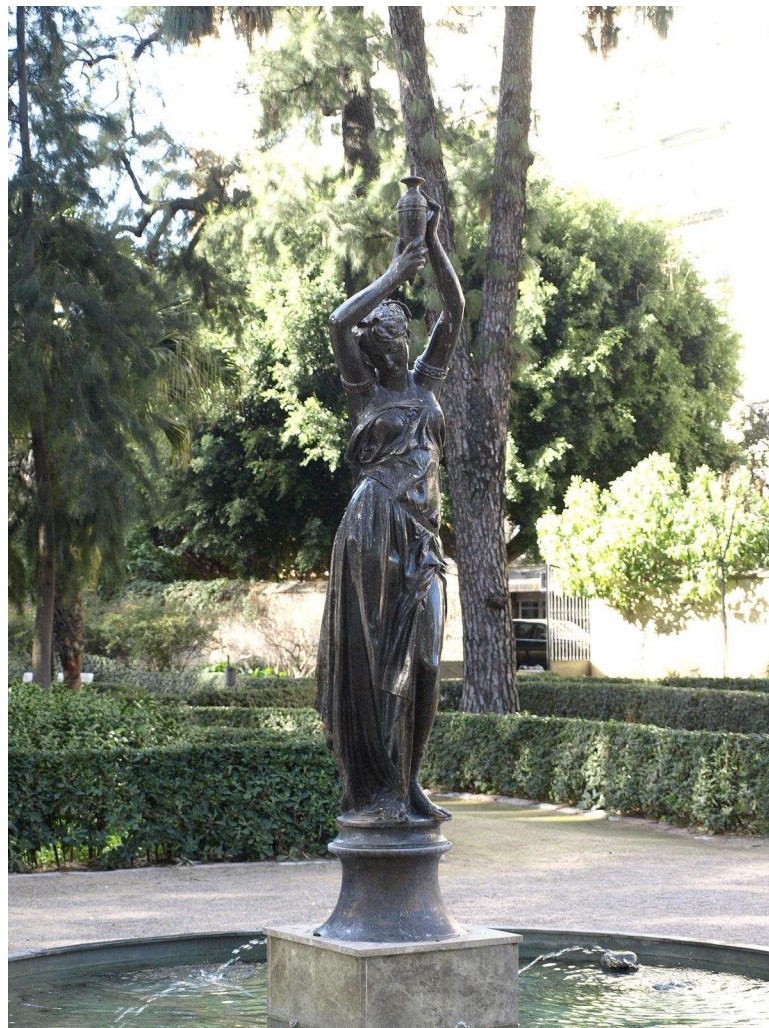


Fig. 4. Ayora Fountain (Photo: L. Almazán Morales)

This space is used by the people from the Algirós neighborhood as a place of calm, rest, and peace within the noise of the city. This garden is the only “green” space

⁸ Vigué 2000. Study of gardens and its structures.

⁹ Carlón Palacios 2011. History and characteristics of different gardens with various species.

in this neighborhood and therefore it is very dear to the local inhabitants. The garden's tall trees help the visitor to feel that they are in a space completely away from the city, though in reality it is in the center of a large and busy neighborhood. This green space is designed to be a place away from all noise, intended for privacy and the enjoyment of its many plant species. The function of this garden likely hasn't changed as much as might be assumed, as it still serves as a place of calmness, peace, and privacy as part of a private villa¹⁰. As it was originally, the garden remains separated from the villa and enclosed within a stone wall. Although it is no longer private property and is a part of public life the garden is designed in such a way that it makes the visitor feel as though they have escaped into a private space. As the neighborhood has little in the way of tourist attractions, the garden is kept "private" by the fact that it is little-known beyond its immediate neighbors. Its design, despite careful landscaping, evokes the "wildness" of nature and encourages the admiration of plant species, with a large number of benches available for contemplation. The trees found in the garden are quite hardy and generally tolerant of more arid environments. It is also important to mention that some of the species were originally planted to provide food to the Ayora family. Examples include the olive trees, the lindens, the date palms, the apple and laurel trees. However, it is difficult to determine precisely which species are original, even though most were planted during the period in which the complex was privately owned. A great variety of fauna can also be found in the garden, as it is a perfect home for many local species of birds. The garden is closed and away from the Palace, which serves to make it a private and intimate space in contrast to Valencia's several city gardens¹¹ – including *Viveros*, *Parterre*, and the *Glorieta* – which are entirely open, they are totally open and hide nothing. By keeping the Ayora Garden enclosed, the impression of private ownership is maintained. Even the entrances to the garden are partially concealed, leading visitors not familiar with the area to believe that the space is, in fact, still privately owned. The *Monforte* gardens¹² were similarly private, but their transformation following public acquisition saw the garden and the residence united openly, with the house as an annex to the garden¹³. The Ayora Garden has cultivated separate uses and use spaces for the villa and the garden, to the extent that they are currently maintained by two different institutions. Despite its many attractions, however, it should be noted that the garden does not have identification signs for all of the wide variety of trees and plants to aid visitors' understanding. This element would be of great benefit, adding an educational aspect to its current social and recreational functions. A good goal for a future project would be to create a didactic workshop for school children¹⁴.

Around the garden, there are elements that help this space to remain quiet and private. In the eastern part of the garden, there is an area for games and space to play *petanque*. To the west is the subway mouth and areas for dog walkers. This creates a separation between more active social activities and the peaceful, contemplative atmosphere of the primary garden.

¹⁰ Velarde 2011. Green spaces and the way they are managed.

¹¹ Samo-Lumbreras 2001. Reference to learn more about Valencian Gardens and their resident recurrent found species.

¹² Santamaría 1993. History of Monforte Gardens.

¹³ *Guía de jardines históricos* 2009. This book helped in understanding Valencian gardens and their differences and similarities with the Ayora Garden.

¹⁴ Sarthou Carreres 1948-1949. Study of the gardens in Spain and Valencia in order to understand similarities between those and this garden; Añón Feliú, Luengo 2003.

In order to put the value of this site in perspective, it is important to be aware of its history and structure, and this requires a solid understanding of its component parts¹⁵. In this project I focused on the garden in order to highlight both its current significance and its potential as a space for learning and botanical research, both of which could be integrated in order to ensure continued public access.

To facilitate a more complete understanding of the Ayora garden and its species I did a detailed inventory of the trees. There are a total of 47 different species; one of which is included in the example below¹⁶ (**Fig. 6**) with the picture of the tree corresponding to the table (**Fig. 5**).

Common name: Silk cotton tree	Scientific name: <i>Chorisia speciosa</i>
Family	<i>Bombacaceae</i>
Origin	Brazil, Argentina
Plant	8-25 m Larger base, thin central portion and wider apex
Leaves	Deciduous 15 cm Light green color
Flowering	Summer and beginning of Autumn
Fruits	Ovoid capsules 15 × 10 cm Spherical seeds with cotton
Climate	Warm weather
Humidity	Medium-High
Irrigation	Drought tolerant
Light	Sun to partial shade
Use	Cotton material and decoration
Quantity	10 of this tree in the garden

Fig. 5. An example of the inventory of the trees of Ayora Garden (L. Almazán Morales)

¹⁵ Kluckert 2000. History and structure of the gardens; Baridon 2005.

¹⁶ Ballester-Olmos y Anguís 1998; Ballester-Olmos y Anguís 2000; Mabberley 2008. Important reference for the Valencian garden and all its different species. The information on the silk cotton tree in the above table is partly taken from these books.



Fig. 6. *Chorisia speciosa* (Photo: L. Almazán Morales)

It is also important to discuss the sources used for this part of the project as I am not a biologist and it was therefore difficult to understand the characteristics of each species and to identify them. For this I used a variety of sources, including: *Mabberley's plant-book: a portable dictionary of plants, their classification and uses* by David John Mabberley; *El Jardín Valenciano: Origen y caracterización estilística & Árboles y arbustos de los jardines de Valencia* by José Fco & Ballester-Olmos y Anguís; additional sources consulted can be found at the end of this article.

Once a solid understanding of the garden has been achieved, the primary goal of this research project comes into focus: the creation of an educational program for the engagement of children and other visitors interested in the garden and its history. This program would include a tour around the Ayora Garden with a full explanation of the complex's history and layout including a description of the different vegetable species grown in the garden. After the tour the visitors would be guided to the fountain at the center, where they would be given a notebook with self-directed activities to be

completed in smaller groups. The notebook would also contain additional information and questions for students to answer on the identification of plant species¹⁷. An example can be found in **Fig. 7** below.

a) *Phoenix canariensis*



Fig. 7. *Phoenix canariensis* (Photo: L. Almazán Morales)

This palm tree comes from the Canary Islands. Unlike other species of palm tree; it has a thick trunk and a dense crown. The leaves also have a very distinctive shape, with a sharply pointed end and very hard surface.

- 1) Which fruit does this palm tree produce?
- 2) Can you identify this tree in the garden?

In order to complete this type of exercise it would be necessary to install identification cards near the majority of plant and tree species. Such cards are currently lacking, and while they are not a standard feature of ornamental gardens they are nearly universally found in botanical gardens as they are necessary in order to study the

¹⁷ Costa, Plumed 2016. This book is useful for the identification of different botanical species.

different species¹⁸. The Ayora Garden's current purpose is primarily entertainment; therefore informational placards have not previously been considered a necessary element. This project suggests, however, that the public function of the garden could be significantly enhanced by a greater focus on education. It is suggested, therefore, that identification cards be placed under each tree in the garden to help visitors identify species, both for the purpose of the proposed learning initiative as well as for casual viewers. Below is an example of a botanical identification card (**Fig. 8**):

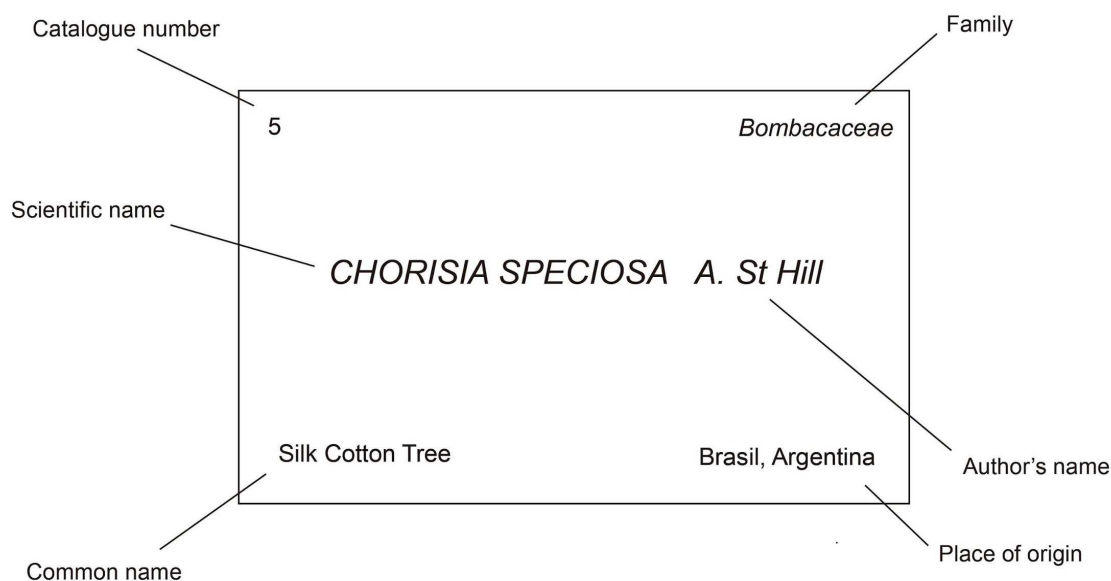


Fig. 8. Model of a botanical identification card based on those in use at the *Jardí Botànic de la Universitat de València*

This exercise could be adapted depending on the age, grade level, and interests of participants. The activity is intended to teach visitors about botany and how to notice and identify different plant species. An additional benefit to the project is the increased visibility and value of this historical and cultural complex. The project could also be used to raise awareness of the environment and to teach children to recycle and to be environmentally conscious. Therefore, the project can be seen as a helpful tool for improving public perception of sites of cultural and landscape heritage, and for increasing understanding of the importance of responsible stewardship¹⁹.

The project I conducted at the Ayora Garden can also be adapted to a wide variety of cultural institutions, including museums²⁰. In completing an internship at the Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilization in Deva (**Fig. 9**), Romania, I had the opportunity to conduct different tours of the building interior, which though different from a tour of an outdoor space is fundamentally similar in its method. After participating in several tours, I realized the potential for this project to me modified for this cultural space.

¹⁸ Godet 1993. Identification of the plants, with a how-to guide.

¹⁹ Kotler, Kotler 2001. Managing of museums and heritage.

²⁰ Hermosilla *et al.* 2017. How to develop an area as a tourist destination and how to manage such an area in order to preserve it.

The museum²¹ is located directly beneath the town's medieval fortress and next to both a recreational park and the city center. Therefore, this museum is perfectly situated to attract visitors. It is very important to have tours available for all visitors in order to facilitate a better understanding of the historical context of the pieces and their meaning. The way the museum is presented to children is very critical, as for many this is their first museum experience. If children are able to learn in and enjoy this environment they are more likely to develop a friendly and caring relationship with education, cultural heritage, and history. They may also be more willing to pursue their own historical interests outside of the museum and to cultivate these interests through visits to other museums and cultural institutions.



Fig. 9. Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilization, Deva, Hunedoara County, Romania
(Photo: L. Almazán Morales)

Having this learning program at the museum would improve the experience of visitors, especially children. Of course, the program would have to be focused on objects of interest in different areas of the museum. One of the most unique and significant objects currently on display is the Bronze Matrix (**Fig. 10**); such a piece could be used to introduce the visitors to the Dacian culture and its history – one which is extremely important in the region, the museum is located very close to the former Dacian capital, Sarmizegetusa Regia, where the matrix was found. In the context of this museum, the activity could begin with a tour, followed by the provision of notebooks containing questions about the objects viewed and facts learned. Below is an example²²:

²¹ Ferencz 2017. Bibliographic reference for the Museum in Deva, its history and characteristics.

²² Aguilera, Carrau 1989. Guide to learn about teaching that would help me understand how to do a didactic activity.

b) Bronze Matrix

Fig. 10. Bronze Matrix of Sarmizegetusa Regia (Photo: L. Almazán Morales)

- 1) What material is it made of?
- 2) When was this matrix found?
- 3) What do you think was used for?

Of course, this example can be used for other museum pieces and may be adjusted depending on the age group targeted, the number of people involved and visitors' individual interests. It provides a basis for other workshops as well, with the primary aim of engaging visitors with the museum exhibitions in order to generate increased interest and encourage repeat visits. The notebook could also function as a souvenir of the visit, especially for children in order to help them refresh and retain the information provided.

This project was conceived in order to manage a cultural area to increase its visibility and value to visitors. Sites of natural and cultural heritage are treasures to be protected and preserved and it is very important to ensure the knowledge they impart is transmitted to future generations so that we can use our past to find a way towards a better future.

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Valorificarea patrimoniului valencian: Grădina de Ayora

Rezumat

Articolul este parte a unei cercetări referitoare la Grădina Ayora din Valencia, Spania. Obiectivul acestui proiect este acela de a aduce în atenție o activitate care să pună în valoare grădina Ayora, deoarece este un loc mai puțin cunoscut chiar și pentru locuitorii aceluiași oraș. Este vorba despre un complex monumental format dintr-un palat construit în anul 1900 (**Fig. 1**), precum și dintr-o grădină situată chiar lângă clădire (**Fig. 2-4, 6-7**). Ambele erau deținute în mod privat de către familia Ayora, iar astăzi este un loc deschis publicului larg.

Lucrarea urmărește trei planuri. Un prim aspect este cel al unui studiu istoric al Palatului și al familiei Ayora, fiind urmărită structura clădirii și modul în care și-a schimbat, în timp, aspectul, de la forma inițială. Cel de-al doilea aspect conține o analiză a grădinii și a speciilor sale. În această secțiune am făcut un catalog cu diferitele specii de arbori găsite în grădină și o foaie de identificare botanică (**Fig. 5**), drept exemplu (**Fig. 8**). În partea a treia propunem un atelier didactic pentru vizitatori, special dedicat elevilor, pentru a pune în valoare această grădină. Atelierul didactic va consta din efectuarea unui tur ghidat în apropierea complexului monumental și apoi din distribuirea unor mici formulare (care pot fi luate acasă) cu diferite întrebări despre speciile grădinii și cu loc pentru răspunsuri. În cadrul acestor ateliere, elevii vor învăța lucruri noi despre un loc pe care nu l-au mai văzut, precum și despre istoria familiei care a trăit în grădina Ayora. În plus, elevii vor dobândi cunoștințe de botanică și vor învăța cum să identifice diferite specii. Este o practică foarte utilă, care poate influența pozitiv predarea, elevii petrecând o zi în aer liber cu colegii și profesorii, învățând să lucreze în echipe și să se distreze.

Moștenirea culturală este un atu foarte prețios și totuși este uitată de multe ori și este important să avem un management bun pentru a o face cunoscută. Desigur, acest lucru trebuie realizat prin păstrarea și respectarea istoriei și a integrității patrimoniului. Din acest motiv, consider că este foarte important să transmitem și altora ceea ce am învățat, fie prin intermediul atelierelor, fie prin vizite la obiective istorice ori prin efectuarea de cursuri. În acest fel, contribuim la păstrarea patrimoniului cultural și natural și contribuim la dezvoltarea interesului și a respectului pentru istorie, care conduc în același timp la un viitor mai bun. Prin prezentarea grădinii Ayora ca un muzeu în aer liber, așa cum propune și acest atelier, elevii pot dezvolta, de asemenea, sensibilitate și conștientizare cu privire la importanța îngrijirii mediului, deoarece este locul potrivit pentru a vorbi despre sustenabilitate și reciclare.

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