LETTER TO THE EARTH



Pegadas!
Guimarães

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Background

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- SDG 1 — No Poverty
- SDG 2 — Zero Hunger
- SDG 3 — Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 4 — Quality Education
- SDG 5 — Gender Equality
- SDG 6 — Clean Water and Sanitation
- SDG 7 — Affordable and Clean Energy
- SDG 8 — Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 9 — Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- SDG 10 — Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 11 — Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12 — Responsible Consumption and Production
- SDG 13 — Climate Action
- SDG 14 — Life Below Water
- SDG 15 — Life on Land
- SDG 16 — Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- SDG 17 — Partnerships for the Goals

Conclusion

Acknowledgements


SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

Introduction

This book came from a simple challenge: what if every school in Guimarães were to write a letter to the planet?

This is the final outcome of that challenge. A challenge set for schools as part of the Municipal Environmental Education Programme – PEGADAS, grounded in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the principles of the Earth Charter.

This wide-ranging challenge invited school communities to deepen their understanding of the major environmental and social issues of our time — and, above all, to identify what each of them can do, starting from Guimarães, to make a difference to the world.

Page by page, we will find the work of 15 classes from 15 lower secondary and upper secondary schools in the municipality of Guimarães, where young people researched, debated and translated their vision into proposals for what they believe can be done to create a fairer and more sustainable planet.

Laboratório da Paisagem extends its sincere thanks to the classes and teachers who made this book possible. Every student and teacher involved has demonstrated that youth participation is not a promise for the future — it is a present, active and transformative reality.

May this letter reach far and wide.




10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES
12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
13 CLIMATE ACTION
14 LIFE BELOW WATER
15 LIFE ON LAND
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Background

The Earth Charter, the document that inspired this project, is a declaration of fundamental ethical principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century. Developed over a decade of international consultations and officially launched in 2000, the Earth Charter is now a key reference document for environmental education and global citizenship worldwide.

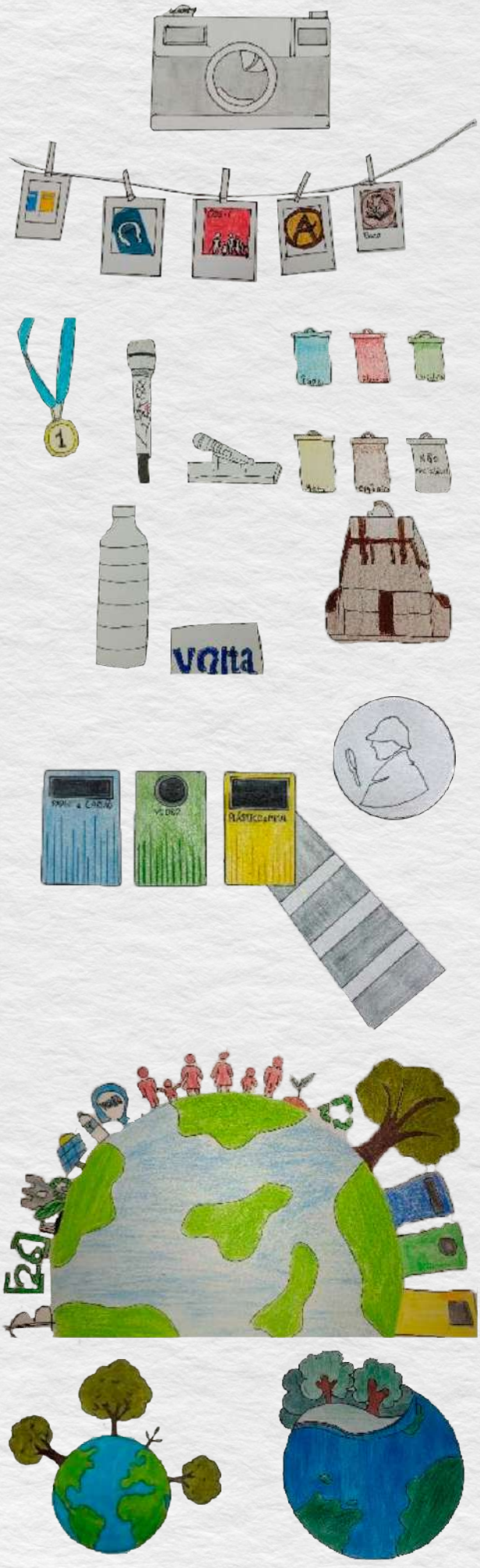
Its principles are organised around four main pillars: respect for and care of the community of life; ecological integrity; social and economic justice; and democracy, non-violence and peace. More than just a political document, the Earth Charter is a call for shared responsibility — the recognition that the future of the Earth depends on the choices we make today, both individually and collectively.

Later, in 2015, 193 member states of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — an unprecedented collective commitment to build a better world across a range of distinct and wide-ranging areas. At its heart are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

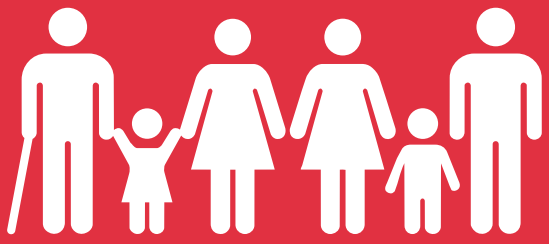
The SDGs are not abstract goals – as the message that 'there is no such thing' emphasises – but rather a roadmap for action that recognises the interdependence between people and the planet: there can be no lasting prosperity without social equity, nor social equity without a healthy environment. The SDGs are a call for everyone to get involved: governments, businesses, communities and citizens.

In this book, each school has focused on a specific SDG and sought to answer a key question: what can we, here in Guimarães, do to help achieve the targets and build a better world? From the local to the global, the visions and proposals set out here are locally rooted but universal in their intent.

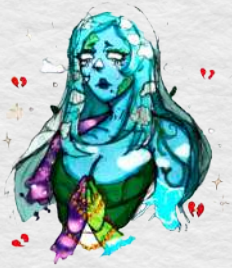

SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS
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3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
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15
16
17



1 NO POVERTY

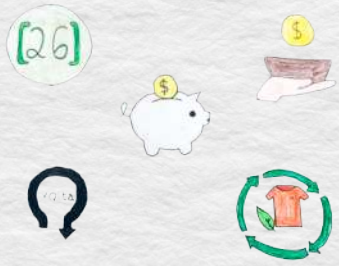


From trash to resource



SDG 1 aims to eradicate poverty in all its forms.
Class 8C has shown that ecology and social justice are closely intertwined: without economic equity, there can be no sustainability. To ensure that no one is left behind, we have set up the solidarity bank ABANKão and the school currency BACO, replacing economic power with civic merit. In this way, we fight consumerism, promote inclusion and protect the planet!







1. **Local:** Linking financial education with civic action, an approach that won us the award at the Rap dos Seguros*
2. **Local:** Introducing the ‘BACO’ currency to reward environmental merit, replacing economic power.
3. **Local:** Set up the ‘ABANKão’ bank, ensuring that no pupil is left behind for a lack of money.
4. **Local:** Guarantee a Basic Social Income in BACOs, giving everyone the same starting point.
5. **Local:** Organise swap fairs to fight consumerism and enable the fair acquisition of goods.
6. **Local:** Georeference ‘shadow zones’ lacking recycling points or safety, protecting vulnerable populations**.**
7. **Regional:** Integrate the solidarity economy model into Guimarães European Green Capital 2026.
8. **National:** Use the ‘V de Volta’ deposit scheme to support schools and families via vouchers.
9. **National:** Demand inclusive urban planning, with good accessibility and recycling points for all.
10. **International:** Promote teacher training (Erasmus/SYNAPSES) by sharing innovations across Europe.

***Did you know that…**

... Class 8C won the Special Insurance Award with its ‘Rap dos Seguros’ (Insurance Rap), proving that citizenship can be sung and that saving money is also a deeply ecological act!



2 ZERO HUNGER

More Solidarity, Less Inequality



SDG 2 – Zero Hunger – aims to end hunger, ensure access to safe and nutritious food, and promote sustainable agriculture. Globally, this challenge is reflected above all in malnutrition, food insecurity and food waste. By making more conscious food choices and by reducing waste, each person can contribute to a fairer, healthier and more sustainable world.

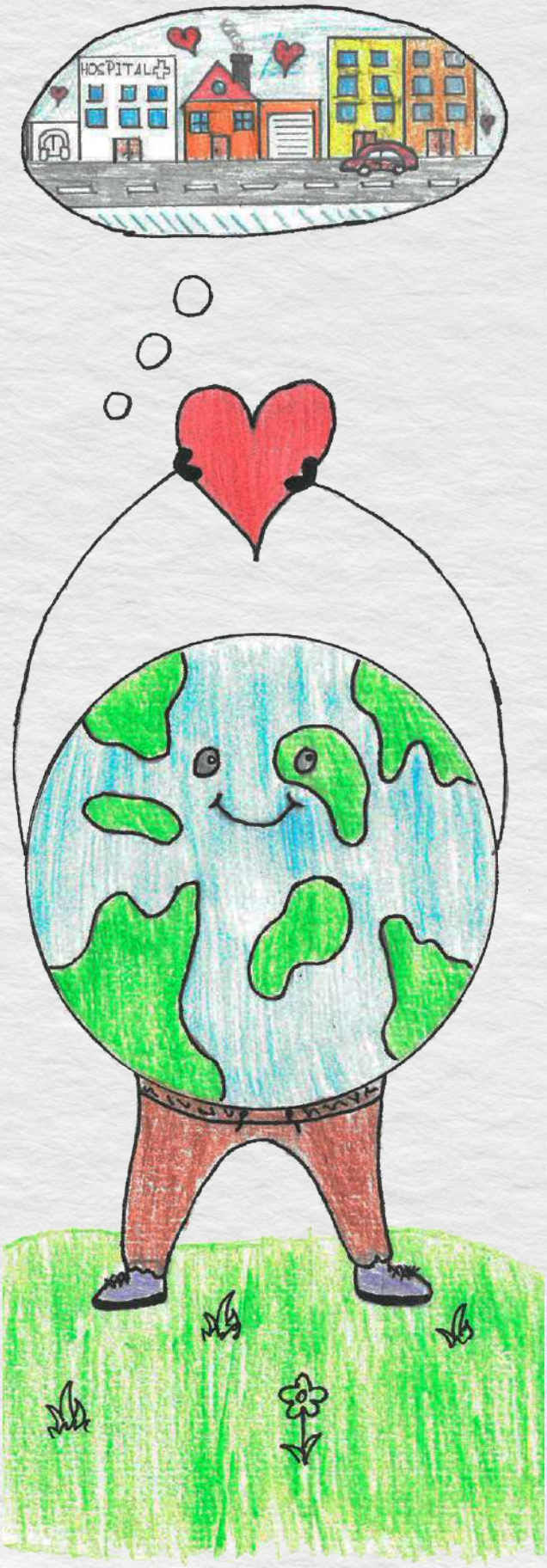
Hunger and food insecurity continue to affect millions of people around the world, preventing them from accessing a healthy and balanced diet. To tackle this problem, we must adopt concrete measures that are accessible to all, including:

1. Reducing food waste;
2. Donating food to charities;
3. Taking part in food collection campaigns;
4. Buying from local producers and supporting sustainable agriculture;
5. Promoting community and school vegetable gardens;
6. Raising awareness of healthy eating;
7. Make better use of food;
8. Use apps that help prevent waste;
9. Encourage sustainable farming practices;
10. Working with organisations that fight hunger.

If everyone does their bit, we can build a world with less hunger, one that is healthier and more sustainable.

***Did you know that…**

... around a third of the food produced worldwide is wasted, whilst millions of people continue to go hungry? Reducing food waste is one of the most effective ways to help tackle hunger and protect the environment.



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Taking care of our health is taking care of the future of the planet



SDG 3, one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all people, at all ages. This goal highlights the importance of access to healthcare, disease prevention and healthy lifestyles , contributing to more balanced communities and a more sustainable planet.

To contribute to SDG 3 in Guimarães, , a number of measures can be taken to promote the health and well-being of the community, namely:

1. Promote walking and cycling as alternatives to driving;
2. Expand the network of urban cycle paths;
3. Encourage healthy eating with local fruit and vegetables;
4. Set up educational vegetable gardens to promote healthy diets;
5. Take part in sports activities at school or in the community;
6. Organise school campaigns on mental health and well-being;
7. Introduce annual basic health screening programmes in schools (eyesight, hearing, weight);
8. Take part in school health education projects;
9. Reduce pollution through recycling;
10. Plant trees and look after green spaces.

***Did you know that…**

... sleeping well strengthens the immune system and improves concentration? Rest is essential for physical and mental well-being.



4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Education, today...



Quality education is one of the key pillars of sustainable development and is essential to ensuring a better future for all. SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education, promoting opportunities for lifelong learning. More than just a basic right, education is a tool for fighting poverty, reducing inequalities and driving economic and social growth.

Measures for a more sustainable planet:

1. Establishment of sustainability clubs and workshops;
2. Integrating environmental education across different subjects, with field trips to Guimarães' natural and cultural heritage sites;
3. Setting up organic school vegetable gardens;
4. Encouraging 'soft mobility' transport options to promote more sustainable travel;
5. Monitoring water and energy consumption to make the school more efficient and environmentally friendly;
6. Promoting digital literacy in an inclusive and responsible manner;
7. Establishing partnerships with universities, businesses and local organisations;
8. Organising national and international cultural exchanges;
9. Reducing the use of plastic in school canteens;
10. Providing ongoing training for teachers on the SDGs, ensuring that sustainability becomes part of the school's culture.

***Did you know that…**

... around 244 million children and young people worldwide are still out of school. Many live in regions affected by poverty or even in areas affected by armed conflict.



5 GENDER EQUALITY

Citizenship League: Voices for Equality



The mission of SDG 5 is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. This means ending all forms of discrimination and violence against them. Other targets include ensuring women's full participation in decision-making, guaranteeing access to economic and property rights, and recognising the value of unpaid domestic and care work. Despite some progress, there is still a long way to go.

Our proposals:

1. Create an app to report cases of inequality;
2. Take part in a 'reverse debate' (defending a viewpoint they do not believe in);
3. Attend a talk organised by the Portuguese Guides Association;
4. Require companies to justify pay differences for the same roles;
5. Establish a more effective victim protection scheme.
6. Organise outdoor activities to raise awareness of the cause;
7. Set up face-to-face mutual support groups;
8. Hold talks with first-hand testimonies in primary and secondary schools;
9. Disseminate information on social media.

***Did you know that…**

... women in Portugal earn, on average, 16 per cent less than men. According to UN Women, a woman or girl is killed every 10 minutes by a partner or family member.



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Water awareness



SDG 6 sets out the global commitment to ensure universal access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, with a focus on quality and sustainability. The unequal distribution of this resource highlights disparities between developed and developing countries. To achieve these targets, international cooperation, investment in infrastructure and technology, and a greater global effort are required.

Actions to be taken:

1. Cleaning rivers and drains while preserving local ecosystems;;
2. Installing more drinking fountains in schools and public spaces to improve access to drinking water;
3. Maintaining timed taps and monitoring toilet flushing systems to prevent water waste;
4. Implementing rainwater harvesting systems for watering and cleaning;
5. Replacing disposable plastic bottles with reusable ones and ensuring access to filtered water;
6. Running school awareness campaigns on efficient water use and reducing plastic;
7. Promote actions at home: avoid microplastics (e.g. by using the 'Beat the Micro Bead' app); opt for bulk detergents; reduce the use of synthetic clothing and avoid using fabric softeners; adopt water-saving habits, e.g. taking short showers, turning off the tap, running washing machines only when fully loaded, repairing leaks and avoiding waste in everyday life.

***Did you know that…**

... as part of its efforts towards the Green Transition, Guimarães reduced water losses by 16 per cent between 2017 and 2024, which contributed to its designation as the European Green Capital 2026?



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Disconnect from waste and connect to the future



The Sustainable Development Goal known as 'Affordable and Clean Energy' is one of the 17 key commitments of the UN 2030 Agenda. This SDG aims to ensure universal access to safe, sustainable and modern energy. Generating energy from renewable sources reduces pollution and fights climate change. Promoting energy efficiency and the responsible use of electricity helps to protect the planet and improves people's quality of life.

To achieve a more sustainable planet, we suggest the following measures:

To reduce energy consumption, the following measures are recommended:

1. Installing smart plugs;
2. Replacing appliances with more energy-efficient models;
3. Improving the thermal insulation of buildings;
4. Installing LED bulbs and motion sensors;
5. Reusing materials.

To promote the use of renewable energy:

1. Installation piezoelectric pedestrian crossings in critical areas;
2. Installation of solar panels on public buildings.

To raise awareness amongst the school and local communities, we suggest:

1. Setting up school vegetable gardens open to the public;
2. Monitoring and publishing the school's energy consumption figures on a monthly basis;
3. Establishment of a 'Sustainable Energy Day'.

***Did you know that…**

... in Guimarães, several energy efficiency and sustainable mobility projects have helped reduce CO_2 emissions, contributing to the city's designation as European Green Capital 2026?



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Fair Work!
An Economy with a Future!



Economic prosperity with ecological integrity: Is it possible?
Yes, as long as it is based on decent work! Class 8B at the Santos Simões School Group is challenging the Guimarães community to promote initiatives that value decent work, economic growth and responsible consumption, contributing to a more balanced, inclusive society that respects the planet. Be part of the change!

Our proposals:

1. Promoting green jobs: Encouraging careers in renewable energy, recycling, sustainable mobility and environmental conservation;
2. Supporting sustainable businesses: Providing tax incentives to businesses that adopt environmentally friendly practices;
3. Promoting vocational training: developing courses in sustainability and green technology;
4. Encouraging sustainable entrepreneurship: Supporting small businesses that offer reusable products or digital services;
5. Reducing youth unemployment: Creating more work placements and subsidising the recruitment of young people;;
6. Ensuring equal access to employment: Guaranteeing equal rights for all, regardless of gender, background or socio-economic status;
7. Promote collaboration between different sectors of society: Foster cooperation between institutions to achieve Sustainable Development Goals;
8. Raise awareness of responsible consumption: Encourage businesses and consumers to choose eco-friendly and responsible products.

***Did you know that…**

... Guimarães has been named the European Green Capital for 2026 and is a certified Sustainable Tourist Destination? Responsible tourism supports local businesses, creates decent jobs (SDG 8) and protects our history without polluting the planet.



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Building Tomorrow, Starting Here



SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure – recognises that without inclusive transport, energy and communications networks, no economy can prosper fairly. Globally, millions of people still live without access to basic technology or resilient infrastructure. Investing in sustainable industry and accessible innovation is therefore an investment in a fairer future for all.

Guimarães can play an active role in achieving these goals through:

1. Installation of solar panels on the municipality's school buildings;
2. Visits to local businesses with sustainable production practices;
3. Development of robotics and technology projects using reused materials;
4. Creation of a municipal network for sharing technological equipment;
5. Integration of digital literacy and innovation subjects into the school curriculum;
6. Support for start-ups focused on environmental solutions;
7. Partnerships with universities for local research projects;
8. Awareness-raising initiatives on the responsible use of technological and energy resources;
9. Participation in European programmes on innovation and sustainable infrastructure.

***Did you know that…**

... Guimarães is set to have Portugal's first optical satellite factory in Pevidém? Housed in a former industrial building, it will be dedicated to the assembly, integration and testing of satellites.



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

We are the same

SDG 10 – "Reduced Inequalities" – is one of the 17 global goals set out in the UN's 2030 Agenda. This SDG aims to reduce inequalities around the world, so that everyone has the same opportunities to achieve their personal and professional goals, regardless of their household income, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability or any other circumstance.



What should we do at school to help achieve this SDG:

1. Create posters or videos for the school's social media channels that celebrate the stories of people who have faced inequality;
2. Organise talks with members of the community from different backgrounds;
3. Avoid judging people on the basis of their social status, race, gender, ethnicity, origin, religion, disability or any other characteristic;
4. Work collaboratively as a group , including everyone;
5. Give new pupils a warm welcome;
6. Launch anti-bullying campaigns:
7. Ensure that all pupils take part in activities;
8. Organise a cultural diversity week;
9. Create opportunities for pupils from different countries and religions to share their culture and customs;
10. Bring together pupils from the school with different religions or from different countries in small groups in the school library to talk about their culture.

***Did you know that…**

... ... Guimarães is a UNESCO Learning City, promoting education and lifelong learning opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds?



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



Guimarães with Heart in Action



The need to make cities and communities more inclusive and sustainable has led to the creation of a Sustainable Development Goal, SDG 11.

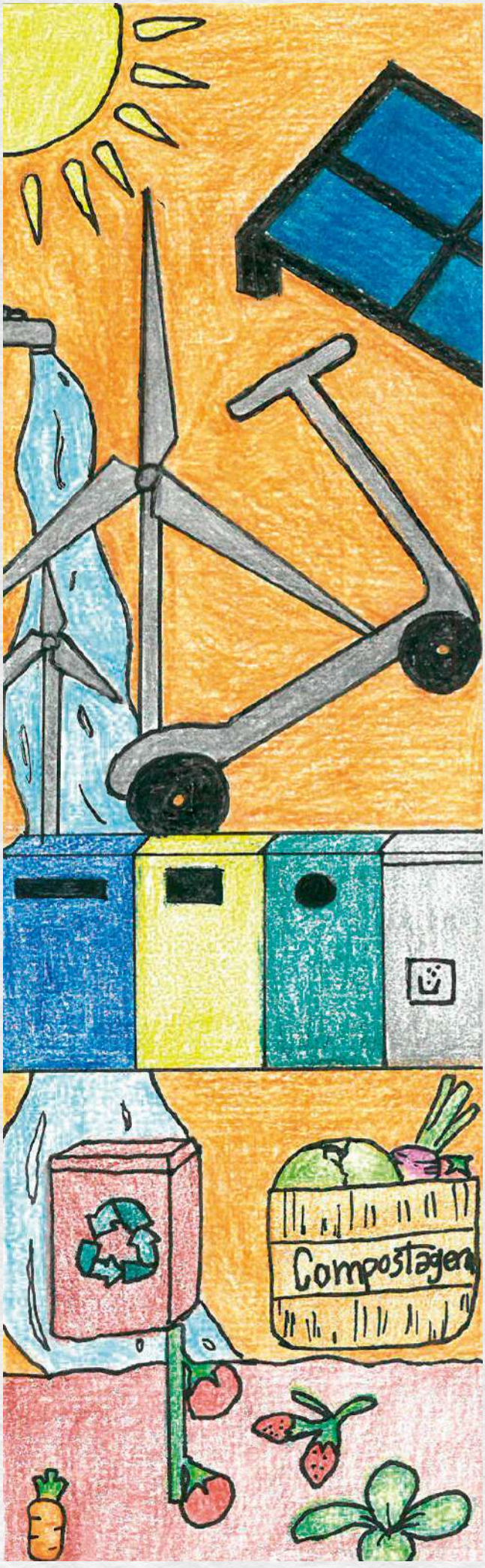
It aims to ensure access to safe housing and basic services; provide safe and environmentally friendly transport; ensure planned urbanisation, while protecting cultural and natural heritage; reduce of the social and economic impacts of disasters; improve air quality; ensure access to safe public spaces; and encourage cooperation between urban and rural areas.

Oh, time! Time that passes, time that presses, and still no action? It is time to act, to ensure the sustainability of Guimarães:

1. My parents used to walk to school. I could do the same, but we need more cycle paths and pavements. And let's not forget that an inclusive city must cater for people with reduced mobility.
2. At my school, rush hour is chaotic. Accessible drop-off and pick-up points would help.
3. My grandparents saw burning waste as the solution. As for me, I sort my waste and use recycling bins.
4. We need to raise public awareness, recycle and invest in greener transport to reduce pollution.
5. In the past, it was common to see children playing in the streets. Today, there are few green spaces. We need more parks, gardens and safe places.
6. In the past, houses were passed down through the generations. And today? There is a housing shortage and high prices. The government must support the refurbishment of vacant properties for affordable rent, and ensure that new housing powered by renewable energy and built sustainably.
7. Increasingly frequent natural disasters require urgent solutions! We must invest in drainage and strengthen flood protection in the River Ave basin.

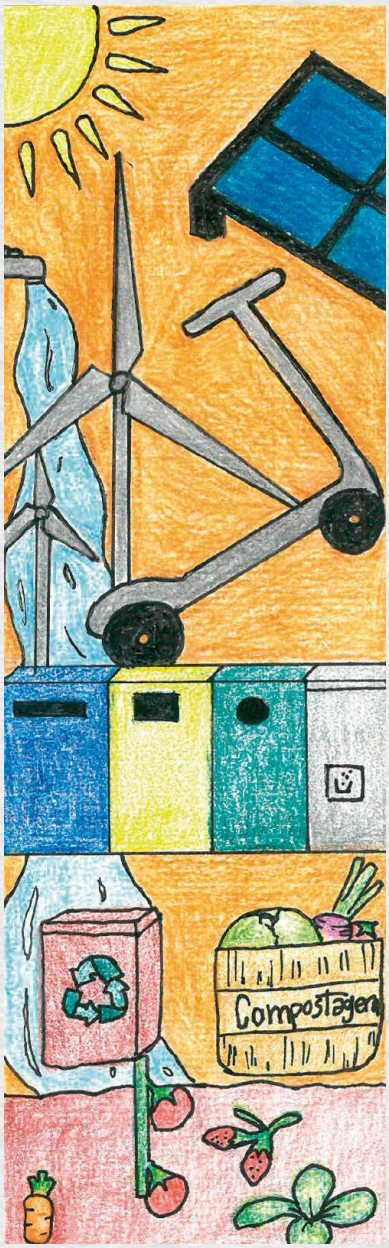
***Did you know that…**

... Guimarães was one of the first municipalities in Portugal to invest in a predominantly electric public transport fleet. 36,000 of its streetlights will switch to LED technology. 40 tonnes of recycled plastic is equivalent to 1.6 million bottles or 4 km of road.



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Caring for the Earth



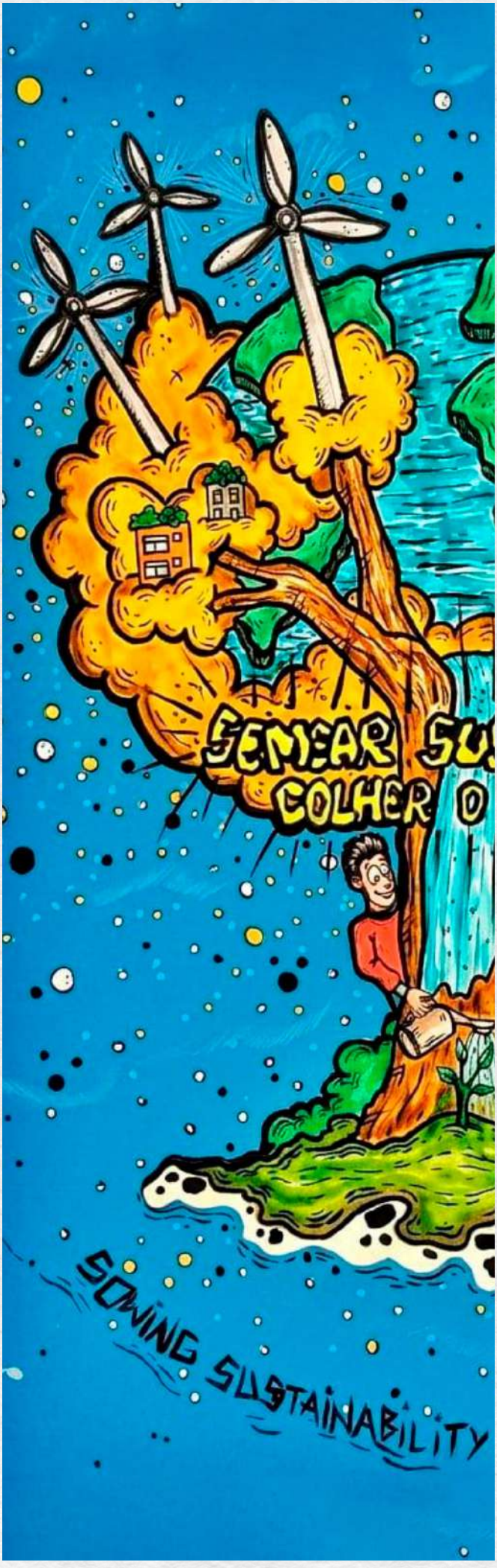
SDG 12 calls for a global shift towards sustainable patterns of consumption and production. It prioritises the efficient use of resources, the reduction of waste (particularly food waste) and the proper management of chemicals and waste. In practice, this means encouraging people to reduce consumption; to reuse and recycle more; to support sustainable businesses; and to protect natural resources for future generations, ensuring a good quality of life on the planet.

Our proposals:

1. Promote the reduction of food waste in the school canteen;
2. Implement waste sorting and recycling;
3. Encourage the reuse of school supplies;
4. Reduce paper consumption by using digital platforms;
5. Promote water and energy-saving campaigns;
6. Give preference to local and sustainable suppliers;
7. Develop composting schemes;
8. Raise awareness of conscious consumption among the school community;
9. Organise clean-up initiatives in public spaces in Guimarães.

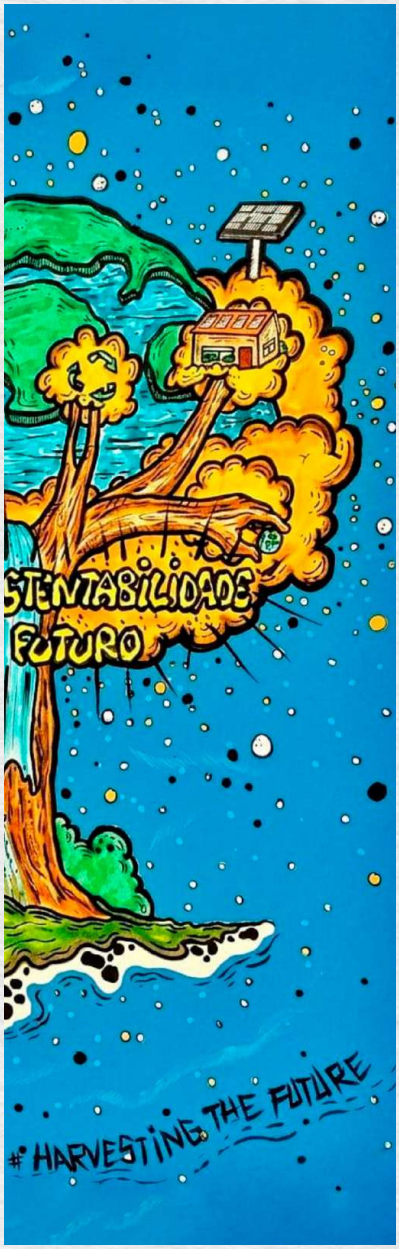
***Did you know that…**

... SDG 12 tackles food waste and overconsumption? By encouraging mindful shopping and reducing the use of plastic and natural resources.



13 CLIMATE ACTION

Sowing sustainability, reaping the future



SDG 13 — Climate action — is an urgent call for everyone to take responsibility for protecting the planet that sustains us. In the face of droughts, floods, heatwaves and rising sea levels, it is essential to act with determination and ongoing commitment. This goal encourages the reduction of polluting emissions, environmental education and the protection of the most vulnerable populations, promoting conscious and responsible choices and ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

Through small actions and conscious choices, real change can happen at many levels. The following measures reinforce this shared responsibility and encourage practices that contribute to a more sustainable future:

1. Running environmental awareness campaigns for the school community;
2. Reforestation Pedra Fina mountain (in Guimarães) to restore local biodiversity;
3. Creation of new green spaces to improve air quality;
4. Promoting non-polluting modes of transport, among the general public;
5. Introducing symbolic fines on those who drop litter on public roads;
6. Organising volunteer programmes to clean streets, rivers and beaches;
7. Making reusable materials mandatory at public events;
8. Installation of additional recycling bins in busy areas;
9. Implementation of composting schemes in public spaces, particularly in schools.

***Did you know that…**

... the global temperature has already risen by 1.1°C as a result of human activity?A tree can absorb 20kg of CO_2 .



14 LIFE BELOW WATER

The ocean breathes. But for how long?



The ocean covers 71 per cent of the Earth and produces half the oxygen we breathe. It is what keeps us alive. But pollution, plastic, global warming and overfishing are destroying its ecosystems at an alarming rate. SDG 14 challenges the world to protect marine life before it is too late. Because saving the sea is not just about protecting fish; it is about protecting the future for all of us.

Our proposal:

1. Raise awareness, through the PEGADAS programme, of the use of biodegradable products;
2. Encourage the use of reusable cups and less packaging in schools and at events;
3. Involve the community in testing the water quality of local rivers;
4. Control the discharge of pollutants into rivers;
5. Set up clean-up teams for the River Ave and other watercourses;
6. Install waste collection points along the riverbanks;
7. Plant trees and protect vegetation along the river;
8. Raise awareness of rainwater reuse;
9. Report illegal waste dumping;
10. Avoid the excessive use of pesticides and fertilisers.

***Did you know that…**

... every year, 8 million tonnes of plastic end up in the sea, affecting 800 species? Pollution and global warming have already destroyed 30 per cent of the coral reefs, and overfishing and ocean acidification caused by CO_2 are threatening the oceans.



15 LIFE ON LAND

Roots of Briteiros, Future of the Planet



SDG 15 – Life on Land aims to protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, manage forests and halt biodiversity loss. Globally, the main challenges are habitat degradation and species extinction. In Guimarães, European Green Capital 2026, this goal means preserving the City Park, Serra da Penha and all the green spaces and woodlands in the municipality, which are vital for local biodiversity.

Measures that could help us achieve a more sustainable planet:

1. Set up a nursery for native plants at the Briteiros School to reforest the area.
2. Organise quarterly clean-ups of the woodland surrounding the schools, collecting litter and waste.
3. Install nest boxes and bird baths in the school playground and in the City Park.
4. Use an app to map the flora and fauna within the Briteiros School area, particularly the Citânia de Briteiros, and share the data with Guimarães City Council.
5. Raise awareness amongst the educational community about invasive species and the importance of controlling them, particularly on Monte de S. Romão and in the Montanha da Penha.
6. Promote a 'Zero Paper' campaign at the school, reducing consumption and reusing materials.
7. Organise local nature walks, particularly through the Citânia de Briteiros, Penha and Caldas das Taipas.
8. Implement a school composting scheme to reduce organic waste and fertilise the soil.

***Did you know that…**

... Montanha da Penha in Guimarães is an important area for biodiversity, where various species of flora and fauna find shelter and food, thereby helping to protect terrestrial ecosystems?



16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

For better institutions



SDG 16 aims to promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies, seeking to reduce all forms of violence; to ensure access to justice for all; and to build effective, accountable and transparent institutions. We must therefore work to reduce conflict, corruption and the abuse of power, while strengthening fair laws and respect for human rights. In Portugal, significant challenges remain, including the slowness of legal proceedings, unequal access to justice and mistrust of institutions. SDG 16 is therefore an essential pillar of sustainability: Without just, safe and inclusive societies, the other goals become more difficult to achieve.

Taking the Guimarães context as our starting point and in line with the principle of 'think global, act local', we believe it would be very important to:

1. Organise study visits to the Guimarães courthouse for pupils from schools across the municipality, so they can learn about the justice system;
2. Run campaigns in schools against hate speech on social media;
3. Set up offices within parish councils to support victims of violence;
4. Organise debates on justice and rights, bringing professionals (judges, lawyers, police officers) into schools;
5. Install physical and digital boxes for (anonymous) reports of corruption in public services;
6. Train local civil servants in ethics, transparency and citizen service;
7. Create a one-stop-shop platform for public institutions in an effort to reduce bureaucracy within the state.

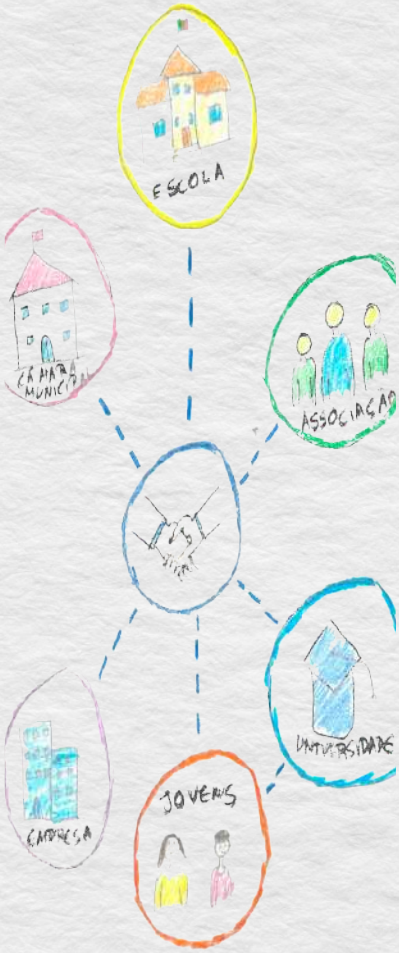
***Did you know that…**

... the Bairro C Citizens' Assembly involved local residents in devising solutions for the neighbourhood, and selected four proposals for its decarbonisation?



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Together We Go Further



No Sustainable Development Goal can be achieved in isolation. SDG 17 recognises that cooperation between governments, businesses, civil society and citizens is essential to transforming the world. At a global level, strengthening partnerships, sharing knowledge and mobilising financial resources are essential to ensuring that no country — and no person — is left behind.

To achieve this goal, we can:

1. Establish cooperation agreements between schools and local authorities.
2. Promote exchanges with schools in other countries within the framework of the SDGs.
3. Establish partnerships with local businesses to fund sustainable school projects.
4. Integrate the SDGs into interdisciplinary projects with universities in the region.
5. Participate in European networks for education for sustainability.
6. Develop digital platforms for sharing best practice among local authorities.
7. Organise local forums with young people, policy-makers and civil society organisations.
8. Support cooperation initiatives with developing countries through school campaigns.
9. Raise awareness among the school community of the role each citizen plays in global partnerships.

***Did you know that…**

... Guimarães has a platform where young people can suggest ideas and report problems: https://www.cm-guimaraes.pt/dar-vez-a-tua-voz-espaco-de-opiniao; In 2024, the first Citizens' Assembly was held in Guimarães, where strategies were drawn up for implementation in Neighbourhood C, some of which have already been put into practice.

Conclusion

“Think globally, act locally” is the motto of this book, which calls on everyone to take action. Each proposal presented here invites other schools, towns and local authorities to replicate it, with a view to building a fairer and more sustainable world. Can we count on you?

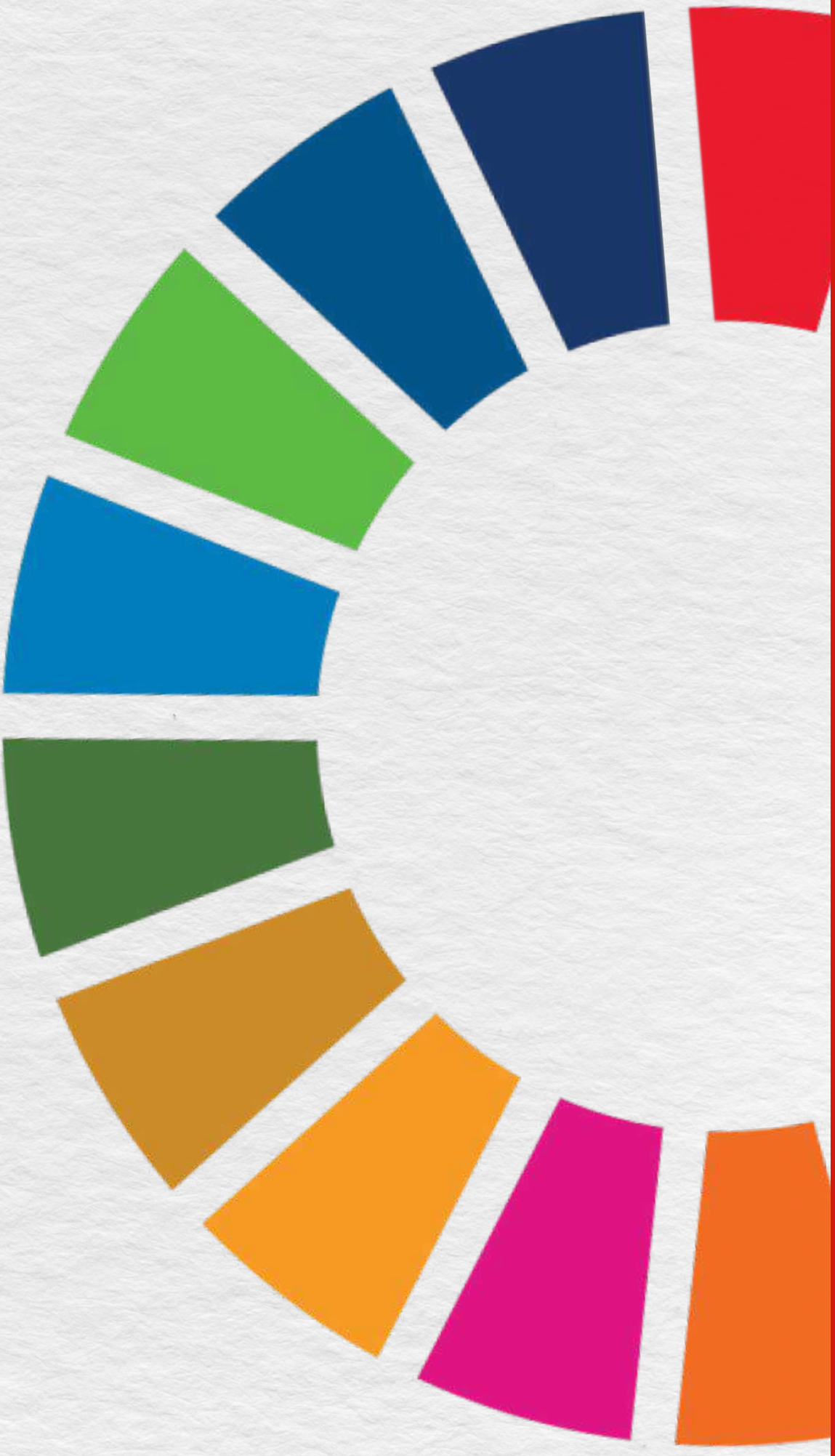
The proposals, visions and illustrations in this book were created by young students from Guimarães, a city designated as the European Green Capital for 2026.

This collaborative project was born here, reflecting a community that has long been involved and believes that sustainability is built through education, participation and shared responsibility.

It reflects a community that believes sustainability is built through education, participation and shared responsibility.

This publication is a starting point for action. It is now up to every pupil, teacher, support staff member and citizen to bring these proposals to life.

Breathe [Inspire] and take action! The next step is yours!



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More than just a project, this was an opportunity to learn together, share different perspectives and build, step by step, a more conscious, sustainable and inclusive future.

This book is the result of your excellent work.



Pegadas!
Guimarães

Laboratório da Paisagem

MUNICÍPIO DE GUIMARÃES