



CHANGE

Envisioning
sustainable futures

Changing abandoned gardens and green spaces into living laboratories

Abandoned garden and green space reactivation plots were transformed into living laboratories with biotic gardens and educational vegetable beds. Installing new systems alone was not enough – the school community had to learn how to use, monitor, and maintain them. Teachers, students, and facility staff worked together and shared responsibility.

In Spain, a tree-planting project introduced native shrubs and trees to enhance biodiversity and regulate the microclimate. Meanwhile, in Portugal, the Quinta do Charco Biological Garden

at Camarate Elementary School turned an abandoned plot into a vibrant learning space. It featured outdoor classrooms, a pond with ducks and chickens, native plant beds, and a vegetable garden irrigated by a planned rainwater harvesting system.

Through terrain analysis, participatory mapping, and prototype sketching – coordinated by architecture students from Instituto Superior Técnico and involving families, pupils and municipal stakeholders – the school community developed new technical and design skills. Community workshops further strengthened engagement, fostering collective ownership and long-term commitment to maintaining the garden.

Identifying and addressing individual, collective and technical-material challenges that hindered participation was essential for enabling change. Suggested actions included drafting written agreements to clarify responsibilities, ensuring accessibility, and sharing the project with other schools to broaden its impact.

Organisational and project management skills helped turn ideas into reality. Realising sustainability goals required planning, scheduling, delegation, and coordination. Teachers who encouraged students to take the lead not only empowered the students but also learned to assess project management. Designated committees played a key role in overseeing garden planning and implementation. Integrated planning with clearly aligned roles and responsibilities enabled faculty and staff to actively engage in green initiatives. Lasting solutions depended on structure, inclusion, and collaboration.