

Learning Pathway

From regenerative insight to durable responsibility

Version 2.0 · Framework in development

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The Portuguese text of this document is the canonical version. This English text is a translation.

Purpose and status

The Learning Pathway prepares people for the long-term care of land. It is intentionally directional rather than operational.

The Foundation is building it with partners. Format, locations, duration, trainers, assessment and cost will be published once they are confirmed, and not before. Nothing here should be read as an open enrolment.

For now, the pathway exists to make two things clear to prospective Guardians:

- There is a great deal to learn.
- Guardianship is a responsibility, not a lifestyle experiment.

How the pathway is organised

Four domains, one for each of the Four Returns

The Foundation measures what a Projecto Guardiã achieves through the Four Returns: inspirational, social, natural and financial. The Learning Pathway is organised the same way, so that what a Guardian learns and what a Guardian is later accountable for use one language rather than two.

Technical land skills are not a separate subject. They are learned in context, over time, with experienced practitioners and in real landscapes, inside the natural domain.

Before the four: reading a place

What regeneration means, beyond restoration

A short opening: a place read as a living system, the unrealised ecological, social, cultural and economic potential it holds, and the premise underneath all of it, that we are part of nature rather than separate from it. This is where most people find out whether the rest of the pathway is for them.

1. The inspirational return

The person

Why am I here. What is my potential, my path and my journey, and what does guardianship ask of me. What are my values and my principles. What are my needs and my limits inside a collective.

And a distinction that separates guardianship from maintenance: it is one thing to ask whether we are depleting a capital, and another to ask whether this place is becoming more able to evolve on its own terms. A Guardian who only asks the first question is caretaking an asset.

Outcome: the capacity to carry responsibility beyond the enthusiasm of beginnings.

2. The social return

The community

The story of the place. Who we are, and who we are not. Our values, principles and impact objectives. What community means here, and where its boundaries lie. Mapping and engaging the ecosystem of people and institutions around a place, including neighbours, municipalities, practitioners, funders and allies. Participatory governance, shared decision-making, conflict, and the human dynamics that end more long projects than ecology ever does.

Outcome: a living network of relationships, and a governance framework that holds when things get hard.

3. The natural return

The land

Soil health across its physical, biological, chemical and mycelial dimensions. Water and landscape restoration. Biodiversity management and monitoring. Principles of holistic and regenerative farming. Fire ecology.

Learned in the field rather than in a room, and over a longer period than the other three, because this is where mastery comes only from practice.

Outcome: the ability to read a landscape, to plan for it, and to evidence what changes.

4. The financial return

The economy

Revenue design and business model. Financial and cost models, including the true cost of care. Funding across grants, loans and investment. Newer economic models, including steward ownership and the circular economy.

And the part that is specific to this work: the economics of a living rural settlement rather than of a single enterprise, built on the joint use of local resources, local knowledge and the historic practices of a territory, and on being paid to perform functions of general interest rather than being subsidised.

One rule is taught here rather than in the natural domain, because this is where the temptation arises: a loss of natural capital in the Strategic Assets is not compensable by financial gain.

Outcome: an economic activity that can sustain the care of a place, and the household of the people doing it.

Bringing the four together

One place, carried through all four

The pathway closes on a single piece of place-based work carried across the four domains, producing something a participant can show: a reading of a place, a collective they belong to, a plan for the land, and a viable economic proposition.

Status

Work in progress

The Learning Pathway is being built iteratively, in real places, alongside real projects, and in partnership with practitioners and training organisations in Portugal and beyond. The Foundation expects the full framework to be published by the end of 2027. Certification is part of it and does not yet exist.

For now, this document makes one thing clear: regeneration is learned slowly, guardianship is earned, and responsibility sits at the centre of the path.

Framework note



The Four Returns framework is the work of Willem Ferwerda, developed by Commonland. Its twenty-year cycle is a planning and monitoring cycle. The Foundation's own horizon is permanence across generations, with a working horizon of seven generations for a Projecto Guardiã.

Start a conversation

The first step is a conversation, not a commitment

If any of this speaks to you, write to us. A first conversation places no obligation on either side. It exists so that we can understand your context together and work out what the most useful next step would be, which is sometimes learning, sometimes an introduction, and sometimes neither.

Begin at terra-agora.org, where you will find the contact form and the form for those exploring guardianship.

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