

Stories that aren't tales

Nature Narratives

RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH NATURE

The Story of Cávado and Homem River
Greenway



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How a 75km Greenway is Bringing People Back to Their Rivers

There is something timeless about a river. It shapes landscapes, nurtures communities, and quietly witnesses generations come and go. Yet in many places, modern life has created distance between people and the waterways that once defined their everyday lives.

In Portugal's Cávado region, that relationship is being rediscovered, one path at a time. Along the banks of the Cávado and Homem rivers, a green corridor is drawing people back to the water, and back to each other.



Discovering a Corridor from Mountain to Sea

The Ecovia Cávado and Homem was conceived with an ambitious vision: to link the mountains to the sea.

It begins at Peneda-Gerês National Park, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve on the border with Spain, and follows the Cávado and Homem rivers all the way to the Atlantic coast at Esposende, threading through six municipalities that have long shared these waters as part of their identity.

For Júlia, one of the project's strongest advocates, its greatest achievement lies in a simple but powerful idea: connection.

"This infrastructure serves to bring people closer to these wonderful places, these natural marvels we have," she explains. "And when people are closer, they care more."



What Is the Ecovia Cávado and Homem?

The Ecovia is a 75km green infrastructure project, but it is far more than a riverside cycling and walking path. It combines the restoration of watercourses, riparian galleries and riverbanks with the rehabilitation of leisure spaces (river beaches, green areas), educational features (nature trails, panels identifying local flora and fauna) and cultural sites (old mills, parks).

By blending hybrid nature-based and grey solutions, the project stabilises banks, restores habitats, improves water quality and strengthens resilience to extreme weather, all while keeping people, mobility and local economic life at its centre.



The Impact

Every day, the greenway tells its own story. Early in the morning, runners follow the riverbanks; families push prams beneath the shade of riverside trees; older residents take leisurely walks while children discover nature just beyond their neighbourhoods. At weekends, the paths grow livelier still, filled with cyclists and families enjoying time outdoors together.

For a region where river beaches like Faial and leisure spots such as Ponte Nova, Porto Carrero, Malheira, Ouriz and Porto São Vicente have long hosted summer afternoons and community gatherings, the greenway hasn't replaced these traditions, it has stitched them together into one continuous, accessible network.



Lessons Learned

Start Small, Think Big

The Ecovia grew section by section, county by county, instead of happening all at once, following an integrated strategy of an intermunicipal project designed to connect the territory. Each completed section created the justification and interest for the next extensions towards Barcelos, a second corridor along the Homem River and, now, new projects on the Vade and Neiva rivers.

Observe and Learn

As a result of intermunicipal networking and the growing demand for recreational spaces and the potential of the territory, and the way people currently use the space—walking, running, cycling, meeting on weekends—the implementation of the sections is dictated by their increasing use, following the guideline of sub-regional connectivity. As Julia states, proximity is what transforms use into care

Work with Nature

The result is a corridor that improves ecological connectivity by enhancing riverbanks and water quality, increasing its climate resilience, and continuing to function as a living ecosystem.

Replicable Solutions

The same model, a maintained, accessible corridor connecting river beaches and leisure areas, is now being extended to other rivers in Vila Verde, including a newly funded renaturalisation of a 33km² stretch of the Neiva. It shows other communities that the approach travels beyond a single river.



Looking Forward

The Ecovia is far from being completed along its entire planned length, but the region is committed to realizing it, uniting the sea with the mountains and the mountains with the sea, and to the potential for increased climate resilience that this will bring to the region. Plans are already underway to extend the route from Faiat and Prado to the boundary with Barcelos, reaching Gaião Beach in Cabanelas, and to develop a parallel stretch along the Homem River between Porto Carrero and Malheira Beach, both included in Portugal's 2030 development programme. Similar greenways are also envisioned along the Vade and Neiva rivers, including a newly funded renaturalisation of a 33km² stretch of the Neiva.

As Julia sums it up: **“It is an investment in the future, an investment in the present, and an investment in everything that is sustainability.”** In Cávado, the message is clear: when communities reconnect with their rivers, they also rediscover their responsibility to care for them.







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