

**Stories of justice
in action:**

**Learning from the
INTERLACE project**





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This document was developed as part of the INTERLACE project, funded by the EU's Horizon 2020 programme. The project aims to restore nature in cities across Europe and Latin America by implementing Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to address pressing urban challenges, including climate change, public health and well-being, economic development, and wildlife conservation. It fosters collaboration among city authorities, residents, organizations, and businesses, creating opportunities to work together in innovative and transformative ways, building a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

Introduction

Step into the heart of communities where nature and people are deeply intertwined.

This collection of stories highlights the profound emotional and cultural ties that local communities can share with their natural surroundings. These landscapes are not just places, but are central to the community's identity and well-being. The included stories are inspired by the experiences of Envigado (Colombia), Granollers (Spain), Portoviejo (Ecuador) and Corredor Biológico Interurbano Río María Aguilar -CBIMA- (Costa Rica) who participated in the INTERLACE project from 2020–2025, funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. Aiming to empower cities to restore and rehabilitate urban ecosystems through nature-based solutions (NbS), the project aimed to support more liveable, resilient, and inclusive environments. As such, the narratives begin with a focus on environmental degradation—pollution, neglect, or infrastructural disruption—and follow the inspiring journey of collective action applied in each context to restore or improve these vital spaces.

Whether it is the Congost River in Granollers, Mamey Park in Portoviejo, the Park of Green Dreams in CBIMA, or the Yurá River in Envigado, each story centers around the active involvement of community members in restoration activities. Children, families, and local leaders have all played pivotal roles.

Together, the stories highlight the importance of engaging multiple generations, with a special focus on empowering young people as the future stewards of their environment, and illustrate the change that is possible when people come together.

In many of these narratives, nature is personified to create an emotional connection sparking action. The Yurá River, for example, symbolizes hope, renewal, and resilience.

The stories also touch on the crucial theme of environmental justice. They highlight how neglected or inaccessible spaces can be transformed into inclusive, vibrant environments that everyone in the community can enjoy. By giving a voice to marginalized groups—like Marco, who has cerebral palsy, or children from underserved neighborhoods—these stories emphasize the importance of empowering local communities to shape their environments. Through the development of localised solutions, the implemented NbS not only increase the resilience of ecosystems to protect against climate change impacts, such as droughts and flooding, but also protect biodiversity and create opportunities for recreation and generate wider benefits for the entire community.

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The Voice of the Yurah

Johana Tabares, Envigado

I woke up, as I do every day, to the soft murmur of drops falling on the moss that covers my source on the Cerro de los Astilleros. It is a delicate sound, almost a whisper, announcing the beginning of my journey. I opened my eyes slowly, bathed in the golden light of the morning, while the colours and smells of the forest greeted me. I felt the freshness of the air, the perfume of the wild flowers, and the echoes of life blooming around me.

But today something different caught my attention: voices.

Little voices, giggling, floating up from the valley floor. I heard my name repeated over and over again. "Yurah, Yurah, Yurah, Yurah," the children said, and each time they uttered it, something inside me lit up. My heart, made of crystal clear water, was filled with an unknown joy.



Yurah...



Yurah...



Yurah...

I decided to follow those voices as I descended the mountain, jumping between rocks, embracing centennial trees, and caressing the fertile land. I passed through the ecotourism park El Salado, where the birds sang my arrival in the urban area, and the carriquís, with their colorful plumage, accompanied me like celestial guardians. On my tour, I felt the presence of the puma watching from the shadows, the woolly ocelot gliding through the bushes, and the sloth bear observing me from the top of a tree, moving to the slow rhythm of nature.



When I arrived near a school,
I heard the children say beautiful things about me:

She is an
ecosystem



She is guarded by
protected areas



She is home
to birds



She has a
puma that walks
next to her



My heart was filled with hope. I thought
no one remembered me anymore, that
my 12 kilometers were invisible to new
generations who didn't know who I was.
But these children were there, talking
about me, dreaming of me.

That night I could not sleep. The children's voices kept
echoing in my riverbed, telling me that soon they would
come to visit me, play with me, get to know me. They told
me that soon they would come to visit me, to play with me,
to know me. Was it possible? Would the laughter and the little
feet splashing in my waters come back? I went back up the
mountain, carrying the message to every corner. I told the
carriquis: **"The children are coming back."** They excitedly
flew through the forest announcing my joy.

Johana Tabares



And the day arrived. The same carriquies that accompany my journey, were the first to warn me: "Yurá, the children are here." I hurried down, meandering with joy, and saw them. Little bare feet sank in my cool waters, tiny hands picked up stones, and laughter filled the air. I heard from afar that they were calling the "Guardians of the Yurah." They came to meet me, to understand that I am more than water;



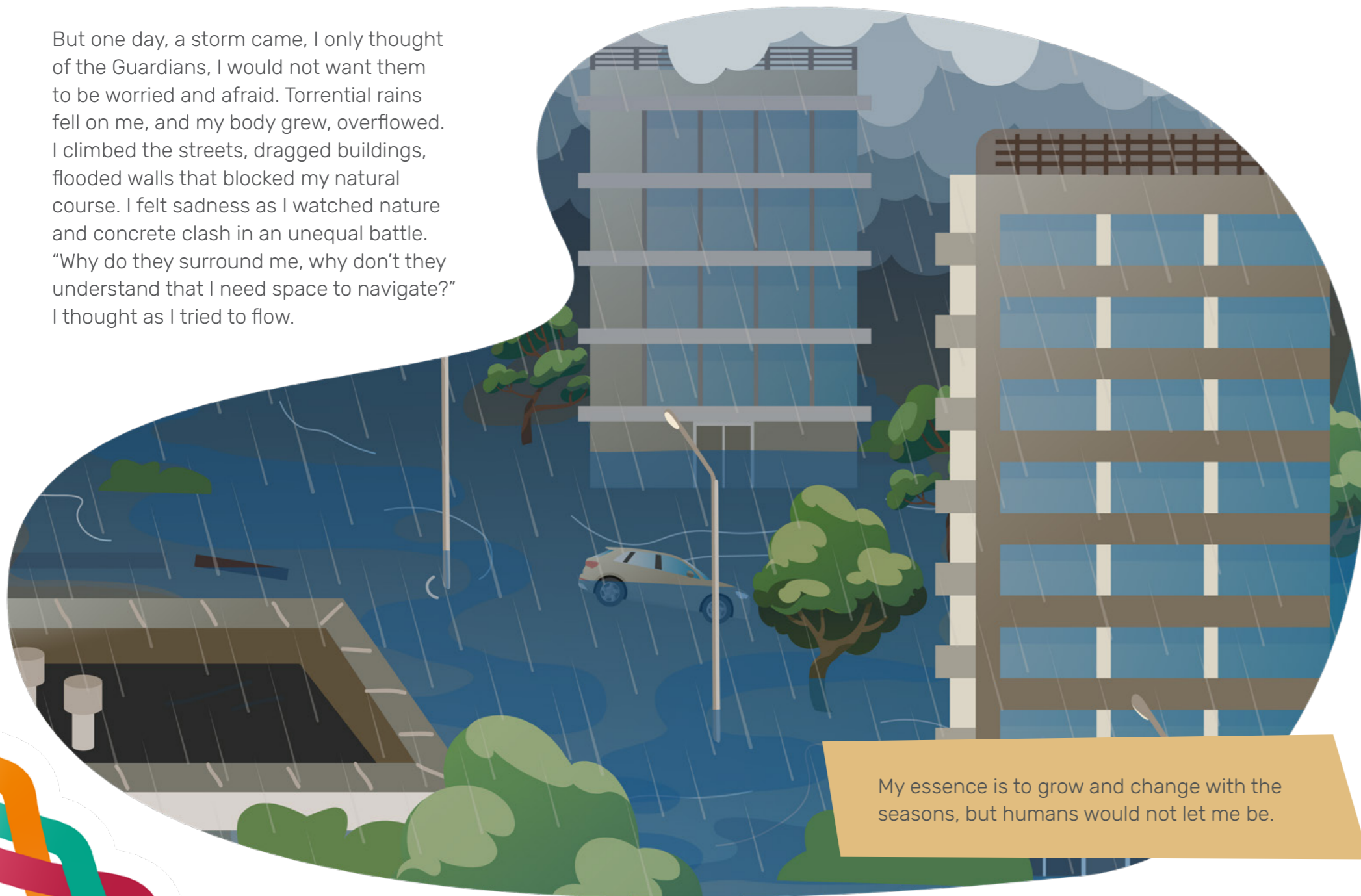
I am life, history and memory.

I showed them all that I am: my unique biodiversity, my more than 300 birds, the trees that embrace my riverbed, and the stories I have kept since time immemorial, the washerwomen, fertility, the muleteers that run my paths. They promised me to take my message to their homes, to their schools, and to anyone who would listen:

**The Yurá
is alive and
needs us**



But one day, a storm came, I only thought of the Guardians, I would not want them to be worried and afraid. Torrential rains fell on me, and my body grew, overflowed. I climbed the streets, dragged buildings, flooded walls that blocked my natural course. I felt sadness as I watched nature and concrete clash in an unequal battle. "Why do they surround me, why don't they understand that I need space to navigate?" I thought as I tried to flow.



My essence is to grow and change with the seasons, but humans would not let me be.

Despite everything, my hope was not extinguished, I thought the children would never come back that they would be afraid of me but the children, my guardians, came back. Their feet wet my waters again, and they reminded me that I am not alone. That day I whispered to them, **"My voice is yours. My life depends on you."** They understood. They filled their hearts with my message and promised to take care of me, to speak for me, and to teach others that the importance of water in Envigado flows with me, with the Yura.



So I continue my journey, from the Astilleros Hill to the Aburrá River, amazed by the life that surrounds me and full of hope thanks to the "Guardians of the Yurá" who are now part of me.



My name lives on their lips and in their hearts. I am the Yurah, and my voice will never cease to flow.

The Voice of the Yurah



INTERLACE
RESTORING URBAN ECOSYSTEMS
RECUPERANDO ECOSISTEMAS URBANOS

The Mamey Park and the Portoviejo River

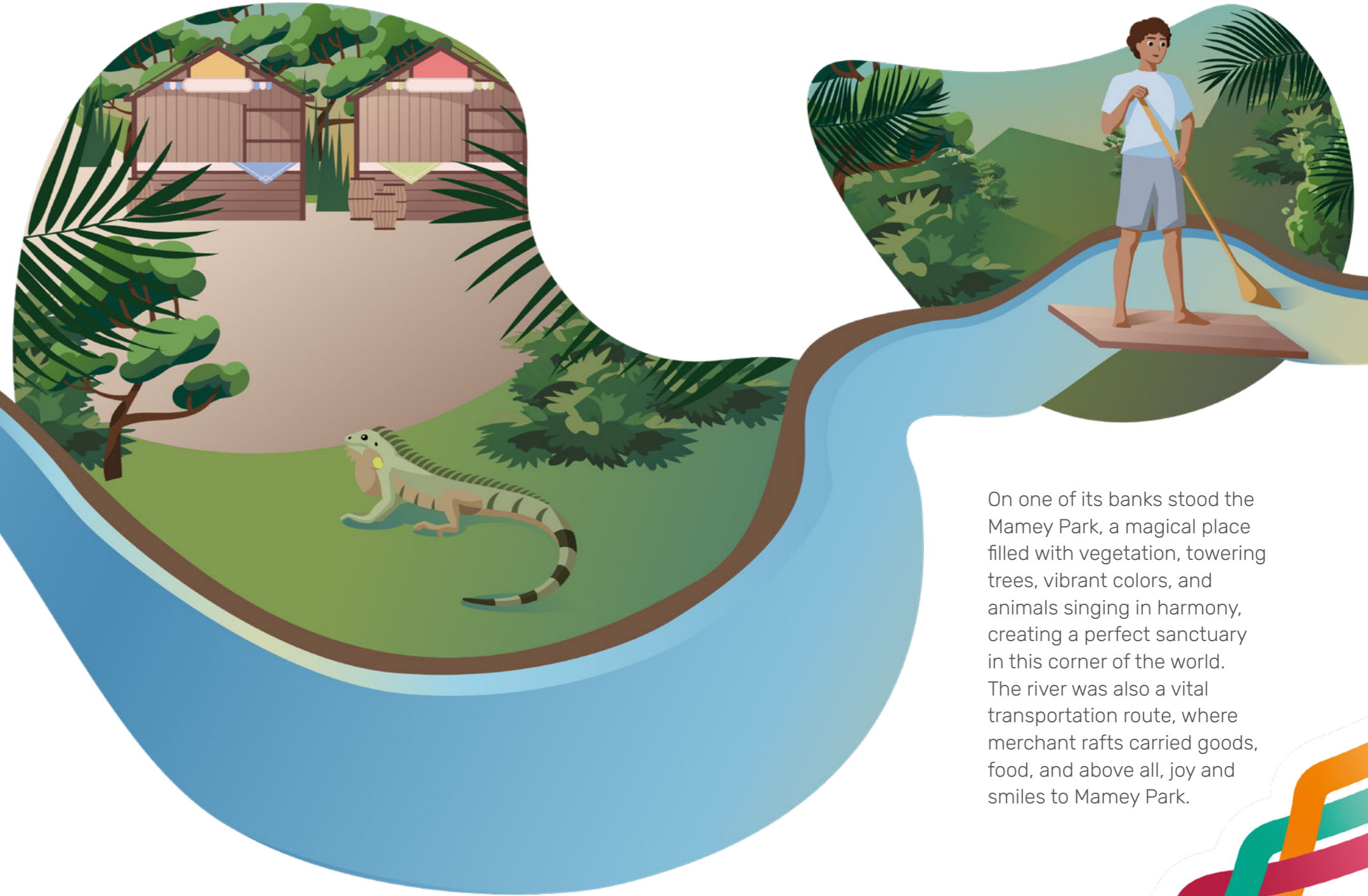
Ligia Vera, Portoviejo



Once upon a time, there was a small city called Portoviejo, where a river meandered gracefully through its heart, bringing life to everything it touched. This river, with its crystal-clear waters, flowed through both bustling neighbourhoods and lush natural landscapes.



The Mamey Park and the Portoviejo River



On one of its banks stood the Mamey Park, a magical place filled with vegetation, towering trees, vibrant colors, and animals singing in harmony, creating a perfect sanctuary in this corner of the world. The river was also a vital transportation route, where merchant rafts carried goods, food, and above all, joy and smiles to Mamey Park.

Ligia Vera

Antonio, a proactive young man who lived nearby, was a nature lover. He nostalgically remembered the afternoons of his childhood spent exploring the park, watching families come to enjoy its beauty. The mango trees were his favourite refuge, and the animals his beloved companions.

However, one day, everything began to change. While Antonio was strolling through the park, he noticed that the river's water was no longer as clear as it once was. He saw rubbish and debris piling up among the trees and observed how the animals began to leave their homes. The rafts, which once glided happily along the river, now collided with logs and floating waste and gradually stopped coming to the park.



The Mamey Park and the Portoviejo River

Sadness overwhelmed Antonio, but it also filled him with determination. "I have to do something to save the park and the river!" he thought.

With the support of the local government, Antonio gathered his friends: **María**, who knew a lot about the park's history; **Teresa**, who shared his passion for nature; and **Gabriel**, a community leader. All of them cherished wonderful memories of the park, and together, they began to reminisce:

I remember when rafts brought goods to the park!

I miss when we used to fish and wash clothes in the river!

I remember walks along the river!



Ligia Vera



"We can clean the river and the park," proposed María.



"We must preserve the existing structures," suggested Teresa.



"And create strategies to encourage interaction between people and nature," Gabriel added enthusiastically.

Determined to restore the park, they gathered in the iconic chapel of Mamey Park, surrounded by tall trees, and started brainstorming a plan.

Antonio smiled. "We'll do all of that together! With the support of the municipality and everyone who wants to join our mission."

Thus, the community came together to achieve their goal. Children collected cans and bottles, others navigated the river to remove branches and debris, while some planted new trees. They put up signs that read: "The Portoviejo River and Mamey Park are our home. Let's take care of them!" Slowly but surely, the community stopped polluting the river.



Over time, Mamey Park regained its splendor. The trees grew stronger, the birds sang again, and squirrels leapt from branch to branch. The river regained its clarity, and each time its waters swelled, it no longer caused floods.



One day, Antonio watched with joy as visitors arrived at the park: children, parents, grandparents, and even rafts once again navigating the river. Mamey Park had transformed into a place full of life and happiness.

“Do you see, Antonio? When people work together and care for nature, they can achieve wonderful things,” María said with a smile.

From then on, Mamey Park and the Portoviejo River became symbols of love and care for nature. They told the story of a place restored for the enjoyment of the entire community, transforming into a magical corner where nature always shines, protected by its very own inhabitants.



Marco and the Park of Green Dreams

Erika Calderón and
Marcela Gutiérrez, CBIMA



Once upon a time, in a modest and hardworking neighborhood with almost no green spaces, there lived a young boy named Marco. Marco was cheerful and full of dreams, even though he was born with cerebral palsy. He loved being outdoors, but in his community, there wasn't a park where he could enjoy nature. The only nearby space was covered in rubbish and debris, making it inaccessible and offering no benefits.

Marco's mother felt sad because she rarely had the chance to take her son outside. She looked at her surroundings with sorrow, wishing that one day it would become a beautiful place. The community's green space was in terrible condition—it was littered with garbage, muddy, and filled with unpleasant odors. There were no flowers, trees, plants, or birds to admire.



One day, a group of people gathered in the community. They were from various organizations dedicated to protecting nature and helping communities create green spaces. When they saw the area, they had a brilliant idea:

to transform the dump into a park filled with trees, flowers, and life for everyone to enjoy!



With a lot of hard work, the group got started.



First, they cleared out all the rubbish and cleaned the land. Then they brought in fertile soil, seeds, and plants. They decided to plant a roble de sabana (savannah oak), a large and sturdy tree that would provide shade and freshness to the park. Marco watched with excitement as the dull, gray site began to fill with greenery and life. He couldn't wait for the park to be completed.



After many months, the park was nearly finished. It looked like a dream come true! There were permeable paths, colourful flowers, and the magnificent roble de sabana standing proudly in the centre. Marco was one of the first to visit. He arrived with his mother, approached the oak, and sat beneath its shade. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, feeling the soft breeze caress his face. He listened to the birds singing and the wind rustling through the branches, and he smiled. Marco swayed his head to the rhythm of the birds and felt pure joy.

The park became not just Marco's favourite place but a beloved spot for the entire community.



Families came for picnics, children ran and played, and older people sat quietly, enjoying the peace. From then on, Marco and his neighbours lovingly cared for the park: they made sure no rubbish was left behind, watered the plants, and tended to the trees to ensure they grew strong.

Erika Calderón and Marcela Gutiérrez



The Park of Green Dreams, as they called it, became a symbol of hope and unity for the community. Thanks to everyone's efforts and Marco's love for nature, the dump was transformed into a place where dreams could grow as tall as the savannah oak.



And so, the story comes to an end, but the love for nature is just beginning.

Reviving water memories in Granollers

Xavi Romero, Granollers



I have lived in Granollers my entire life. When I was a child, the Congost River was like another member of the family, a constant presence that infused life into our daily routines. Back then, we knew the water intimately.

The river wasn't just a place—it was life itself.

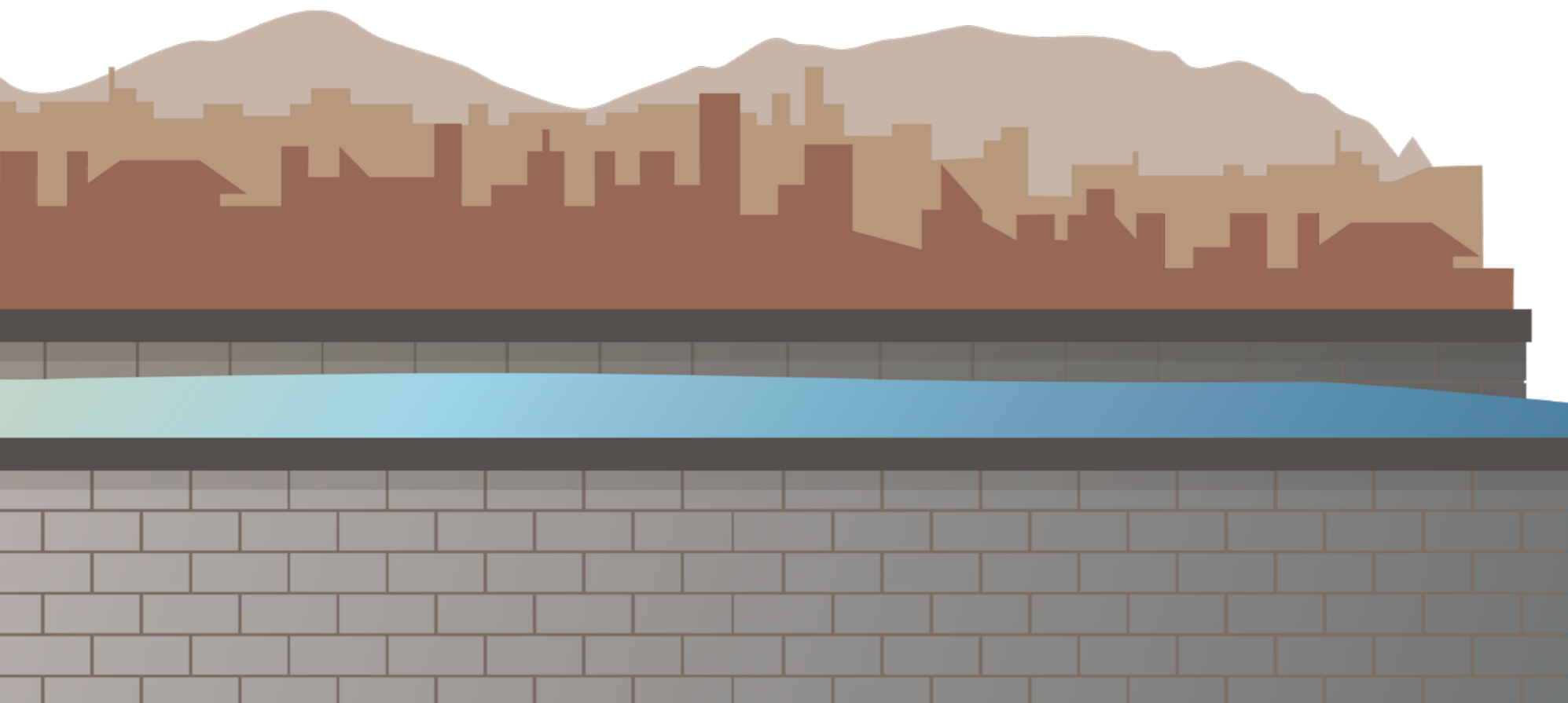
Farmers came from neighboring regions, drawn by the abundance of our springs and wells, and children like me spent summers splashing in its clear waters or fishing along its banks. It was a water paradise—or at least, that's how I remember it.



But those days now seem so distant. As the city grew, the river began to change. First, they built walls and channels to control it. Then, the springs we once relied on were forgotten, hidden under concrete and asphalt. The Congost, once brimming with life and stories, became something distant, almost invisible. They called it progress. But to me, it felt like losing something precious.

We didn't just lose the river; we lost our knowledge of water. We used to know where the springs were, the underground paths the water traveled, and how the river would rise and fall with the seasons. That wisdom was passed down through generations, but over time, it began to fade.

Then came the droughts. They've become more frequent: 1990, 1999, 2005, and now this one, which has lasted three years. It's hard to describe the helplessness of watching your city dry up, knowing that water is somewhere beneath your feet but feeling powerless to reach it. And when it rains, it feels like a cruel joke—storms so intense they flood the streets, sweeping everything away. It's as if the water is trying to remind us of its power, its rightful place.

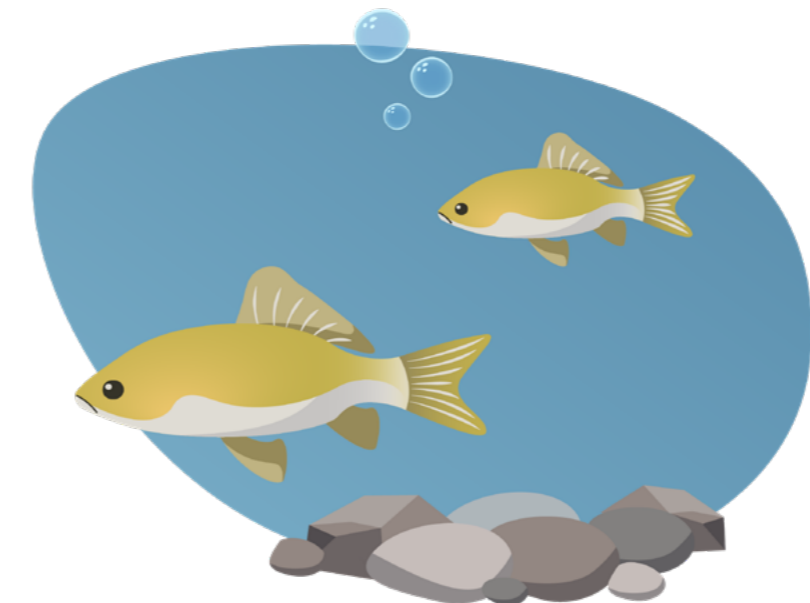




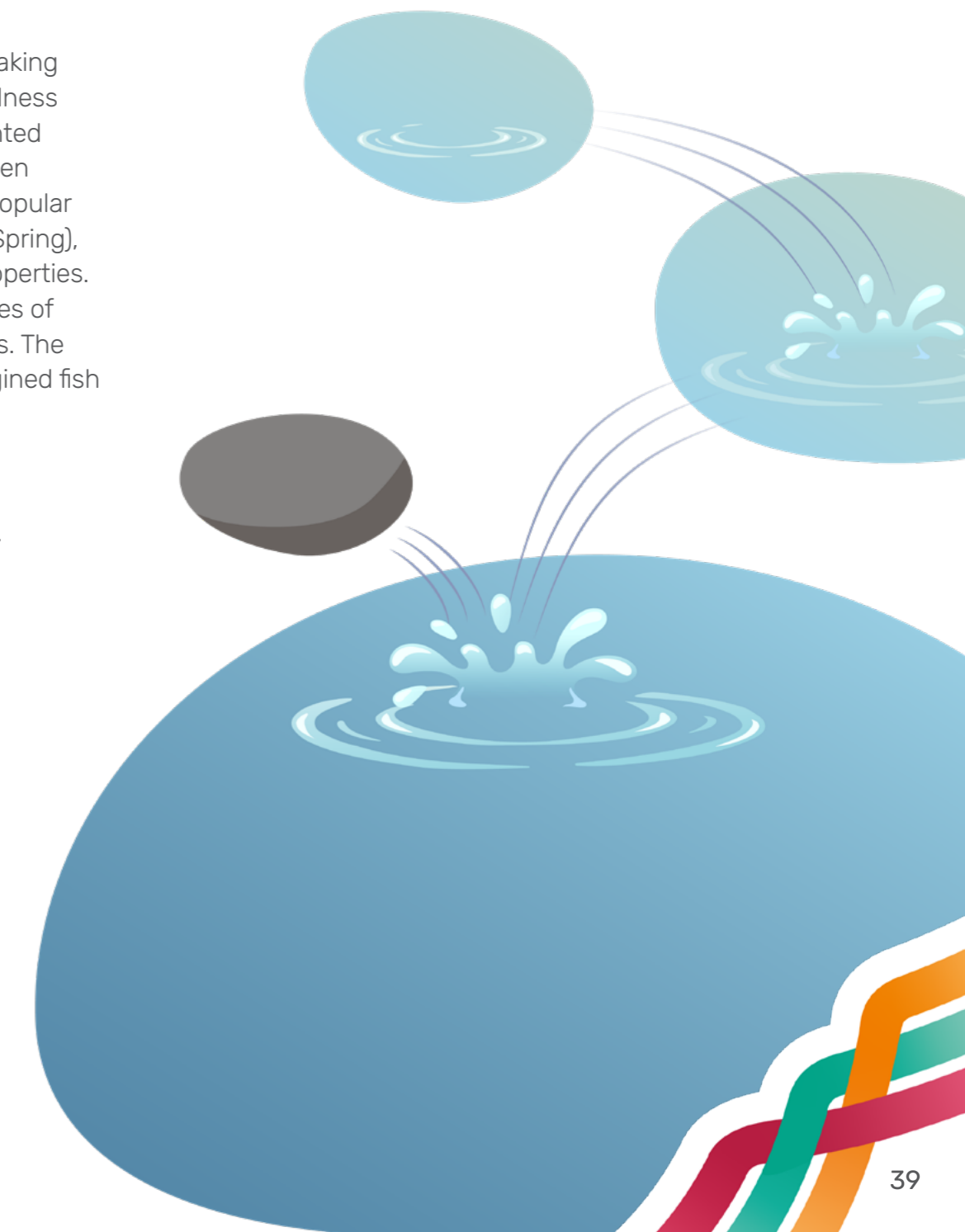
That's why I joined the HIDROsfera Granollers project. At first, I wasn't sure what a group of artists, scientists, and ordinary people like me could achieve. But when they said they wanted to recover the water memory of our city, something stirred inside me.

I remembered stories, like how grandmothers acted as healers, taking children to throw stones into the stream at La Mineta to cure sadness and lethargy; or the legend of the Pedra de l'Encant (The Enchanted Stone), a famous rock in the city square that was said to have been brought by a flood and would be taken away by another; or the popular excursions to enjoy and picnic by the Font del Ràdium (Radium Spring), whose water was once believed to have healthful radioactive properties. I knew I had to share what I remembered—especially my memories of the river, which, fortunately, had been restored in recent decades. The Congost had been severely degraded, and honestly, I never imagined fish would return to it. But now, I'm delighted to see it full of life.

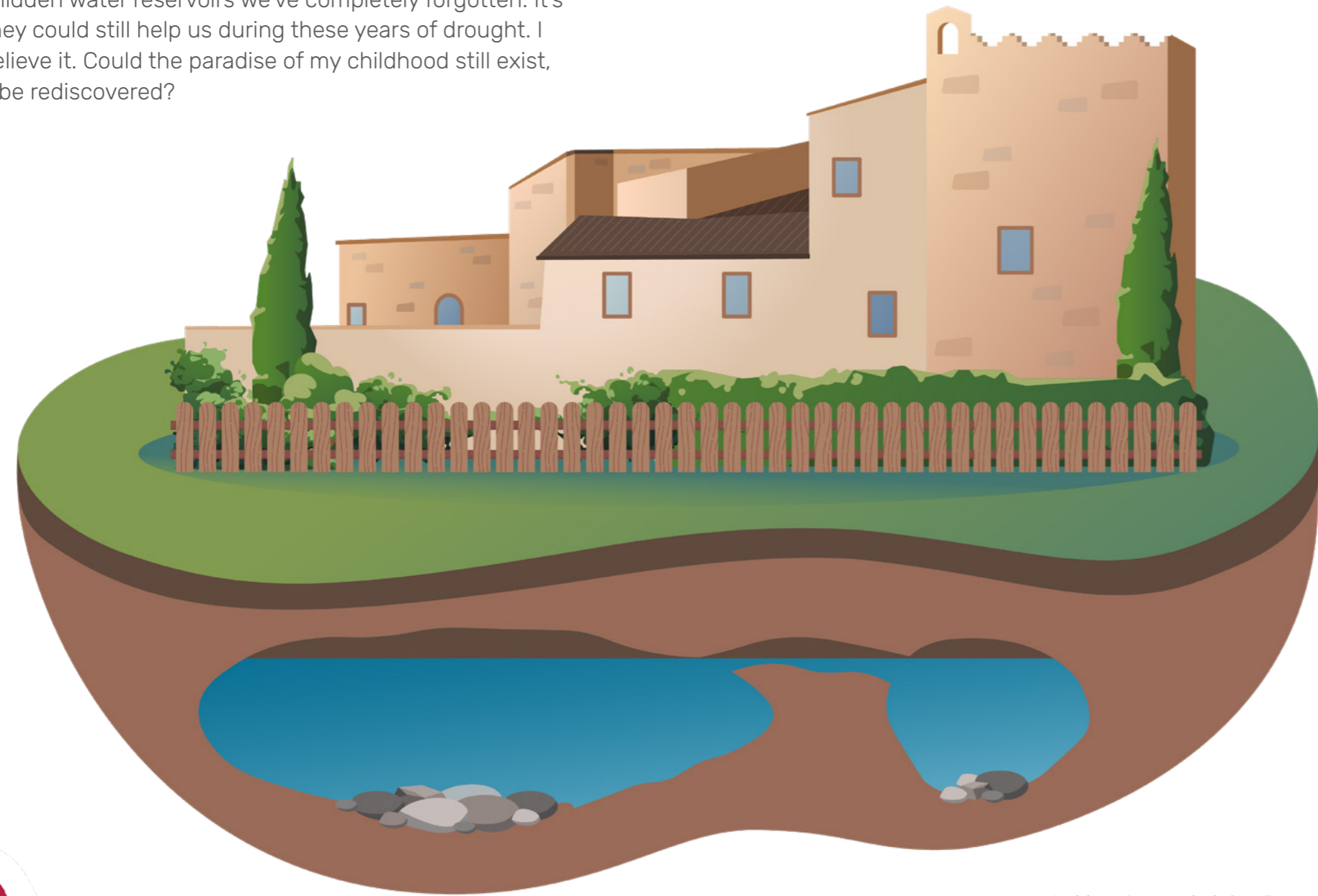
Many leaders made mistakes with the natural environment of our city, but for bringing back the river, I forgive them everything.



Xavi Romero



One day, during one of our workshops, a hydrologist explained something that left me in awe. Beneath Granollers, there are still aquifers—hidden water reservoirs we've completely forgotten. It's possible they could still help us during these years of drought. I couldn't believe it. Could the paradise of my childhood still exist, waiting to be rediscovered?

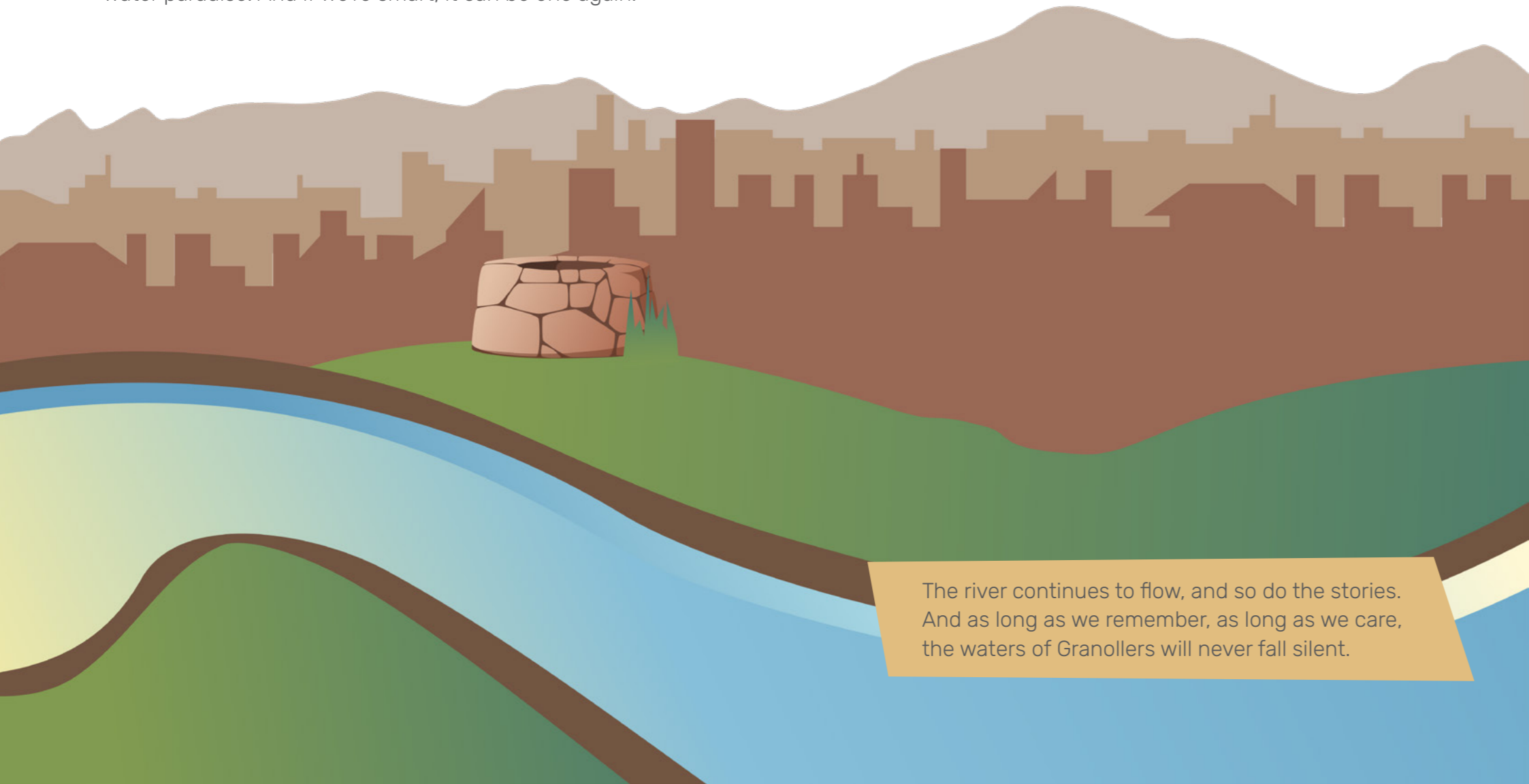


The cultural richness connected to water also resurfaced. Legends, sayings, and even old songs came back to life. Someone mentioned El Rec Gran, a long-covered spring, and another shared a story about the Fada de la Torre de les Aigües (Water Tower Fairy). It felt like we were weaving a tapestry of memory, each thread reconnecting us to the river, the aquifers, and the water that sustains us.

By the end of the project, we had created something extraordinary: the Water Maps, seven artistic maps that captured everything we had learned. They depicted the three spheres of water—the river, the watershed, and the aquifer—and reminded us that the history of Granollers is written in water. Looking at those maps, I felt something I hadn't felt in years: hope.



Now, when I see the Congost, I see a river that is increasingly green and alive. I remember what it once was and feel joy that the river's natural beauty is returning. I see a future where the wisdom of the past helps us face the challenges of droughts and floods. As I told the young people working on the project, "Granollers was once a water paradise. And if we're smart, it can be one again."




The river continues to flow, and so do the stories. And as long as we remember, as long as we care, the waters of Granollers will never fall silent.



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