

# REHABILITATION OF THE *PÁTIO DAS ESCOLAS* OF THE UNIVERSITY OF COIMBRA 2005-2011, Coimbra – Portugal

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Client University of Coimbra  
Engineering Betar (structures), Luís Ribeiro (electrics), Grade Ribeiro Estudos, Projectos e Consultadoria Lda (water, sewage)  
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The history of the University of Coimbra is inseparable from the expression of its urban and architectural heritage, as the city itself was built based on the idea of the University as its centre and morphological generator. The occupation of the old Royal Palace of the *Alaúçova* by the General Studies took place in 1537, by concession of *D. João III* and named of *Pátio das Escolas* [Schools' Patio] after the definitive acquisition by the University in 1597 to *D. Filipe I*. The old Royal Palace and its courtyard enjoyed an exceptional topographic context at the top of the hill overlooking the surrounding city at its feet and the *Mondego* River.

Having been used as car parking for the last years, the rehabilitation of the *Pátio das Escolas* sought to recover this unique condition of the university palace and its relationship with the city, contributing to the comprehension of the historical memory of the space, and to its contemporary renewal as a symbolic centre of the University.

The proposal for the resurfacing of the courtyard (which also safeguards the existing architectural heritage in the subsoil) sought to ensure and reinforce its institutional scale while simultaneously inducing a cosy and comfortable urban environment.

It is an operation of great containment and subtlety, which intended to preserve much of the existing surface, specially the old peripheral contour in stone that now delimits a grit *terreiro* [yard] evoking the old patio of arms, where several new paths are drawn connecting the singular elements of the Palace. On the whole, the new paths form an irregular pattern, nevertheless articulating the geometrical heterogeneity of the surrounding buildings and thus creating a unifying reading of the space.

The new paths and the surface gutters are covered with a stone similar to the one existing in the current patio floor and the entire infrastructural drainage system of the courtyard (heavily damaged) is completely remoulded through a concrete channel with a minimum height to avoid large excavations (although always controlled) and a “cover” of the same stone as the pavement.

The stones of the gutters are perforated in order to enable the eventual installation of a fogging system to soften the patio environment, which can become extremely hot during the summer.

Along the façade of St. Peter's College, there is a small tree-lined avenue, creating a shaded space to relax, talk, or just enjoy the beauty of the surrounding space and the magnificent view over the *Mondego* valley.

