



Palace of Schools

University of Coimbra - Alta and Sofia

Presentation of the Property

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200

400 m

SISTEMA DE COORDENADAS RETANGULARES
ETRS89/PT-TM06

Universidade de Coimbra - Alta e Sofia

Zona de Proteção Especial| Universidade de Coimbra - Alta e Sofia

Património classificado:

Alta

Sofia



Map of the city of Coimbra, José Cecílio da Costa, 1893.

As the name suggests, the Property comprises two distinct areas, Rua da Sofia, in the lower part of the city to the north, and Alta Universitária, located at the top of the hill where the urban centre originated. Although very close, the two areas are physically autonomous, together totalling 36.2 hectares, of which 29.7 correspond to Alta and 6.5 to Sofia. Surrounding these areas is an 80.8 hectare protection zone. The total area of the Estate is 117 hectares. These figures do not correspond to what was applied for and registered in 2013 for the inclusion, in July 2019, of the Machado de Castro National Museum in the Alta area.

The definition of the Alta and Sofia areas, as well as the protection zone, was based on the history of the university institution itself, according to its phases of installation, expansion, consolidation, retraction and restructuring, in close connection with the exercise of the state's political power. Inevitably, all these phases have a direct correspondence in the ideological, cultural and material domains, with physical expression in Coimbra's built heritage and urban organisation, as well as in the construction of cultural and identity traditions.



University Tower (Palace of Schools)

The Property is endowed with a series of exceptional attributes, which together express the importance of an institution whose influence and symbolism transcend local, regional and national boundaries to acquire a truly universal dimension.



Sofia Street

1. First university centre formed through an urban expansion operation

The university reform of King João III, and the consequent definitive transfer of the institution to Coimbra, led to the development of a school centre to accommodate the large influx of students and promote the continuous awarding of academic degrees.

Rua da Sofia is an urban exponent of the time and model of European avant-garde. It was planned as a new structuring axis for urban growth on the edge of the city and with a specific programme - the university.

2. Model of new architectural types

The University of Coimbra, through the collegiate network built since the 16th century, was the scene of various architectural experiments that became new typological models in terms of aesthetics, art and programmes. Examples include the church and cloister of the Colégio da Graça and the cloister of the Colégio de S. Jerónimo

Colégio de São Jerónimo





Palace of Schools

© Paulo Amaral

3. The university that occupies a palace

The oldest part of the University of Coimbra is located in the Paço das Escolas complex and essentially corresponds to the oldest royal residence in the country, the former Paço Real de Coimbra.

Its uninterrupted use, which predates the establishment of the University by five centuries, with continuous consolidation and constructive evolution, make it a unique and absolutely original building in the context of European university architecture.



Joanina Library
© Paulo Mendes

4. The exceptionality of the Joanina Library

Founded as a study library, reserved for the university community, it is one of the most stunning libraries in the world, thanks both to its shape and rich decoration, and to its valuable bibliographic collection of around two hundred thousand volumes, dating from the 16th to the 18th centuries, which can still be consulted today.

5. Example of university reforms in the ideological, pedagogical and material fields

Over the course of its more than seven-hundred-year history, the University of Coimbra has undergone several reforms with correspondences in various fields of knowledge and teaching, materially recorded in its built heritage: from the Joanine reform to the Pombaline reform, from the action promoted by the Estado Novo to the democratisation of teaching and the consequent expansion of facilities.

Chemistry Laboratory





Academic Procession (19th century)

6. University of centuries-old academic traditions

The University of Coimbra keeps alive a set of traditions characteristic of the symbolic practices associated with cyclical academic festivities, which origins come from its seven centuries of history: from institutionalised academic culture (Honorary Doctorates, Solemn Opening of Classes, etc.) to more spontaneous manifestations such as the Latada parade.

7. Holder of an important collection in the fields of science and biological heritage

There are several collections of scientific objects and specimens owned by the University of Coimbra, gathered mainly since the 18th century, whose importance goes beyond national relevance, due to their enormous variety and quantity of original objects. The Natural History, Physics and Astronomy collections stand out. Intertwined with these scientific objects is the vast biological heritage present in the Botanic Garden.





Joanina Library
© Coleção Alexandre Ramires

8. University of language consolidation, diffusion and expansion

As the seat of Portugal's only university until 1911, Coimbra became an important cultural centre over the centuries, and the city's cultured norms had a great influence on the students' linguistic knowledge, which would end up influencing people in other geographical areas. Many important names in Portuguese literature also passed through the institution.

9. Model for integrating archaeological and architectural heritage

As part of the work carried out in recent years, archaeological activity has made it possible to identify and recover a series of objects and architectural structures that help us to understand the history and material evolution of the University of Coimbra, sometimes proving evidence documented in both written and cartographic sources.

College of the Holy Trinity





10. Historical and artistic heritage restoration model

The interventions in the University of Coimbra's historic architectural heritage have been guided by actions that respect the concepts, methods, techniques and practices of architectural rehabilitation in force for each historical period. The University of Coimbra aims to develop proposals, correcting, balancing and advancing the affirmation of this area and its heritage as a factor in economic and social development, with respect for the environment and people, regarding their culture, social organisation, and differences.



Sala dos Capelos (Palace of Schools)

It is based on these attributes that UNESCO recognises the correspondence to three of the six criteria that justify the inscription of the Property on the World Heritage List.

Criterion II: *"Exhibit an important exchange of human values over a given period of time, or within a particular cultural area, on the development of architecture, technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design."*



Bird's-eye-view of the city of Coimbra

Over its seven centuries of history it has performed an absolutely irrefutable role as a centre of production and transmission of knowledge, within a geographical area that covers four continents – the ones corresponding to the ancient Portuguese Empire. The University of Coimbra, Alta and Sofia has used over this period, but mostly after its settlement in the city of Coimbra, the cultural, artistic and ideological influences of the former empire context inspired particularly by the pioneer charisma of the Portuguese Discoveries. While doing so, it received and disseminated knowledge throughout the fields of arts, sciences, law, architecture, town planning and landscape.

Criterion IV: *"To offer an outstanding example of a type of construction and of an architectural, technological or landscape ensemble, which illustrates significant periods of human history".*

The University of Coimbra - Alta e Sofia is an extraordinary architectural set that, simultaneously, illustrates the several purposes of the university institution and the various significant periods of the Portuguese architecture and art, as well as of a national geographical and cultural space. Its history is closely connected with the ideological, pedagogical and cultural reformations, which hold a direct correlation to a material dimension. As a whole, the University of Coimbra represents and is the result of the aggregation of a vast cultural genesis, always present and active.

Palace of Schools



New Cathedral of Coimbra



Faculty of Arts and Humanities



Criterion VI: *“Be directly or tangibly associated to events or living traditions, ideas, beliefs or artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance”.*



The University of Coimbra — Alta and Sofia has had a unique role in the formation and unity of the Portuguese language, and has contributed for the dissemination of its educated norm. It has distinguished itself from early on, as an important centre for the production of literature and the dissemination of new ideas. The university has hosted several of the writers responsible for the transmission of our language and culture. For a long time, it was the only university in the whole geographical area of Portuguese administration, and its action spread in the education of professionals who then moved to the continent, the islands and the overseas territories, up to the moment of their independence. Hence, it educated the elites and contributed towards making the movements of resistance. The arrival at the University of many students from various countries, especially Portuguese-speaking ones, means that its universality is still very much present today in the four corners of the world, influencing and being influenced.



The Property

The definition of the registered areas (Alta and Sofia) and the protection zone was based on the history of the university itself, in close conjunction with the current reality of the territory, according to its phases of installation, expansion, consolidation, retraction, restructuring and reorganisation, phases that correspond directly in the ideological, pedagogical, cultural and physical domains.

The inscription of the Property, although based on physical materiality, also included an important immaterial aspect. Both express the importance of an institution which, due to its influence and symbolism, has a universal dimension.

The foundation (14th century)

In 1290 King Dinis founded the first Portuguese University, or "General Studies", as the founding document calls it. First based in Lisbon, it was transferred in 1308 to Coimbra, a city that was smaller and more peaceful, but which also had in its favour the fact that it was the first "capital" of the kingdom and had the presence of the Monastery of Santa Cruz, one of the most important cultural centres at the time. But the movement of the University between the two cities would continue throughout the Middle Ages: in Coimbra until 1338, in the Alta next to the Paço, in Lisbon from that date until 1354 and again in Coimbra until 1377, this time in the lower part of the city.

D. Dinis square (20th century)



The definitive establishment (16th and 17th centuries)

It wasn't until 1537 that the University was definitively established in Coimbra, at the same time as it underwent an extensive internal reform. To accommodate the many students and the teaching spaces themselves, the city expanded to the north, opening up a new street, unusually long, wide and straight, suggestively named Sofia, the Greek word for wisdom. It was designed for a specific programme: teaching. On the east side it housed colleges for students, mostly linked to religious orders, and on the west side, houses for teachers and staff. Classes would take place in the colleges linked to the neighbouring Monastery of Santa Cruz, the driving force behind the ongoing reform.



Urban scheme for Sofia street and its University College

The definitive establishment (16th and 17th centuries)

Various vicissitudes, especially the lack of space in the face of the great demand from students coming from all over the kingdom and the Empire, led the monarch to lend the newly remodelled Royal Palace, which from then on would become the main home of the university, definitively acquired from the crown in 1597. Apart from this main centre, many other colleges were built - Jesus, Artes, São Jerónimo, S. Bento, S. Pedro, S. Paulo, Grilos, Santíssima Trindade - transforming the urban fabric and giving the city a particularly intense constructive dynamic and artistic update. Meanwhile, the Palace adapted to the new academic functions, transforming the spaces and erecting new structures that were not only useful but also of great symbolism for the academic institution: this is the case of the Porta Férrea and the Sala Grande dos Atos, both from the 17th century.

Palace of Schools

© João Armando Ribeiro



The Joanine Period (18th Century)

In the 18th century, these colleges, sometimes large architectural complexes that combined conventual and residential features, numbered around 25.

During the reign of King João V (1707-1750), the Casa da Livraria, now known as the Biblioteca Joanina, was built, as well as a new tower, whose clock and bells regulated student time, with an astronomical observatory on the upper terrace. Both were the result of the desire to promote cultural and scientific updating and the reception of Enlightenment ideas.

Portrait of the king D. João V (Joanina Library)





Portrait of Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo (Senate room, Palace of Schools)

The Pombal reform (18th century)

Opposition to the pedagogical programmes and practices of one of the most important and educational religious orders and the new Enlightenment currents led to the expulsion and extinction of the Society of Jesus in 1759. In 1772, during the reign of King José I and essentially by the hand of Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, the future Marquis of Pombal, the University underwent a profound reform. In order to institute new knowledge and modernised teaching, with a rational and experimental character, new statutes were instituted, professors and compendiums were replaced, two new Faculties were created and new establishments were built with the most modern scientific equipment. Examples include the Chemical Laboratory, the Astronomical Observatory, the Natural History Museum and the Botanical Garden.



Previous Church of Saint Dominic monastery, Sofia street

Extinction of the religious orders (19th century)

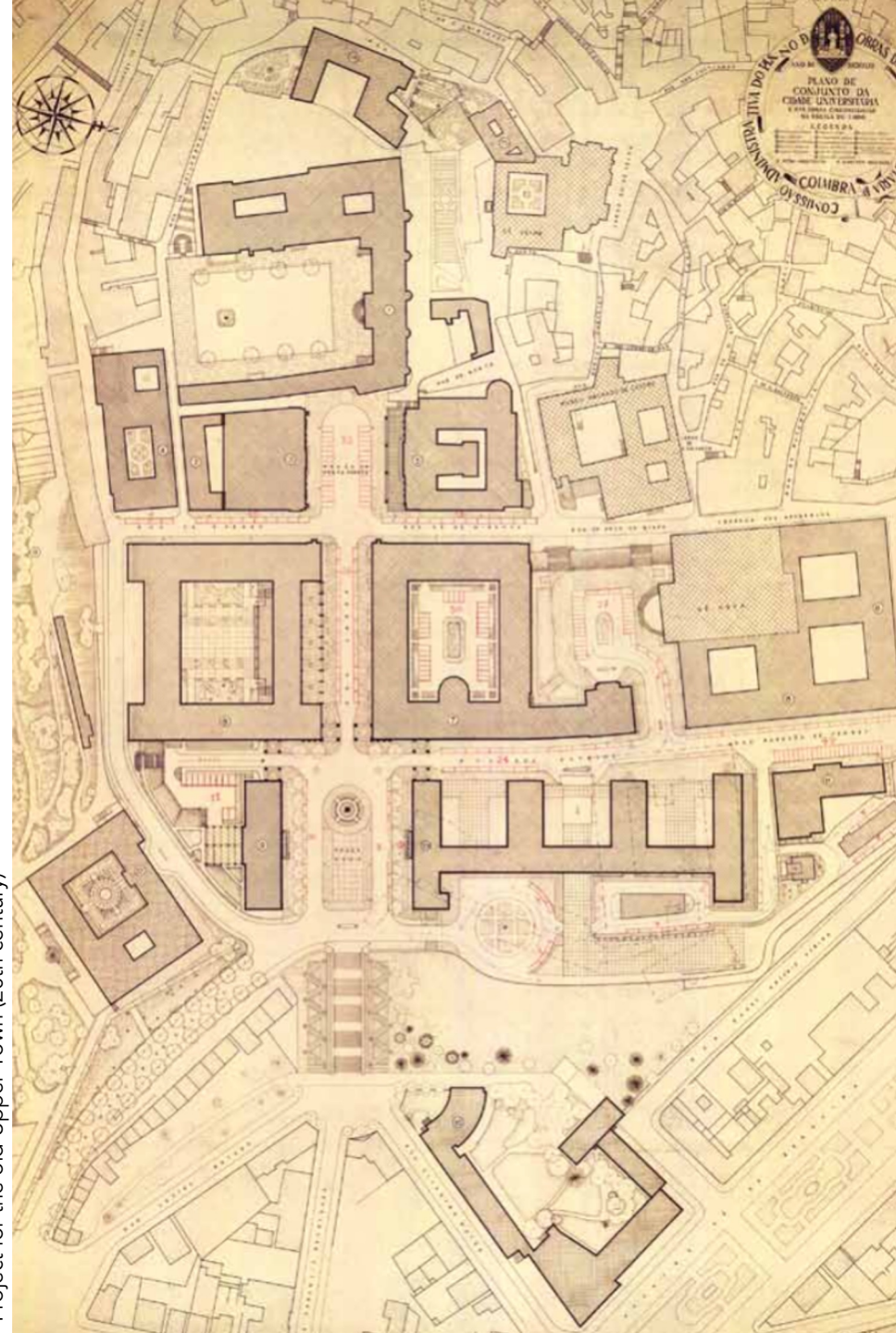
The extinction of the religious orders in 1834 led to the closure of convents, monasteries and colleges. In the following decades, a vast heritage was sold off, either incorporated into the state treasury or sold at public auction. At the same time, private university jurisdiction, the academic forum and financial autonomy were abolished. The process of secularisation of the university began and, with it, the emergence of student associations and social movements.

The Alta (20th Century)

The Republican regime promoted a number of reform measures, particularly in terms of education. It was, however, during the Estado Novo period that the University was once again the target of a profound reorganisation. Between 1943 and 1974, a whole new University City was built, monumental and classicist, concentrated and mono-functional, which implied a major urban change and the sacrifice of a significant part of the old Upper Town (Alta Universitária), with the transfer of the resident population to outlying neighbourhoods.

Towards the end of the century, marked by the massification of university education, the Alta proved incapable of continuing to house the university in its entirety: not only the University Hospital was relocated, but also the construction of new pole begun.

Project for the old Upper Town (20th century)





Architecture Department, College of Arts

Today (21st Century)

Nowadays, with the decentralisation of university facilities reinforced by the construction of Poles 2 and 3, the University is looking for solutions to enliven the Alta, reorganising spaces and equipments, constructing new buildings, introducing new programmes that are not exclusively university programmes and upgrading its heritage image. At the same time, it is returning to Rua da Sofia, its 'Pole Zero'.



Inscribed Zones: the Alta

The Alta is particularly rich in history: scene of successive occupations and appropriations, it has always been the sought-after location for the representation of power.

This can be seen in the many archaeological remains and the concentration of monumental buildings, the fruit of multiple artistic movements and the phases of expansion and reform undergone by the institution.

From the core of the Paço das Escolas to the various university colleges, from the structures born of the Pombaline Reform to the construction of the University City by the Estado Novo, today these are the most striking aspects of this territory.



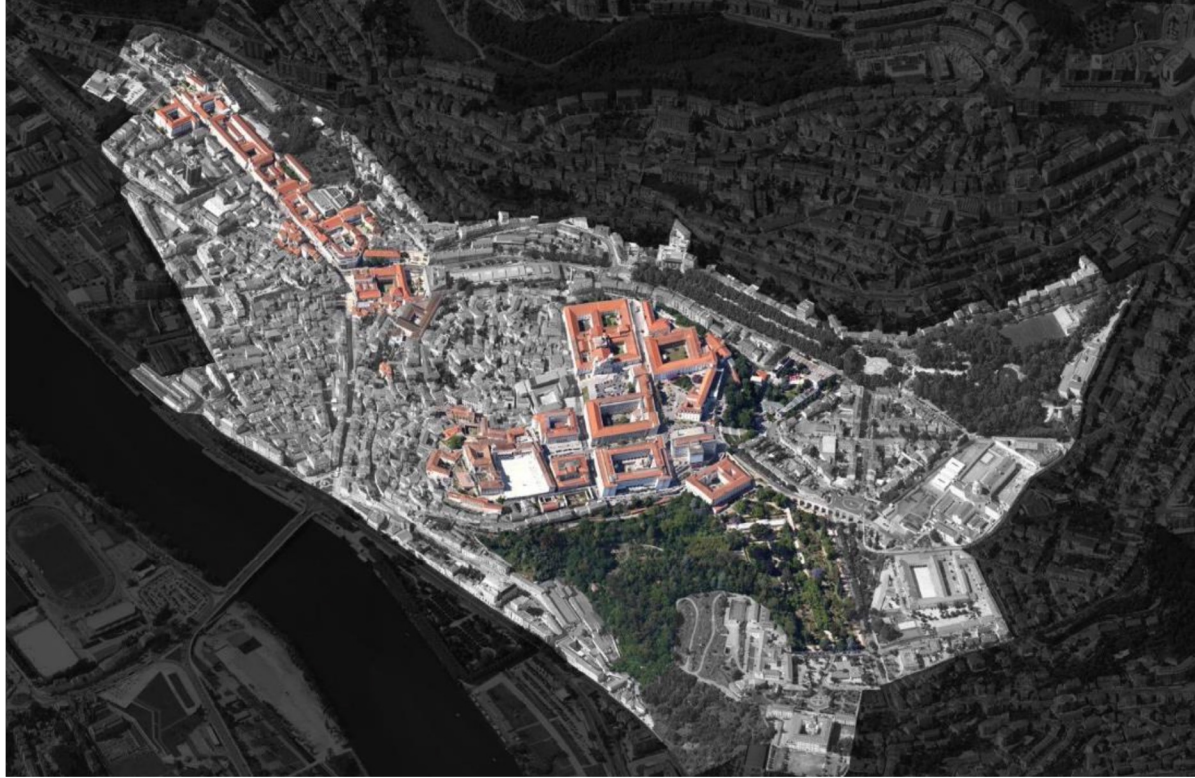
Church of the previous Monastery of the Holy Cross of Coimbra

Inscribed Zones: the Sofia Street

In the 16th century, the construction of a nucleus entirely dedicated to teaching and student accommodation in the vicinity of the Monastery of Santa Cruz came to the fore. The opening of Rua da Sofia was an exceptional experiment in controlled expansion and, above all, was aimed at a specific program: teaching.

With the extinction of the religious orders in 1834, Rua da Sofia was emptied of its original functions and the University was confined to the upper part of the city. Today, the University and the City intend to revitalize the area, consolidating, for example, the strategy of returning the student function, already achieved at the Colégio da Graça, which has since been renovated.

In this area, the colleges of Espírito Santo, Carmo, Graça, S. Pedro dos Terceiros, S. Boaventura, S. Tomás and the Colégio das Artes stand out. The Monastery of Santa Cruz is of fundamental importance because of the connection it had to the University.



Protection Zone

Bird's-eye-view of the city of Coimbra with the Protection Zone highlighted

The protection zone is a heterogeneous area. The Alta, the Baixinha, the areas surrounding Avenida Sá da Bandeira, Praça da República and Avenida Emídio Navarro all have their own distinct characteristics, which must be preserved as part of the city's identity. As they surround the inscribed area, they play a key role in maintaining its characteristics and are inseparable from it, as the city and the university merge.

To this end, a major effort has been made to reinforce a new paradigm in the way we look at and intervene in this sensitive area of urban territory. Since 2004, strategies have been developed for intervention in this area. It is from this work that the "Municipal Regulations for Building, Recovery and Urban Conversion of the Area Affected by the Candidature of the University of Coimbra as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, including the protection zone" were born, published in the Diário da República at the beginning of 2012.



Honorary Doctorate Ceremony

Intangible heritage: academic festivals and institutional ceremonies

The University incorporates a set of traditions that are characteristic of the symbolic practices associated with academic festivals, of remote origin, such as the Festa das Latas or Latada, at the beginning of the academic year, and the Queima das Fitas, marking the end of the year and/or course.

Parallel to this student culture, the ceremonies for the Rector's inauguration, the solemn opening of classes and honorary doctorates stand out, all of them in the Sala dos Capelos, with academic parades from the Joanina Library, with the professors wearing the talar habit with the respective insignia and colors.

Intangible Heritage: the Song of Coimbra and the Portuguese Language

Also part of the intangible heritage are the Serenades and the Song of Coimbra, a musical genre of great singularity, whose main players are students and former students. Of an erudite nature, but without ever losing its popular regional and local roots, orality is its main form of transmission.

On a scientific and cultural level, the University of Coimbra represents one of the first centres of development, innovation and irradiation in Portugal's history. It was of decisive importance in the formation and consolidation of the Portuguese language, expanding the cultured norm of the language and influencing linguistic knowledge for centuries. Writers such as Camões, Almeida Garrett, Antero de Quental and Miguel Torga, singers such as Zeca Afonso, and politicians such as António de Oliveira Salazar have all passed by the University.

Queima das Fitas Serenade, 2024



University sorority Prá-kys-tão

Intangible heritage: the sororities

The various university sororities, with secular origins, only gained a configuration close to the one we have today in the 19th century, probably because of the closure of the university colleges. They are one of the most characteristic aspects of the student community's own experience, sharing not only a space, but above all, ideals of culture, scientific knowledge and camaraderie, making them one of the most popular traditions at the University of Coimbra.

