

FONTE DA PRATA COMMUNITY CENTRE
MOITA (SETUBAL), PORTUGAL
2022–2018

Low-budget social-care facilities
triggering regeneration

Located in the Municipality of Moita, 40 km south of Lisbon, Santa Rafaela Maria foundation is a charity established in 1992 to oversee and develop social projects with families and children. With a focus on prevention of school drop-out, it daily assists approximately 70 children and teenagers with learning impairments, mostly coming from destitute families and dysfunctional environments. In addition, it assists social welfare on child protection and monitoring, economic funding to families in vulnerable situations and parental training, in addition to emigrants' integration.

The campus of the foundation's community centre is located near the south shore of the Tagus river in one of its many inlets and adjacent to the neglected social housing quarter of Fonte da Prata, a multicultural neighbourhood built in the early 1980s to mostly house migrants coming from the former Portuguese colonies on the aftermath of the revolution. The campus' main building is the dilapidated Palace of Fonte da Prata, built in 1910 for the wealthy landowner Eloy Castanha and designed by architect Guilherme Eduardo Gomes in an eclectic mélange of 17th- and 18th-century motifs of Portuguese traditional architecture. With a plot area of roughly one hectare, besides the palace the precinct comprises a series of disperse buildings in ruins, some of which may be renovated or rebuilt but — in compliance with regulatory constrains — using the same footprint.

In terms of programme, the masterplan comprises lecture rooms and workshop space, kitchen and canteen, the foundation's main centre, chapel, lodging for volunteers and storage for summer camps apparel and equipment. Given the limited budget, the project is phased. The palace will hold the main family and social emergency functions, while the nearby ruin towards northeast will be renovated into the volunteers' residential quarters. Furthermore, the landscaping of the precinct will comprise the creation of car parking, a football/basketball pitch, a playground, an orchard and a vegetable garden, in addition to restoring the existing well, washer, tank and threshing floor.

Phase 1 consisted in the renovation into lecture hall of the existing agricultural warehouses which are attached to the southwest façade of the palace. While partially using its foundations and part of its perimeter walls, the footprint and the double-gable roof of the existing building was largely maintained, with one volume used as a multifunctional space with lockers and toilets, and the other as five lecture rooms. In stark contrast with the palace, the lecture hall building is fully clad wall-to-roof in an insulated sandwich panel of aluminium and polyurethane, tinted with a graphite ash pigment. This particular choice of material was led by both budget and maintenance costs, as well as the prevention of vandalism and intrusion, which is also the reasons for the openings to incorporate a system of reinforced aluminium shutters.



Location: Quinta da Fonte da Prata, Moita, Portugal

Client: Fundação Santa Rafaela Maria

Scope: Architecture and landscape architecture

Project Brief: Community Centre

Gross Built Area: 460 sq. m (phase 1) and 1,130 sq. m (phase 2)

Construction Cost: 600K (phase 1); 1,8M (phase 2)

Project Status: 2018 (project) – 2022 (built phase 1)

Photography: Fernando Guerra and Francisco Ascensão