

# FÁTIMA LARGE COVERED AREA FOR ASSEMBLIES (2.º place)

1998,

Fátima –  
Portugal

**Promoter** Diocese of Fátima  
**Photography** José Manuel Costa Alves

The city of Fátima is characterised, in part, by the divergence between the “city of the Sanctuary” and the chaotic and violent process of sedimentation around it of the “civil city.” Some measures, such as the consolidation of a new urban front to the West, the reinforcement of accessibility and parking on the same side and the concealment of *D. José Alves Correia da Silva* avenue, will allow an urban regeneration that complements the option of implementing the new covered assembly space (GECA in Portuguese) between *Pio XII* square and the Pastoral Center.

This new territorial breath of the civil city will reinforce the sense of progressive and hierarchical approach of the pilgrim on foot, or motorized, when approaching the Paulo VI Center, converging in the new churchyard, not only of GECA but also of the enclosure. This churchyard must allow the contiguous perception of the GECA and the Sanctuary, ritualizing the approach and the ultimate discovery of the “emptiness – full,” without breaking the dimension that currently exists between the Paulo VI Center and the Basilica. These delimit the “center” or the “void” to which José Mattoso refers when characterising the sacred spaces of exception that were born from an extraordinary “manifestation” of the sacred, as opposed to a parish church or cathedral. The “Sanctuary” is the “materialisation of memory” and “has as a reference a moment, an experience, an epiphany.” According to Mattoso, sanctuaries are marks of the sacred in the space of men, promises of revelation, invitations to seek an extraordinary experience at the cost of a break with daily life, feed for thought during the journey undertaken by the attraction of the mystery; appeal to overcome a monotonous and gray life. This characterisation of empty space that the historian associates with the culmination of the “pilgrimage,” because “what he expects is that the manifestation of God is revealed in some unpredictable and surprising way,” is essential to the sanctuary’s experience (or of its “call”) “because if it is surrounded by a void, its character of an epiphany is accentuated.”

The new covered assembly space creates a new geography or landscape, in which the coverage is traversable. In this geography, three elements of the ecclesiastic architectural tradition stand out: the staircase, the tower, and the complementary cross. The union of these three elements denounces the width of the huge nave but also the presence of the Sanctuary that the pilgrim discovers in a final effort ascending the staircase. The approach from east, coming from the Chapel of the Apparitions, is immediately captured by the great descending door that contradicts its great ascending volume and revealing the processional succession of the atria of the secondary chapels and of the reconciliation, of the great transversal atrium whose “dome” announces the dimension of the large nave as a huge sky that accompanies the involvement of the presbytery.

