

# A Qualification System for Heritage Conservation and Traditional Building Rehabilitation

Vítor Córias | President of Grémio do Património

*The conservation of built cultural Heritage – monuments and historical buildings – along with the rehabilitation of the traditional building stock, have been growing in importance in terms of the overall economy of most countries, and ordinary citizens are becoming increasingly concerned and expectant with regard to this issue. As a result, these two areas of the construction sector have been taking a more prominent role and gaining their own identity.*

**R**ehabilitating the traditional building stock is generally more complex than standard construction, and requires companies to implement appropriate methods and technologies. Such demands are further heightened when dealing with Heritage, when the various different agents have to take a radically different stance. The success of interventions to rehabilitate building stock and, above all, to preserve and restore our Heritage, is seriously compromised if such interventions are not entrusted to companies with the necessary qualifications.

As well as applying only to companies undertaking these interventions and having been conceived with new construction in mind, the current qualification regimen applicable to companies in the construction sector, in Portugal and elsewhere — the “contractor licences law”, does not take into account the qualification of the relevant personnel actually involved in front-end execution, when assessing companies’ technical capabilities.

The low demands vis-à-vis the technical capabilities of most agents is not conducive to assuring the effectiveness and durability of the interventions, ergo the satisfactory application of private and public funds, and is

incompatible with taking a responsible stance in terms of safeguarding our Heritage.

The current procurements procedures, in Portugal and elsewhere, enable such access to be restricted, by the contracting authority establishing a series of additional requirements extending beyond simply holding a contractor licence. However, it is extremely time-consuming for bidders to provide evidence that these requirements have been fulfilled and likewise for contracting authorities to verify this.

Based on its associates’ experience gained over several decades, GECORPA – Grémio do Património (the Portuguese association rallying professionals and firms specializing in heritage conservation and building rehabilitation) promoted the development of the GECORPA QUALIFICATION SYSTEM (GQS), intended for personnel and firms working in these demanding fields of activity, which ensures that any given company’s access to executing interventions in these areas is dependent upon its fulfilment of a series of specific requirements pertaining to the qualification of the human resources available in the said company and its organisational structure.

The GQS qualification system started off by systemising the business activity undertaken by companies in the sector under assessment and dividing it into three broad Areas of business activity:

**I. Design and consultancy**

**II. Inspection and testing**

**III. Execution (contractors and subcontractors)**

In each Area, the companies' business activity was divided into Branches of activity, each of which was in turn subdivided into Specialities, according to the companies' technical skills. The specialities were in turn subdivided further into Types of work and Techniques (Figure 1). For example, four Branches of activity are considered for those companies which execute interventions (contractors and subcontractors):

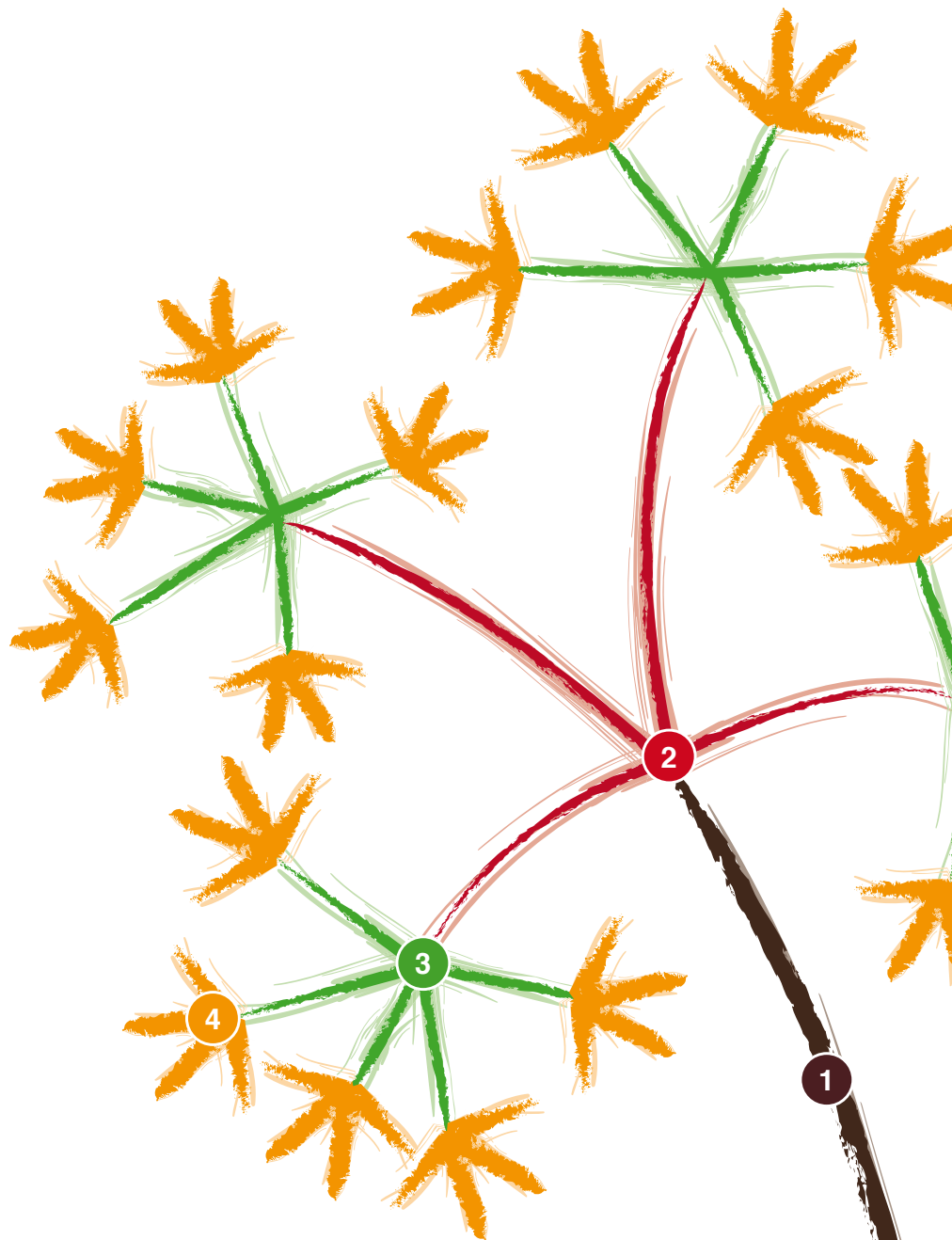
- 1 – Constructive and structural rehabilitation
- 2 – Rehabilitation of foundations
- 3 – Rehabilitation of supply and mechanical systems
- 4 – Technical and artistic rehabilitation

There were four stages involved in developing the system:

- 1. Systemising the specialist activities which constitute the services provided by the groups of agents involved;
- 2. Setting out a group of professionals, at various different levels of qualification, who are vital both for the correct execution of these activities and for the planning, management and coordination thereof within a corporate context;
- 3. Setting out the relationships between the various different activities and the professionals tasked with them;
- 4. Creating an application which can be accessed via Internet, to operate the procedures.

*1. Levels 2 to 6 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) are particularly relevant*

*1 | Diagram showing the systemisation of the works in each area of activity of the rehabilitation of building stock and Heritage, structured into four grades*



- 1** Branch of Activity
- 2** Specialities
- 3** Types of work
- 4** Techniques

The GQS is aimed at five types of interested partners from the Heritage conservation and building stock rehabilitation sector:

1. Authorities which use the services of qualified companies, particularly those authorities which award building rehabilitation and heritage conservation works;
2. Companies to be qualified: companies providing building rehabilitation and heritage conservation services, from the aforementioned three groups;
3. Professionals to be qualified: Advanced and intermediate technicians, namely professionals whether or not they are part of the companies' permanent staff;
4. Training bodies: Accredited bodies interested in providing training initiatives;
5. Certification bodies: Accredited bodies which can offer certification programmes for those technicians who are interested.

The GQS is applied to each specific case in two phases:

1. Qualification, based on the training undertaken and experience gained, of the company's human resources involved in the planning, management, coordination and execution of these activities, by assigning each one with one or more specific professions;

2. Qualification of the company in specialities as per the qualification of its human resources and in categories of ability, as per the number of those human resources.

The advantages to the contracting companies of the GQS are obvious: instead of stipulating additional requirements and assessing the bidders' fulfilment thereof, the contracting authorities can just choose from the system's classification grid those branches of activity and specialities which are best suited to the nature of the work to be performed. The GQS enables online access to information regarding the skills of the qualified companies and of their human resources. For companies providing building rehabilitation and heritage conservation services, the advantages are equally clear: by enabling the contracting authorities to access information regarding the skills of the supply companies, the GQS avoids the need to transfer supporting documentation to the platforms, thereby allowing greater simplification and streamlining of resources in responding to the pre-qualification procedures. The professionals working in the sector can also benefit greatly from the GQS, by having their skills recognised, valued and disseminated. translated into effective and long-lasting intervention.

The GQS falls within the framework of the

relevant European Directives on the award of public contracts, enabling the selection of bidding companies via compliance with a series of requirements which extend beyond simply holding a contractor licence. By the contracting authorities subscribing to the GQS, the qualified companies can have automatic access to the tender, without the need for the latter to provide evidence of and the former to verify fulfilment with those requirements.

Subscription to the GQS by the various different interested partners, particularly contracting authorities, service provision companies and professionals is voluntary, resulting from their recognition of the inherent advantages.

Implementing the GQS makes it possible to assure the quality of the heritage conservation and traditional building rehabilitation interventions, to promote a specialist sector of relevance to the economy, to stimulate the qualification of its human resources and contribute towards preserving practices and know-how which themselves are a major asset and heritage. Finally, but of no less importance, the system can contribute decisively towards the major investments in building rehabilitation and heritage conservation which are being lined up for the next few years and decades being translated into effective and long-lasting interventions ■



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