BUILDING A NEW IDENTITY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE:
The Case of Colombia And Government Buildings
Constructed During The Term of The Liberal Republic (1930-1946)
And The Case For Their Preservation

Daniella Zamora Cano

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Science in Historic Preservation

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
Columbia University

May, 2019
ABSTRACT

1930 to 1946 marks a pivotal moment in the history of Colombia, not only as a period of changing political ideologies that defined how the country modernized, but also as a transitional period in the discipline of Colombian architecture. The Liberal Republic which began with the election of Enrique Olaya Herrera in 1930, was characterized by greater transparency in governance and the extension of governmental services to communities that had formally been underserved. In tandem with this change was a building program that would see many new buildings constructed as outposts of the national government and its services. This building program was executed through a centralized office of construction and design. The architects of these buildings adopted a new formal, stylistic and tectonic paradigm which saw them moving away from classical and neocolonial styles of the past toward architectural forms consistent with the emerging Modern Movement.

These two shifts - the one political and governmental, the other architectural - occur in parallel with one another. While it is difficult to draw direct lines of influence between the politicians who operated in the halls of government and the architects called upon to design the
structures which housed the institutional programs devised under the liberal government, these trends track along similar lines. Each emphasizes greater exercise of transparent and rational approaches to their respective practices.

Importantly, for Colombian architecture, the governmental building program of this period forms the foundation for a new prevailing direction in the design of governmental and national institutional programs.

The architecture that was designed in this period (1930-1946) by the MOP was heavily influenced by European architects who had migrated to Colombia after the first World War. These architects brought with them European composition and stylistic strategies that they introduced in the buildings they designed. While they did not represent the Modern Movement as a design idiom or that of the International Style, the buildings studied in this thesis represent an expression of modernity within the Colombian context. Through the National Buildings of Cúcuta, Túquerres, and Barranquilla, we can witness the foundations of what was to become Colombian Modern Architecture in the following decades.
Acknowledgments

Throughout the process of researching and writing this thesis I received tremendous support from professors, peers, and family. It has been an incredible journey; I have learned a lot about myself and had a wonderful opportunity to meet amazing people along the way. To everyone who helped me throughout this process, I am deeply grateful.

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor Paul Bentel, for his expertise, guidance, constant feedback and support. He gave me the confidence I needed when I was in doubt, and with whom this thesis would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my thesis readers Monty Freeman whose enthusiasm and feedback I found incredibly helpful and Paula Echeverry whose guidance and presence on my thesis jury meant the world to me.

I would like to thank my parents for always encouraging me to be the best version of me I can be and for their constant love and support. I would like to thank my partner who made this process easier by keeping me company in the late nights of writing and to my friends that made this process fun along the way.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vi</td>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 10   | CHAPTER ONE  
History of Colombian government buildings |
| 22   | CHAPTER TWO  
Early transition  
National Building of Cúcuta |
| 33   | CHAPTER THREE  
Form follows function  
National Building of Túquerres |
| 43   | CHAPTER FOUR  
The International Style  
National Building of Barranquilla |
| 54   | CHAPTER FIVE  
Challenges of preserving Modern Architecture  
The case of Colombia |
| 64   | CHAPTER SIX  
Preservation Proposal |
| 68   | BIBLIOGRAPHY |
List of Illustrations

Chapter 1
Figure 1.1. Alberto Wills Ferro

Figure 1.2. Leopoldo Rother
Source: http://facartes.unal.edu.co/museoarquitectura/leopoldo.html

Chapter 2
Figure 2.1. National Building of Cúcuta - Circa 1940

Figure 2.2. Map of Colombia divided by departments
Source: Author

Figure 2.3. Site plan
Source: Author

Figure 2.4. Program distribution
Source: Author

Figure 2.5. Analytical diagrams
Source: Author

Figure 2.6. The Starret-Lehigh Building
Chapter 3

Figure 3.1. Perspective of National Building of Túquerres - Circa - 1941
Source: Instituto Nacional de Vias (INVIAS) Collection at the General Archive of the Nation in Bogotá, Colombia

Figure 3.2. Map of Colombia divided by departments
Source: Author

Figure 3.3. Site plan
Source: Author

Figure 3.4. Program distribution
Source: Author

Figure 3.5. Analytical diagrams
Source: Author

Figure 3.6. The Bahaus Building
Source: www.widewalls.ch
https://www.widewalls.ch/bauhaus-architecture/

Chapter 4

Figure 4.1. National Building of Barranquilla - Circa
Source:

Figure 4.2. Map of Colombia divided by departments
Source: Author

Figure 4.3. Site plan
Source: Author

Figure 4.4. Program distribution
Source: Author

Figure 4.5. Analytical diagrams
Source: Author
Figure 4.6. Maison Locative Ponsik Building  
Source: Lucien Hervé - www.fondationlecorbusier.fr  

Figure 4.7. Gustavo Capanema Building  
Source: www.fondationlecorbusier.fr  

Chapter 5

Figure 5.1. Map of BICNAL distribution per department  
Source: Author

Figure 5.2. BICNAL for Cucuta  
Source: Author

Figure 5.3. BICNAL for Atlantico  
Source: Author

Figure 5.4. BICNAL for Nariño  
Source: Author
1930 to 1946 marks a pivotal moment in the history of Colombia, not only as a period of changing political ideologies that defined how the country modernized\(^1\), but also as a transitional period in the discipline of Colombian architecture. The Liberal Republic which began with the election of Enrique Olaya Herrera in 1930, was characterized by greater transparency in governance and the extension of governmental services to communities that had formally been underserved. In tandem with this change was a building program that would see many new buildings constructed as outposts of the national government and its services. This building program was executed through a centralized office of construction and design. The architects of these buildings adopted a new formal, stylistic and tectonic paradigm which saw them moving away from classical and neo-colonial styles of the past toward architectural forms consistent with the emerging Modern Movement\(^2\). Although at first, we only witness this change stylistically, this new wave of architectural styles slowly influenced how the architectural program was organized.

These two shifts - the one political and governmental, the other architectural - occur in parallel with one another. While it is difficult to draw direct lines of influence between the politicians who operated in the halls of government and the architects called upon to design the structures which housed the institutional programs devised under the liberal government, these trends track along similar lines. Each emphasizes a higher exercise of transparent and rational approaches to their respective practices. Importantly, for Colombian architecture, the governmental building program of this period forms the foundation for a new prevailing direction in the design of buildings for governmental and national institutional programs.

---

\(^1\) When talking about modern, modernity or modernization I will be referring to being contemporary or up to date. As defined by the Oxford Dictionary: characterized by or using the most up to date techniques, ideas or equipment.

\(^2\) The Modern Movement as a specific form of architecture which emerged in Europe in the early 20th century. It was characterized by building designs in metal, glass, reinforced concrete with limited amounts of ornamentation.
It is a premise of this thesis that government construction becomes the vessel through which these architectural styles spread, and most importantly, with time these buildings become public icons in the collective memory of people, they are an expression of government aspirations, of reaching all territories of the country and at the same time, they are an expression of the changing spirit of the architects themselves.

To better understand why this sixteen-year period marks a period of change in the country we must also understand that before 1930, Colombia had been under a Conservative authoritarian rule for more than three decades. The shift from Conservative to Liberal leadership was both sudden and energetic. The dynamic of political change is reflected in the many reforms that shaped the country and introduced the idea of progress and modernization as its hallmarks.

During this period, the government pushed the idea of modernizing the country in areas such as education, by implementing educational reforms that gave all populations access to free education, the development of efficient transportation infrastructure, and an increase in government construction. As a part of its rationalization of government, all government construction was centralized in the Ministry of Public Works (MOP).

The architecture that was designed in this period (1930-1946) by the MOP was heavily influenced by European architects who had migrated to Colombia after World War I. These architects brought with them European composition and stylistic strategies that they introduced in the buildings they designed. While they did not represent the Modern Movement as a design idiom or that of the International Style, the buildings studied in this thesis represent an expression of modernity within the Colombian context. Through the National Buildings of Cúcuta, Túquerres, and Barranquilla, we can witness the foundations of what was to become Colombian Modern Architecture in the following decades.

The changes in governmental architecture evidenced by the work of the MOP also occur

---

3 For the rest of this thesis I will be referring to the Ministry of Public Works as MOP.
against a changing backdrop of professional architecture practice. During this period, architecture as a profession gained increasing recognition as an indispensable discipline; before this period there were very few if any Colombian trained architects and the country depended on hiring foreign professionals to fill the void. With the progressive Liberal ideologies from this period, education at all levels became a priority, pushing universities to launch new degree programs in architecture; it’s in this period that the first generation of architects trained in Colombia pave their way into the professional field. The Colombian architects working for the MOP did so alongside the foreign - mostly European - architects who were both the collaborators and teachers of this generation. For this reason, the MOP and its work can be seen as a foundation of an indigenous architecture profession and the buildings it produced as the first evidence of that emerging design culture.

Architectural historians who study this work have identified the architecture produced in this period as stylistically transitional between the classically inspired and neo-colonial idiom which characterized the buildings carried out under the Conservative leadership, and modern styles which came to predominate as the official architecture of Colombia in the 1950s and 60s. This characterization of architecture produced under the MOP in the 1930s and 40s was widespread and has negatively influenced the perception of its value. Colombian architecture journals of the 1950s such as Proa defined the architecture of this period as not significant. As early as 1951, according to the editors of Proa, only architecture after 1945 could be considered as “Colombian” architecture, meaning architecture which was both modern in character and produced by Colombian architects trained in the country.

It is one of the central goals of this thesis to restore attention to the architecture of the

6 The first generation of architects to graduate from the National University of Colombia was in 1944.
7 Silvia Arango, Historia de La Arquitectura En Colombia (Bogotá: Centro Editorial y Facultad de Artes, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1989), 177.
8 Colombian architecture journal founded in 1946 by architects, Carlos Martinez Jimenez, Jorge Arango Sanin and Manuel de Vengeoechea.
MOP produced between 1930 and 1946 on the basis of its intrinsic qualities, its value as a reflection of an emerging political ideology, as the early example of an emerging national architecture culture and as an essential prelude to the architecture which would follow in the 1950s and 60s. I believe that while this work may be categorized as stylistically transitional, it is also foundational to what would emerge and be recognized as Colombian Modernism. Therefore, throughout this thesis, I will not only argue for the significance of these buildings and the need for their proper preservation, but I will also make the case that this research has the potential to advance larger preservation goals of later Colombian Modern architecture. The examples selected for this study represent distinctive architectural expressions of this period because of their materials, their programmatic clarity, their response to climate and their typological innovations.

By focusing on buildings built by the government through the MOP, I will also bring attention to the lack of value citizens place on governmental buildings in Colombia, a circumstance which poses an additional threat to these buildings aside from the threats that come with development pressures, further deterioration and lack of recognition.

Throughout the close reading of three notable case studies, I will argue that the importance of the work done by the MOP during this period is fundamental to the history of Colombia and should be recognized as such and be preserved. The architecture of this period represents a crucial historical juncture, a moment during which Colombian political leaders set in motion the process of modernization represented in part by the architecture produced in the service of the governmental forms they imagined, and also a moment in which architects introduce within their work a change of architectural styles.

Although this thesis will focus on the specific period known as the Liberal Republic (1930-1946), it is essential as mentioned previously, to understand the context that led to this change in political ideologies. For this reason, this thesis will begin with a historical background of Colomb-
bia; the socioeconomic climate that led to this change in the government, as well as the historical background of the period itself. The Liberal Republic; its progressive ideologies, how this political leadership ultimately contributed to the modernization of the country, and what were its characteristic features.

A historical background of the MOP is equally vital in understanding the buildings this thesis will focus on and is followed by the historical background of the country. The historical background of the MOP will cover the purposes of the ministry, how it functioned, its organizational background as well as the mention of several projects that were carried out within this ministry during this period that were representative of the MOP. A brief background of the life and training of the architects that designed the selected case studies will also be included.

With this historical backgrounds, I will set the context in which I will place the selected case studies, and with which I will further argue for their significance. The case studies will each be divided into sections devoted to the study of the geographical context in which the buildings are located and the events that led to the commissioning of the buildings within the MOP. Following this, there will be an architectural description and analysis of the building in which I will describe how the building’s design manifest a new design idiom through materials, style, language, layout, and response to the program as well as the conditions of the site. Each case study will end with an assessment of the current conditions of the buildings.

An overview of the current challenges the preservationists face in Colombia will follow. This overview will include an outline of the regulatory framework for cultural heritage at the national level to better understand the current toolbox the country has for designating and intervening cultural heritage. I will also address the specific challenges of Modern architecture in Colombia and the overall perception of cultural heritage in the country.

The case study method was selected for the development of this thesis because it will allow
me to concentrate on key issues of the significance of the architectural production of the MOP as a foundation for later studies of the many buildings it produced. To that end, I intend to create a framework that can be useful for the evaluation of the significance of other buildings belonging to the period of study.

The criteria for the selection of case studies was as follows: 1) the buildings had to be commissioned within the sixteen-year period selected (1930-1946); 2) they had to be designed and built within the National Buildings Section of the MOP, and 3) they had to represent the transition of architectural styles from a classical style to an architectural style that is representative of the International Style and the Modern Movement that had emerged in Europe and the United States. For the purpose of this thesis and based on the selection criteria stated above, three case studies were selected; the National Buildings of Cúcuta, Túquerres and Barranquilla for which this thesis will argue for significance as a template for establishing the significance of other buildings produced in the same period by the MOP.

The research was based on primary resources including the historical archives at the General Archive of the Nation of Colombia and the Leopoldo Rother Archive in the Leopoldo Rother Architecture Museum in the National University of Colombia, both archives located in Bogotá, Colombia. The yearly reports made to the National Congress from the MOP were also a primary resource which provided an overview of the MOP itself. Secondary resources such as historical and architectural books, journal articles, and academic research papers from libraries in Colombia and New York.

The thesis will conclude by reiterating the claim that there is a tangible association between the architectural ideas these buildings embody and the ideas of good government promulgated under the liberal administrations of this period; and that these buildings reflect a gradual transition to the International Style Modernism which suggests the influence of European design trends as well as the outward orientation of the community of designers of the MOP. I will suggest
the that architects working in Colombia at this time were already alert to the idea which would animate advocates of Colombian Modern architecture in the 1950s and 60s, namely that they were producing a national architecture which also placed Colombia as an equal member of the international community.

**Definition of terms**

Throughout this thesis, references to specific terms will be made that can be open to different interpretations and result misleading within the context of this thesis. For this reason, I have defined specific terms that I will be using frequently below.

*International Style*

The term “International Style” was defined by Phillip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock in their book published in 1932, which followed the Museum of Modern Art exhibition of the same year. The authors claimed that the International Style was not international in the sense that the production of architecture in one country was the same in all countries, but instead, it was a collective experiment of individual architects that was carried out in parallel to each other\(^\text{10}\).

Johnson and Hitchcock defined three features that were characteristic of this new style that had emerged throughout the world:

1. Architecture as volume: as opposed to mass and solidity, where there are no longer thick walls, which represent mass, but instead the use of thin enclosures acting as shells protecting the structure. These become planse surfaces bounding a volume.

2. Regularity in the facade: as opposed to symmetry, the regularity of structure creates a rhythm which can be seen from the exterior of the buildings. The standardization of parts also plays an essential role in the regularity seen of the facades.

3. The absence of ornament: as opposed to arbitrary decoration. Architectural detail which

is needed in modern structures represents the decoration of contemporary architecture.

It could be said that this book which defined so clearly the idea of the International Style became a source of influence for many architects of the time and of the future generations. The authors referred to the style as elastic enough to permit individual interpretation and to encourage growth\(^{11}\). It indeed laid the foundations of what was perceived at the time to be Modern Architecture. The International Style became a style which was emulated by many architects through the 1930s, 40s, and 60s across the world.

**Modern Movement**

The Modern Movement in architecture emerged in Europe in the early twentieth century as a result of new technological advancements which allowed architects to explore new construction technologies and materials. According to Pevsner in his book, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, the Modern Movement in architecture had to possess both qualities, the faith in science and technology, and the romantic faith in speed and the roar of the machines\(^{12}\).

The Modern Movement marked a conscious break with architectural styles of the past and introduced an architectural style characterized by the use of modern industrially produced materials, abstract forms and the abandonment of decorative elements.

Architects such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies Van Der Rohe became pioneers of this new architecture. These architects and many more were responding to specific events that were occurring in the world in their own ways, such as the industrialization which brought with it new construction technologies such as reinforced concrete, steel, and glass. The advancements of the use of reinforced concrete opened the door to many new aesthetic possibilities. The aesthetic expression is based on function and structure, where the buildings are a product of a rational resolution of the problems presented by the program.

Le Corbusier developed within his work as set of architectural principles which he con-

---

sidered to be the *five points of a new architecture* as a vocabulary based on the use of reinforced concrete, which were; 1) The use of *pilotis*, 2) roof gardens, 3) a free plan, 4) a free facade and 4) the use of ribbon windows.

**Modern Idiom**

The term “Modern Idiom” will be used to refer to the architectural language that became characteristic of the International Style and the Modern Movement, mentioned above.

*modern, modernity, modernize*

When using the terms “modern”, “modernity” or “modernization”, Iy will be referring to the idea of being contemporary, to being up to date in cultural, economic and technological aspects, and introducing innovative ways of thinking. When refering to the process of modernization of the country, It will be in the context of the process of bringing all aspects of the country up to date including new transportation modes, a more democratic government, new construction technologies, new materials, as well as cultural and social progress. All of these aspects respond to the aspiration of the nation and the people to be part of the international community.
As mentioned before, the 1930s and 40s were years of great significance for Colombia and the world itself. The country drastically changed political gears, leaving the conservative authoritarian leadership behind and welcoming a liberal leadership. The world was going through the Great Depression which affected Colombia’s economy, but also in the long run, helped boost its national production. All these events directly or indirectly affected the way architects designed buildings. To this end, it must not be a coincidence that it is during this period that architects slowly start distancing themselves of the traditional ways buildings were designed and introduced within their work a broader range of architectural styles, such as the Art Deco as well as styles that identified with the Modern Idiom.

During this period, the Liberal Republic re-structured the MOP and centralized all government construction under this ministry. Never before had all government construction been under one entity, and shortly after this period, government construction was decentralized, and once again each ministry became responsible for the construction of their buildings.

The political mandate of the Liberal Republic to engage with its citizens outside of the capital paralleled rapid and dispersed urbanization. This, together with the introduction of airplane transportation in 1919 encouraged the idea that the country was a collective unity to which government construction needed to respond.

As the governmental entity in charge of carrying out all government construction, the MOP also saw exponential growth. Within thirty years, the MOP went from managing and maintaining government construction within the capital to designing and building all over the country. Government infrastructure ranged from schools, universities to hospitals, military quarters and penitentiaries. Among these buildings, a series of National Buildings were being commissioned all over the country, especially in less urbanized territories, where the lack of governmental in-
structure was noticeable. These buildings acted as outposts of government services such as the judicial branch, mail, telegraph, tax collection among other programs in order to properly serve all communities.

The growth in government construction also resulted in a demand for more architects and engineers to work in the MOP. Unfortunately, at the beginning of this period, architecture as a profession in Colombia was not well established. There were no architecture programs in the country, and people who wanted to study architecture had to look for their education outside the country. While many Colombians were leaving the country to be trained as architects, foreign architects in return were migrating to Colombia.¹ The friendly immigration policies of the liberal government attracted many foreign architects to come work for the MOP. These architects came with their notions of design and influenced the architecture produced during this period.

The Prehistory to the Liberal Republic

Colombia claimed its independence in 1810 and opened the door for the country to grow. After three centuries of Spanish presence, not much had been accomplished in the country; most of the Colombian territory was still unexploited, unknown and uninhabited.² It is in the nineteenth century that the country slowly starts to evolve, and agricultural production starts to come at the forefront. New transportation infrastructure is built, allowing isolated territories to be interconnected, and in less than a hundred years after the independence, the new Colombian nation had more than doubled the number of cities, creating the foundation for the urban modernization of the twentieth century.

The first decades of the twentieth century came with great advancements, the introduction of airplane transportation in 1919 opened new possibilities to connect territories that were still

¹ Giaime Botti mapped the architects who studied abroad and until 1936 approximately 28 Colombians had obtained their training in Europe.
² Jacques Aprile Gniset, La Ciudad Colombiana (Bogota: Banco Popular, Fondo de Promocion de la Cultura, 1991), 18.
difficult to access by ground. North American companies also paved their way into Colombian territory creating an economic influx that benefited the country. By the end of 1930, the country had passed from a European dominion to the North American orbit\(^3\), making the United States the predominant leader in the import and export industries of Colombia.

Colombia’s exportation industry was mainly supported by the coffee industry which was growing at exponential rates, making Colombia the world’s second-leading coffee producer.\(^4\) This new wave of economic growth and the compensation from the Panama Canal agreement\(^5\) resulted in great years of prosperity for the country where public works such as railways and highways became a priority.

Within the construction industry, the newfound economy created two significant advancements; the first was the importation of materials and the second, the progressive adoption of new construction technologies with reinforced concrete.\(^6\) These two changes opened up possibilities within the country for the construction industry to expand and for architects it represented new design possibilities.

In parallel with the economic growth mentioned above, there was a disparity within the rural and working-class populations, which together were more than half of the total population in the country. These sectors of the population were discontent, the rural communities working the lands did not benefit from the prosperity the landowners experienced, and the exploitation of the working-class by North American multinational companies generated a tense environment where outbursts of protests started to occur. These strikes were met with military oppression which only resulted in a weakening of the Conservative leadership.

The Conservative party which had been in power for more than the three decades, started to

---

\(^3\) Ibid., 96.


\(^5\) The Thomson-Urrutia treaty signed in 1921 between the United States and Colombia stipulated the terms of an agreement in which the United States paid Colombia 25 million dollars in return for Colombia’s recognition of Panama’s independence.

\(^6\) Aprile Gniset, La Ciudad Colombiana, 219.
lose popularity within the country, internal party divisions presented a weak national image to the citizens, and the tensions between both parties grew. These tensions, the discontent of the rural and working-class populations, and more importantly the mishandling of the strikes of 1928 contributed to the final collapse of the Conservative hegemony. Thus, in 1930 Liberals won a place in government, with Enrique Olaya Herrera (1930-1938) as the new president.

**The Liberal Republic (1930-1946)**

With Herrera as the new president, the country entered into what is commonly known today as the period of the Liberal Republic that lasted from 1930 to 1946 with four presidential terms. While the first presidential term within the Liberal Republic period was characterized as transitional and moderate, it laid the foundations for the next president, Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo. He was revolutionary in his philosophy and coined his first term as “the revolution at march.”

Pumarejo went on to be president in two different terms during this sixteen-year period, first from 1934-1938 and also from 1942-1945 (his last term ended one year short due to a coup attempt that led to his resignation shortly after). He was an ideological reformer and was the president who pushed for more progressive and modern ideas, specifically in terms of the economic and political structures.

Pumarejo believed in modernizing the country as a way to move it forward and leave behind the state of backwardness he claimed the country was facing, Liberal reforms were necessary. For him, education played a crucial role in the industrialization process of the country, especially with respect to its leadership. The lack of a well-educated professional class restricted the potential for industrial and economic growth.

Education, which had historically been dominated by religious institutions especially the Catholic Church was secularized and the government during this period set in motion the con-

---

7 Bushnell, The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself, 79.
struction of schools and universities in different territories of the country. Pumarejo the high rates of illiteracy as a problem and a setback to the country and also brought social and labor issues into the very center of political debate for the first time. His presidency brought real change to the government, and although he was a wealthy man, he knew that it was dangerous to ignore the middle-and-lower-class populations as the Conservative leaders before him had done. He expressed a desire to help under served communities obtain a larger share of system’s benefits.

Under Pumarejo, the government’s priorities were to promote industrialization and modernization by pushing progressive ideals with a series of reforms that brought the country many changes. During this period, and specifically during his presidency, agrarian reform led to a redistribution of lands to those who cultivated them, a tax reform that allowed the state to charge taxes depending on income, and an educational reform that established primary education to be free and obligatory. The budget designated for education was more than tripled, and educational autonomy was granted to the National University of Colombia. The educational reform also stimulated the construction of the university campus in Bogotá. That campus was designed and built within the National Buildings Section of the MOP.

Pumarejo’s second presidential term (1942-1945) was not as revolutionary as his first term and was absorbed by World War II, and as a consequence, the relationship between Colombia and the United States was strengthened. The Liberal Republic came to an end in 1946, when the Conservative party gained control of the government once again with the election of Mariano Ospina Perez (1946-1950) as the new president.

---

9 Bushnell, The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself, 185.
10 Ibid., 187.
The Ministry of Public Works (1930-1946)

The Ministry of Public Works was founded in 1905, as part of a reorganization of the public administration and to replace the Ministry of Development.12 During the years leading up to the 1930s, most of the work carried out by the MOP was concentrated in Bogotá, the capital of the country. Among the first tasks of the MOP was the completion of the National Capitol.13 Other representative projects before the 1930s were projects carried out to celebrate the centennial of the independence of the country.

In 1934, with Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo’s first presidential term, new legislation centralized all governmental construction through the National Buildings Section in the MOP. This was an effort to reorganize and properly manage all government constructions. Before this, government construction lacked technical studies, architectural and civil plans for their proper construction.14

The MOP by the mid 1930s had eight sections that carried out different activities, among these sections was the National Buildings Section which was in charge of the design and construction of all government buildings. Projects built within this section included buildings for the Ministry of Education (universities, schools), buildings for the Ministry of Government (prisons, detention centers), buildings for the Ministry of War (hospitals, military quarters) and buildings for the Ministry of Agriculture (laboratories).15 Among other government projects were the design and construction of National Buildings as outposts of governmental services.

National Buildings were designed to resolve various governmental programs such as administrative government offices, mail and telegraph offices, administrative offices for finance and public credit, notaries, judiciary offices, courts, and tribunes. These buildings were also seen as symbols of the Nation, and as such, they were designed to be centrally located, on main streets, or

---

13 Construction of the National Capitol began in 1847, the design was by English architect Thomas Reed.
15 Niño, Arquitectura y Estado, 111.
in public plazas to give the impression of monumentality.\textsuperscript{16}

These buildings were meant to spread new ideas about the physical organization of buildings and to demonstrate new building technologies. Although at the beginning of this period (1930-1946) the architecture that we see has a neo-classical language, such as the National Building of Neiva (1932-1934) and the National Building of Leticia (1932), these were buildings being built with new construction technologies such as reinforced concrete, steel, and glass. They were modern to the context of Colombia and more specifically modern in the context of the cities they were being built.

The reorganization of the MOP introduced a professionalized system to manage all government buildings. The ministry also began to hire more architects and civil engineers specializing in the design of hospitals, prisons, and schools to fulfill the growing demand of these services. During this time the National Buildings Section included architects, engineers, and drafters who represented a mix of foreign born and trained professionals (mostly from Europe) that had migrated to Colombia as well as a few Colombian architects trained outside of the country.\textsuperscript{17}

The European architects who migrated to the country brought with them new notions of architecture. These were architects who could have been influenced by the Modern Movement which had emerged in Europe years prior to this period. While initially the “new” architecture these foreigners introduced was only stylistically, the work of the MOP professionals slowly transitioned to a more rational approach to structure and the resolution of program.

In Colombia, the influence of the Modern Movement was not exclusively through Europe. There was also a strong North American influence that spread throughout Latin America driven and evidenced by the spread of the International Style. The spread of the International Style in Colombia and elsewhere in South America was also enhanced by the introduction of immigration-friendly policies which attracted foreign professionals such as architects to migrate to the

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{17} Foreign architects such as Bruno Violi, Leopoldo Rother, Erich Lange, Ernst Blumenthal, Vicente Nasi, and Colombian born architects such as Pablo de la Cruz, Alberto Wills Ferro, and Nel Rodriguez among others.
country and work for the government.

During these sixteen years, we see in Colombia the first wave of modernity, a period characterized by a generation of Colombian architects and foreign architects who together led the process of introducing the Modern Idiom into the country.\(^{18}\) We see the beginning of architecture as a profession in Colombia grow (the National University of Colombia opens the first program of architecture in the country in 1936). *The Colombian Society of Architects* (SCA) is founded in 1934, and many architectural journals start to appear such as *Ingeniera y Arquitectura* (1939) and *Proa* (1946). During the later years of this period, the first generation of Colombian trained architects graduate and start producing architecture that is influenced by their predecessors, and by the architecture produced during this period.

**Architects of the MOP (1930-1946)**

To understand in more depth the creative environment within the National Buildings Section of the MOP, it is vital to understand who were the architects, engineers, and drafters that were working in this period, what was their educational background, where were they trained and by whom they could have been influenced.

The architectural profession in Colombia during the first two decades of the twentieth century was practiced mostly by engineers or foreign architects.\(^{19}\) During these years the MOP depended on foreign architects who migrated to the country to work with the government. Many of these foreign architects were from Germany (Rother, Blumenthal, Lange), Italy (Bruno Violi, Vicente Nasi), among other nationalities.

Alberto Wills Ferro, Ernst Blumenthal, and Leopardo Rother are the architects of the National Buildings this thesis will be focusing on. They worked together in the National Buildings Section of the MOP during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Wills Ferro was Colombian and the

---


other to were German Born and trained. These architects not only worked under the same office, but also collaborated in several projects for the university campus of the National University of Colombia in Bogotá. This demonstrates that they were familiar with each other, and with their working styles. The buildings designed by these three architects for the National University have a common language representative of the rationalism behind the Modern Movement.

**Alberto Wills Ferro (1906-1968)**

Alberto Wills Ferro was born in 1906 in Bogotá, Colombia. He did his first studies at the National University of Colombia (UNAL), in the Engineering School. Within the engineering school, there was a department of architecture (1928), and that is where the architect began his architectural studies. He graduated in 1932 as an engineer/architect with four other classmates. He furthered his education by traveling to New York with a scholarship awarded by the Mayor F.H. La-Guardia of New York. He obtained a Master’s of Science in Architecture from Columbia University in 1944.

During the years after he graduated from the National University of Colombia, he went to work at the National Buildings Section of the MOP (1932-1941), where he became the director of the National Building Sections in 1938. During his time in the MOP, he designed a remarkable number of buildings, including the National Library in Bogotá (1933-38), the National Building of Cúcuta (1937-1940), as well as other National Buildings for Cartagena, Neiva and Puerto Berrio. His work in the MOP was extensive as he also designed hospitals and schools throughout the country.

---

Throughout his work within the MOP, he experimented with different architectural styles, from classical, neo-colonial to architectural styles aligned with the Modern Movement. This is representative of the changing character of the architect but could also be reflective of the changing character the country was experiencing as well.

**Ernst Blumenthal**

Ernst Blumenthal worked in the MOP from 1939-1942\(^2^3\), during his years there, he designed a significant number of buildings. His work focused primarily on the design of educational buildings, designing a great number of schools and technical universities. During his time working in the National Buildings Section of the MOP, he also designed the National Building of Túquerres.

Unfortunately, there is not enough research done in regards to the life of Blumenthal or his educational background. From the research undertaken for this thesis, there has been limited information in regards to his work as an architect in Colombia or Germany. He is mentioned in several books and research papers, but most of the information is brief and unspecific. The potential research of his training as an architect could further advance and give insights to what and who he might have been influenced by and how those influences could have translated into his own designs. Furthermore, the research could enhance the significance of his work in Colombia.

**Leopoldo Rother (1894-1978)**

Leopoldo Rother was born in 1894 in Breslau, Germany. He served in the first World War and then went on to study in Breslau and in Berlin where he graduated in 1920 as an architect/engineer from the Technical Higher School of Charlottenburg in Berlin. His experience in working with the government and with public buildings began in Germany, where he was a resident archi-

\(^{23}\) Niño, Arquitectura y Estado, 334.
tect in charge of overseeing the construction of these buildings in Berlin from 1920-1923 and then in Muenster from 1923-1935. His last job in Germany was designing and directing the construction of the reformatory - Brandenburg-Görden Prison of Brandenburg an der Havel from 1930-1935. As a Jew, his participation in the project was largely kept a secret.\textsuperscript{24} His job was terminated shortly after the completion of the prison. Rother realized that he and his family were in danger in Germany and were able to migrate to Colombia in 1936. The president at the time, Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo had given the instructions to the Ministry of Public Relations to hire European architects who wished to migrate to Colombia. Government construction was rapidly expanding, and the MOP needed more architects and engineers in order to fulfill the demands of the country.

Rother was 42 years old when he came to Colombia. He came directly to work under the National Buildings Section within the MOP, and one of his first projects and probably one of his most prominent projects was the design of the university campus for the National University of Colombia in Bogotá, today commonly known as the “White City”. This project was also without a doubt one of the most significant projects designed and built under the MOP during the Liberal Republic period. With the university campus and the buildings he designed for this campus, we can see he had been influenced by the Modern Movement that was taking place in Europe. The buildings he designed were rational in their design, characterized by their white color and pure volumes.

Rother went on to design a great number of projects while working in the MOP, such as the National Building of Barranquilla, a marketplace for Girardot and many other projects which today are Assets of Cultural Interest for the Nation (BICNAL). He also became a professor at the

National University of Colombia shortly after the architecture program was established, and was an influential figure for the future generation of architects. He is considered by many architectural historians to be the pioneer of Colombian Modern architecture.

The period of the Liberal Republic (1930-1946) is a significant period in the history of Colombia, not only because of its political history as a period that introduced reforms that would contribute to the modernization of the country, but it is also a pivotal period for architecture as a profession. It is during this period that foreign architects and Colombian architects exchange ideas and collaborate to produce a new style of architecture. This is a period in which the architects find themselves experimenting with different architectural styles and start introducing a Modern Idiom into their designs.

During this period, progressive ideologies advanced by the Liberal government run parallel to the change in the individual and collective ideas of architecture in the country. Thus, we see a change in the architects’ work as it began to align with the characteristics of the Modern Movement. After this period, Colombian architects continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to the aesthetic and intellectual reforms characteristic of the Modern Movement.
The National Building of Cúcuta, is a building that marks a pivotal moment within the MOP. It demonstrates the initial phase of the transition of architectural styles and design methods which parallel the emergence of progressive and modern ideologies of the Liberal Republic. Alberto Wills Ferro, who designed the National Building in 1937, is a pioneer in this respect.

Wills Ferro, who was 31 years old when the initial design phase of the National Building began, had been working with the National Buildings Section of the MOP for a couple of years and by this time had already designed several buildings, including the National Library in Bogota (1933-37), which today is one of his most prominent buildings. His projects ranged from schools, to National Buildings to hospitals indicating the broad spectrum of buildings he designed while
During these years, he also worked alongside architects such as Leopoldo Rother and Ernst Blumenthal among others, most importantly he had collaborated with these two architects while designing the Law School for the National University of Colombia in Bogota (1940). The collaborative experience with these two German architects could have influenced Wills Ferro who introduced a Modern Idiom within his work shortly after, as is visible with the National Building of Cúcuta.

The National Building presents an interesting juxtaposition between what one could categorize as a stripped classicism architectural style and a modern construction technology such as reinforced concrete for the time. If we compare the National Building with other buildings Wills Ferro previously designed such as the National Building of Neiva (1932), the break between styles becomes visible, where the architect distances himself from classic architectural style and introduces within his designs a language that aligned with the characteristics of the Modern Movement.

**Context/Location**

The National Building is located in Cúcuta, which is the capital city of the department of Norte de Santander in the northeastern portion of Colombia (figure 2.2). The department of Norte de Santander shares a border with Venezuela, which has made Cúcuta an essential commercial center in the region. Since it was founded in 1733, the city has experienced rapid urbanization and as of today has a population of approximately 660,000, making it the

---

sixth largest city in Colombia.

In the years between 1930-1946, the country was experiencing rapid urbanization rates, while more than half of its population was still located in rural areas, large portions of these populations were beginning to migrate to urban cities for better job opportunities. Such was the case of Cúcuta, which by 1938 had a total population of 37,323 \(^2\) which was approximately 11% of the total population of the department of Norte de Santander. The department itself only had 24% of its population living in urban areas. \(^3\) Meaning that half of the urban population of the department was located in Cúcuta.

The location of this National Building, as well as other National Buildings of this period, became strategic locations for the government. Building outposts of its governmental services in these cities, allowed the government to have more access to the growing urban population as well as the rural populations, thus it expanded their reach throughout the country.

The National Building of Cúcuta was commissioned by the MOP in 1937, as part of a series of projects that were carried out as part of the celebration of the centennial of the passing of General Francisco de Paula Santander; \(^4\) construction began in January of 1939, and the building was inaugurated on May 6th, 1940. It was designed to carry out governmental services such as the mail and telegraph offices, notaries, a judicial branch, and a sanitary department among other services with national character. \(^5\)

The building is a three-story symmetrical building, situated facing north of the Plaza Libertador, known today as the Parque Nacional (National Park). The building itself occupies an

\(^3\) Ibid., 7.
\(^4\) Francisco de Paula Santander was a Colombian military and political leader during the 1810-1819 Independence War of the United Provinces of New Granada (present-day Colombia).
entire block and the setbacks on the east and west sides of the building are an extension of the park. The building is accessible through the south and north facades, with the public entrance located in the south facade facing the park (figure 2.3).

The building features rounded corners which accentuate the horizontal rhythm created by the striped fenestration and emphasized by the continuous overhangs above the windows. The south facade has a frontispiece with a brise-soleil that highlights the verticality and prominence of the principal entrance. The frontispiece has decorative signage and emblems which allude to the governmental character of the building. The prominent base of this building is characteristic of the stripped classicism which was often used when designing government buildings in the United States. The base has a covered walkway supported by pilotis which reinforces the prominent base and public entrance to the building.

The north facade is of similar design, also having a central frontispiece accentuating the access with a brise-soleil. This facade, as opposed to the South facade does not have the rounded corners but instead is flanked by two volumes which protrude forward and give dimension to the facade. The two volumes have a central entrance which is emphasized by the fenestration above. The east and west facades are a continuation of the fenestration, the overhangs and the covered walkway of the south facade creating a continuous massing reinforced by the rounded corners.

---

6 Stripped Classicism is a 20th century architectural style that strips away ornament of the classical styles leaving only the structural and proportional systems visible.
Program Distribution and Circulation

The building’s program is organized around two interior courtyards. The first floor is dedicated to the mail and telegraph offices which are services that have a public character, these are organized along the interior courtyards creating a resulting circulation along the perimeter of the building.

The program on the second and third floor are offices intended for the judicial branch, tax collection offices, the sanitary department, and an educational department. The layout of these two floors is identical, and the program is distributed along a central double-loaded corridor that runs along the entire building and connects to the vertical circulations. This double-loaded corridor is intended to distribute the program along the interior courtyards and the facades of the building, thus ensuring that every room and office has direct access to natural light and ventilation. The circulation is designed to connect the three vertical circulations (stairs), thus making the circulation flow continuously throughout the building.

The vertical circulation of the building consists of two L-shaped stairs located in the northwest and northeast corners and a more monumental split staircase located in the entrance hall which is reflective of the classical characteristics the building has.

The space between the two interior courtyards on the second floor was intended to be a great hall in which the city could carry out cultural activities for the community. According to the original drawings, this space was named after the General Francisco de Paula Santander. This same space on the third floor was intended to be an open terrace, but according to recent aerial views (Google Earth 2014) it appears to have been covered.
The National Building of Cúcuta, built between 1939-40 employed an advanced construction technology for the time. The structure is made of reinforced concrete with a grid created by the beams and columns. The exterior walls are an infill of hollow brick covered in stucco. The interior doors were made of wood, the floor finishes in the primary circulation zones were granite, and the flooring for offices was in tile.7

The use of reinforced concrete was becoming a standard practiced in Colombia during this time. The first cement production company was established in 1905 and started producing cement in 1909. Steel on the other hand was most likely being imported, given that the first steel manufacturing company was established in the late 1930’s (Siderurgica de Medellin S.A.).8 Which meant that while cement was readily accessible, steel on the other hand was dependent on the availability, its importation, as well as the transportation of the material through the country.

The use of reinforced concrete and steel drastically contrasted with the traditional construction techniques commonly used in Colombia, such as masonry construction with load-bearing walls and gabled roofs with wooden structures.

These new construction technologies enabled more possibilities within the design of the buildings. The layout was not obstructed or dictated by thick walls, but instead was made of structural columns that created an open layout for more possibilities to organize and distribute the program. The structure also allowed for longer spans between columns and thinner floor slabs which enabled the spaces to feel more spacious by also maximizing ceiling height.

The steel windows and doors were also likely to be imported for the same reasons mentioned above. Importation played an important role in the process of modernization in the country. The advertisement of new materials and construction technologies in architectural journals such as Ingeniería y Arquitectura promoted the idea of being modern by using modern materials.  

Symmetry

The symmetry is a prominent feature in this building. The facades in the north and south sides of the building are symmetrical around their centers. This symmetry is further reinforced by an axial entrance and two interior courtyards. The symmetry of the facades also highlights the monumentality, scale, and massing of the building which is characteristic of the classic architectural styles. The interior layout of the building also has an axial symmetry which corresponds to the symmetry of the facades.

The way the program was distributed in the layout of the building is also very reflective of the transition between architectural styles. While still being very symmetrical, there is also an element of functionality, where the climate of the region dictates the program. The circulation and distribution of spaces allow for optimal use of natural light, shade, and ventilation, taking full advantage of the courtyards.

---

Environmental Responsiveness

The response to the climate conditions of the regions during this period is an important feature of these buildings. This was due to the fact that buildings were not commonly designed with central air conditioning systems and the tropical climate demanded certain design features would create shade from the sun as well as cross ventilation.

The design of the National Building responds to the tropical climate of Cúcuta which has a mean temperature of 27.6 °C (80 °F). The interior courtyards are an important feature of the design, they provide the interior spaces of the building with ventilation as well as optimization of daylight. The exterior windows also allowed natural daylight as well as ventilation for the spaces facing the facades. The overhangs throughout the exterior windows as well as the covered walkway on the ground floor are designed to create shade and protection from the sun.

Architectural Precedent

The National Building of Cúcuta has a strong influence of classic architectural styles which can be seen through the symmetry and monumentality of the building. However, the National Building’s design also has elements that are characteristic of the Modern Movement. Many of these characteristics became widely popular around the world during this time and can be seen in many buildings that were designed within the same time, such as the Starrett–Lehigh Building (figure 2.6), built in 1930-1931 in Manhattan, New York. It was designed by Russel G., and Walter M. Cory with Yasuo Matsui as the associate architect and it was initially built as a freight terminal, ware-
house and office building, The building is considered to be in the forefront of modern architecture in New York City in the 1930s\(^9\) and has been categorized as an example of the International Style.

The Starrett-Lehigh building and the National Building both share common features that are characteristic of the International Style, such as the regularity in the facade created by the striped fenestration, the absence of ornament and the use of reinforced concrete which emphasized volume rather than mass of the buildings. Although the Starrett-Lehigh building is much larger in scale, the aesthetic of the building can certainly have been influential for the design of the National Building of Cúcuta.

Comparing the architectural language of the National Building with the Starrett-Lehigh building can bring context to the potential elements that influenced the design of this building. The Starrett-Lehigh building which was designed a few years earlier than the National Building as well as other buildings of this period could have been influential for architects such as Alberto Wills Ferro in countries like Colombia, where the North American influence was increasing. The use of reinforced concrete, the rounded corners and the horizontal rhythm created by the fenestration also suggest that international trends in architectural design that became popular during this time, also migrated to Latin America.

Unlike the Starrett-Lehigh building, the Cúcuta example has unique features in its design such as the covered walkway, the overhangs and the brise-soleil that are driven by the need to respond to the climate of the region.

**Current State of the Building**

Today the National Building of Cúcuta is commonly known as Edificio Santander (Santander Building). It is still a government-owned building which houses the National Registry of Civil Status for the department of Norte de Santander. Throughout its lifespan of almost 80 years, it

---

has undergone several interior and exterior renovations. From those renovations, very few have been adequately documented.

According to Google aerial imagery, the building has gone through several exterior paint iterations, the latest being done in 2017. The exterior aesthetic renovations done in 2017, were part of a larger revitalization and urban project of the city in which not only the exterior of the building was updated, but it also included the renovation of the park and the conversion of the street dividing these two as a pedestrian walkway. The new pedestrian walkway now connects the park and the National Building.

While the building today might appear in good condition, and is probably maintained every so often, there appears to be no accurate documentation or record of the work that has been done, nor to what extent these renovations have stayed true to the original design of the building. The lack of scholarly research on National Buildings of this period leaves us with limited information about this building and limits the resources preservationists have when future restorations and conservation interventions are required.

According to the latest BICNAL\textsuperscript{11} List (September 2018) accessible from the Ministry of Culture website, the National Building of Cúcuta is not an Asset of Cultural Interest for the Nation (BICNAL). This means that the building is not designated or recognized as significant within the national scope, nor is it recognized as significant at the regional or local level, making this building extremely vulnerable and at risk of potentially being demolished due to development pressures. There is no entity that would prevent the city from demolishing the building. The preservation of the building relies solely on the value the community has placed on it.

Since this building still carries out governmental services, it is frequently visited by a large portion of the city’s population. Unfortunately, government buildings in smaller municipalities are not well regarded, and in most cases pass unrecognized to many. There is no official or popular recognition of its importance, its history or its architectural value.

\textsuperscript{11} The BICNAL list is the national list of the architectural heritage that is designated as Asset of Cultural Interest of the Nation.
The Significance of the National Building of Cúcuta

The National Building of Cúcuta is a building that has many layers of significance which makes it a remarkable building worthy of preservation efforts of the government. This building along with the other National Building that were built during this period throughout the country represent a body of work from a governmental agency that no longer exists. These buildings also represent the efforts of a Liberal government to present an image of progressive and modernity to its citizens.

The MOP described the building as Modern in the yearly report of 1941 presented to the National Congress, which speaks to the MOP’s and the Liberal governments intention in presenting a Modern image that could speak to the progressive ideals of the liberal government. Modern meant progress and innovation, and this building exemplifies the technological progress of using new construction technologies in rural areas of the country.

The building is also a representation of the early Modern architecture that was being produced in the country during this period, it is building that has features of the International Style (regularity in the facade, absence of ornament, reinforced concrete) as well as features of a stripped classicism (monumentality and symmetry) that represent a transitional period within the work of Colombian architect Alberto Wills Ferro.

The National Building is located in a city where its architecture contrasted with the Colonial and Classical architecture that was common in these cities. Therefore it represented and still represents today symbol of modernity and progress of the country in the twentieth century.
The National Building of Túquerres was designed by the German architect, Ernst Blumenthal in 1941. Like the National Building of Cúcuta, this building represents the transitional period in which architects in Colombia start experimenting with new architectural styles. However, unlike the National Building of Cúcuta, the Túquerres example represents a mid-point of this transition, at least stylistically, where we truly see a cohesive attempt of a Modern Idiom. This could be due to many factors including the fact that Blumenthal was European, and had been trained in Europe, and influenced by the emergence of modernist buildings at home, before migrating to Colombia. Unfortunately, as mentioned previously, there has been minimal research on Ernst Blumenthal, his life or his work, so a precise reconstruction of his influences before coming to Colombia is not yet possible. We do know that he began to work for the MOP around the same time as Leopoldo Rother a fellow German architect and influential figure in Colombia’s architectural
The work of Blumenthal during his time in the National Buildings section of the MOP is varied, both programmatically and stylistically, he designed schools with a strong reference of Spanish colonial architecture, which contrasts with the National Building of Túquerres which has a Modern Idiom. This change, can be both representative of his search of different styles as well as designing according to the program of a building or needs of the MOP.

The architecture designed in the MOP was influenced by the Liberal government and the intentions this government had in portraying an image of progress and modernity. Since these building were meant to carry out governmental services they became the image of the Liberal government.

Context/Location

The National Building is located in Túquerres, which is a municipality\(^1\) in the department of Nariño in the southwest portion of Colombia (figure 3.2). As of today the city has a population of approximately 40,000.\(^2\) Due to its proximity to Ecuador, it became an important urban center for the exportation and importation of agricultural goods. The population of Túquerres in 1938 was of approximately 20,235,\(^3\) which was only 4.3% of the total population of the department of Nariño. Very much like Norte de Santander, Nariño also had at

---

1. A municipality is a territorial division smaller in size and population than a city.
this time a large rural population, with 83.4% of its total population being located in rural areas, making this department and the department of Norte de Santander some of the departments with the highest rural populations during the Liberal Republic period.

These departments with high numbers of rural populations were areas of the country where the need for governmental outposts was necessary in order to provide its services for all communities. National Buildings in these principal municipals also allowed the government to have more reach in these rural areas, that were not of easy access through the cities nearby. Both the National Building of Cúcuta and the Túquerres example were located near borders with other countries making them also strategic for possible communication points with the other countries.

Túquerres is located in the Andean region of Colombia, which has an orogenic in development, which is evident through the volcanoes and geographical faults the territory has. Because of this condition, Túquerres suffered from a series of earthquakes and landslides between 1935 and 1936 which ultimately deepened the socio-economic crisis the municipality underwent during these years. These unfortunate natural disasters destroyed a significant part of the municipality’s infrastructure and left the town in disarray.

Due to earthquakes of 1935-36, the MOP began reconstruction work in Túquerres in 1938, creating the Office of Reconstruction of Túquerres. Some of the projects consisted of building aqueduct and sewage infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and housing for the victims affected by these natural disasters. Within the reconstruction projects, there was also a commission for the National Building of Túquerres. The building was designed in 1941 and inaugurated in 1942.

---

4 Censo General de Poblacion, Dpto. de Nariño - 1938, 7-8.
The National Building of Túquerres is a two-story L-shaped asymmetrical corner building facing west of the main plaza of Túquerres (formerly known as the Plaza Bolívar). The building currently shares the block with three additional buildings, although at the time of the design it was intended to occupy half of the block and the building was a free standing building. The access to the building is through the east facade which faces the main plaza (figure 3.3).

The building’s overall composition is comprised of three volumes that intersect with each other to create the L-shape. The two principle volumes are perpendicular to each other and are connected by a third volume which is the vertical circulation. The principle facade is the east facade and is where the access to both volumes is located. The east facade has different heights due to the different volumes that make up this facade. From left to right, the first volume has the fenestration concentrated in the center, and it is framed by a series of overhangs that emphasize the entrance. The vertical circulation has corner windows that emphasize the verticality of this volume. The volume right of the vertical circulation has a simple design, which has an entrance aligned to the left and is slightly recessed. The entrance is emphasized by steel windows above the doors. The west facade has the fenestration equally spread throughout the facade and is indicative of a rational design of placing windows where needed.
CHAPTER THREE | Form follows function: The National Building of Túquerres

Program Distribution and Circulation

The form of the building is dictated by the program, where each volume solves a different program and are connected by a vertical circulation volume. The mail and telegraph offices are resolved in a rectangular volume that is facing the main plaza, the program itself is distributed along a double-height corridor which also acts as a receiving hall for the entrance. The second volume which is perpendicular to the mail and telegraph volume is also a rectangular volume and resolves the other departments that have a private character, such as the sanitary and educational departments and the offices for the judicial branch. The program is distributed along a central double-loaded corridor and the layout is repeated on the second floor. The double-loaded corridor allows all the offices to have direct access to ventilation and natural illumination as well as optimizes the use of the space.

Structure

The National Building of Túquerres presents an interesting juxtaposition of traditional and modern technologies (wood and concrete), which is likely a response to the availability of these materials in region of the country as well as to the specific climate conditions of the city. The interior doors, floors and ceilings are made of wood and the exterior windows are of steel and glass. The exterior walls brick walls.

In this building, the use of reinforced concrete is limited, used only for the foundations, columns, stairs, and other small elements. In contrast, the structure for the floor slabs and the roof is made of wood. The roof is gabled with wooden trusses and metallic roof tiles which was a traditional roofing system in Colombia. It is likely that the availability of steel and concrete in
this region of the country was scarce and presented a larger expense. Since this building was smaller in scale, it was possible that the budget for its construction was also limited. Interestingly enough, Blumenthal designed the building with steel windows and doors which were also products that most likely had to be imported.

Blumenthal’s intention to design the building with a modern language in the exterior while still having to use traditional construction techniques is indicative of the creativity of the architect. While the roof was gabled, he designed parapets that would cover the roof and give the impression of a flat roof.

**Symmetry - Asymmetry**

Unlike the National Building of Cúcuta, symmetry in the facades as a whole is not present, instead, there is an asymmetry which corresponds to the different volumes that comprise the building. This asymmetry responds to the functionality of the building, where each program corresponds to a separate volume. However, there is symmetry within each volume and there is also symmetry in plans, where the two perpendicular volumes are symmetrical and share a common pivot point. This intricate design of symmetry and asymmetry in plans represents the functional quality that is characteristic of the Modern Movement.
Environmental Responsiveness

The climate in Túquerres is drastically different from the climate in Cúcuta and Barranquilla. The mean temperature is 11 °C (51 °F), which is a significantly colder climate and is due to the municipality’s altitude at 3,104 meters above sea level (mamsl)(one of the territories with most altitude in the country). These climate conditions create different needs when designing the building. Since the climate is much colder, there is no need to have elements such as the overhangs that create shade and protection from the sun; instead, the windows are left unprotected to maximize natural daylight. In many cases, gabled roofs are considered to be more appropriate for cold weather in comparison with flat roofs.

Architectural Precedent

The National Building of Túquerres has a distinctive modern language in comparison to the National Building of Cúcuta, the aesthetic language of this building echoes the characteristics of the buildings designed by Walter Gropius such as the Bauhaus Building in Dessau, Germany, built in 1926. The Bauhaus was an art school whose intent was to unite art and industry using art as the intermediary. The Bauhaus is regarded as one of the most iconic buildings of the twentieth century and is representative of the Modern Movement in Germany and of Walter Gropius’ design ideologies. Walter Gropius is widely regarded as one of the pioneers of the Modern Movement in architecture and became an influential figure during the twentieth century.

The Bauhaus building has characteristics in its composition and design that can be seen

---
in the National Building of Túquerres. When designing the Bauhaus building Gropius intended to create a clear separation between the different programs but at the same time bringing them together into a dynamic interrelation. In this sense, the National Building has many characteristics that can be identified in the Bauhaus building such as the separation of the vertical circulations in a separate volume, the use of overhangs, the use of steel windows and the simple design of the facades with plane surfaces. The similarities are compelling, and while the Bauhaus building was built more than a decade earlier than the National Building, it evidently could have influenced Ernst Blumenthal while he was living in Germany. Taking into account that Blumenthal could have migrated to Colombia at around the same period as Leopoldo Rother (1936) further reinforces the possibility that Blumenthal was familiar with this building and with Walter Gropius’ design ideologies.

Just as with the National Building of Cúcuta, we can see in the Túquerres example several features that can correspond to those of the Modern Movement o International Style although missing one crucial element which is the use of the reinforced concrete as the primary construction technology. Some of the most visible are the absence of decorative elements and the functionality of the design of the building.

Current State of the Building

The National Building of Túquerres currently houses the Judicial Branch of the municipality of Túquerres, and since it has a prominent position on the main plaza, it is a building that also has a strong presence in the collective memory of the people that live here, it is undoubtedly a building that people visit frequently.

Since the building is located in municipality of the department, it is often overlooked, which could be positive in the sense that fewer alterations to the original fabric have been made,

---

9 Giedion, Space, Time, and Architecture; the Growth of a New Tradition, 487.
but also harmful in the sense that it is not recognized as a significant building worth safeguarding. Incredibly, in its seventy-seven years, the building still looks consistent with the original drawings, meaning that no exterior alterations have been done to the building. It appears that the signage and the clock are missing, but it is also questionable if they ever were there, since minimal historical records are available of the building.

However, the National Building of Tuquerres is not recognized as significant at the local level, nor at the National Level, it is not included in the BINCAL list which leaves this building at risk of being demolished at any given time. While the building is still government owned and in use, and this does provide a certain level of protection, there are no policies in place to protect it if were going to be demolished.

Government buildings in Colombia are often associated with negative connotations such as mistrust and wariness. This results in negative connotation to the building itself, therefore it is a building that does not generate a sense of pride for the municipality of Túquerres and its history and value is unexplored by the communities in the municipality and the region.

The Significance of the National Building of Túquerres

The National Building of Túquerres along with the National Building of Cúcuta and Barranquilla are part of a substantial effort from the Liberal Republic government to create outposts of their services throughout the country. Along with this national effort to present a modern image, there was also the effort of the architect and the MOP to carry out those intentions. This building is an exceptional representation of the work of a German architect whose work has not received enough attention or research efforts from the academic and preservation communities in the country. The work of Ernst Blumenthal is mostly unrecognized, and much research still has to be done in regards to his trajectory as an architect and the work he produced in the country. Most importantly, there are very few known works if him still existing today, making this building
a valuable asset to commemorate his legacy in Colombia.

With buildings such as the National Building of Túquerres, the government intended to present itself to the rest of the country within a modern building that represented its ideals about progress and modernization. These buildings that in most cases were built in rural areas represented a contrast between a new modern building with the traditional colonial setting of the smaller towns. The National Building of Túquerres is still as of today a building that contrasts with the colonial setting of the municipality, giving it a monumental character. It is a remarkable building representative of a German Architect, a governmental agency and is an early example of the Colombian Modern architecture, therefore it should be recognized as significant both at the local and national level.
CHAPTER FOUR | The International Style: The National Building of Barranquilla

The National Building of Barranquilla, is one of the most representative buildings of the arrival of the International Style as well as the influence of Le Corbusier in Colombia. Designed by Leopoldo Rother, a German architect that with time became an influential figure in Colombian architecture. The Design phase of the National Building started in 1945, but the construction began in 1946 and continued throughout the early 1950s.

This building is an excellent example of the buildings that were designed and built at the end of the Liberal Republic period, which opened the door to a period called by architectural historians as the period of Colombian Modern architecture.\footnote{Silvia Arango, Historia de La Arquitectura En Colombia, 209 - Niño, Arquitectura y Estado, 209.} While the construction of this building
does not necessarily fall within the period this thesis focuses on, the conceptual phase and commission of the building does.

The National Building of Barranquilla was part of a master plan for the civic center of the city, where there were to be four buildings designed; these buildings would each resolve programs for the nation, the department, the municipal and the judicial branch. Out of this master plan, only the National Building was built.

Leopoldo Rother was in charge of the design of the master plan in 1945 and was one of his later projects while working in the National Buildings Section within the MOP. By 1946, Rother had been working for ten years in the MOP and had designed a significant number of buildings around the country. The buildings he designed reveal the influence of the International Style that was emerging in Europe.

This building and his other works are representative of not only his work as an architect and his view of architecture but are also representative of the work done within the MOP, in a time when all governmental construction was done under one agency. It gives us an insight into the changing character within the organization and within the architects that were working in the MOP in the Liberal Republic period.

**Context/Location Background**

The National Building is located in Barranquilla, which is the capital city of the department of Atlantico. The department of Atlantico is located in the most Northern portion of the Country, along the Caribbean sea, making Barranquilla the largest port in the Northern Caribbean Coast.
region of Colombia. With a population of approximately 1,228,000\(^2\), making it the fourth most populous city in Colombia as of today.

According to the 1938 census, the department of Atlantico had a population of 268,409\(^3\), of which 89% was urban and only 11% was rural, making it one of the densest cities in the country at the time. The total population of Barranquilla in 1938 was 152,348 which made up more than half of the total population of the department. By 1951, the population of Barranquilla had almost doubled with a population of 279,627.\(^4\) Barranquilla was growing at an exponential rate, which can explain why the government saw necessary a civic center for the city. The growing urban population and the fact that the main port for the Caribbean region of the country was located in Barranquilla, made the city a strategic location for an outpost of the government of this scale.

Barranquilla in the 1940s was the second largest city of the country, being Colombia’s principal port, creating opportunities for rapid industrialization and progress. According to the yearly review to the National Congress from the MOP in 1945, there was an agreement between the national government, the department of Atlantico and the Municipality, to create a civic center in the city of Barranquilla, within the commercial sector of the city. The civic center was to have buildings for each of these divisions with a total area of 33,600m\(^2\).

The National Building of Barranquilla is an eight-story rectangular building, that occupies half of the block that was initially intended for the civic center. Today, the National Building shares the lot with what was the Telecom Communications building which was built in 1965. The building faces north of the street and has a large setback which creates a green area for the building (figure 4.3).

---

4 Censo General de Población, Dpto. de Atlantico - 1938.
The building is lifted on a platform and has an open floor supported by pilotis. The main facades are the north and south facades which are the long facades of the rectangular volume. These facades are conceived in glass and have a regularity to them created by the visible concrete structure and steel windows. The regularity of the facades is interrupted by an exterior stair on the north facade and a protruding volume on the south facade. The east and east facades are secondary facades which in their design reflect the service areas such as the stairs and restrooms. These facades have a brise-soleil intended for ventilation and illumination for these service areas. The flat roof becomes an open terrace with a portion of the terrace covered with a series of concrete vaults.

**Program Distribution and Circulation**

The program of the building is distributed along a central double-loaded corridor that runs long the span of the building, this distribution becomes a typical feature for the upper levels above the open floor. The open floor was designed to resolve the parking needs of the building, and the mail and telegraph offices are resolved on the ground level.

The National Building has different access points for pedestrians as well as for vehicles.
The ground floor which is the platform of the building is where the mail and telegraph offices are located. The access to the ground level is through the east facade and connects directly to the street. The entrance is received by a great hall which is also characteristic of the National Buildings of Cúcuta and Túquerres. Within the great hall, there is one of the two vertical circulations which connects this floor to the other floors. This platform becomes the base of the open floor, which is where the parking is located. This floor is also accessed through two ramps on both the north and south facades.

The third level is an atypical floor plan and is offset from the pilotis, which from the exterior gives the impression of double height to the open floor plan of the second level, accentuating the slenderness of the pilotis as well. The modular grid created by the pilotis is used as the divider of the program within the different floors, where the span between two pilotis created a module, and the span between three pilotis created a double module and so forth.

**Structure**

The National Building of Barranquilla is not only innovative with its design but also with the construction technology used. Unlike the previous National Buildings, this building is conceived entirely in reinforced concrete, includ-
ing the foundations, floor slabs, pilotis, and vaulted roofs. The use of reinforced concrete allows for a structural grid that can support the building without the need for load-bearing walls. This allows the exterior of the building to have more flexibility and allows the facade to be conceived in glass. The structural grid created by the concrete pilotis becomes the regulator of the interior distribution of the program on the upper floors.

The vaulted roof is also an innovative achievement at the time, which is also reflective of the intentions of the architect to design a building that would create an impact in Barranquilla. Accessibility of material in Barranquilla was more feasible given that it was the principal port of the country. The availability of materials as well as the large scale of this building allowed the architect to be more bold with his design.

Apart from the use of reinforced concrete, the use of steel and glass is very prominent in this building. The steel windows are very typical of the steel windows found in trade catalogs of the time in the United States, which again, can be indicative of the type of steel products that could be imported to the country.

Symmetry

The National Building is not a symmetrical building, which highlights the dynamic and intricate quality of the building. The design of the building responds to the different needs of the program creating asymmetrical floor plans. Although it is not symmetrical, the building was designed as a rectangle that allows the building to have a balance and rhythm created by the structural grid.

Environmental Responsiveness

The building was also designed to respond to the tropical climate of the region; the average temperature of Barranquilla is 28.4 °C (85 °F) which makes the city a hot city all year long.
and requires the buildings to respond to this in different ways.

The building was not designed with a central cooling system; therefore, the architect had to design the building in such a way that it would be protected from the sun as much as possible. To this effect, the building was designed to face north, allowing the long sides of the rectangular volume to receive less direct sunlight. As a result, the short sides of the rectangular volumes receive the most impact of daylight. The architect, therefore, resolved the circulation and restrooms along these facades, given that these spaces do not have a continuous flow of people. These facades have elements such as concrete brise-soleils which protect the stairs from the direct sunlight but allow ventilation. The North and South facades have the windows slightly recessed in order to create shade from the sun but still able to receive natural light. The windows were also designed to open and close when necessary for ventilation purposes.

**Architectural Precedent**

The design of the National Building of Barranquilla was strongly influenced by Le Corbusier and his five points of architecture. This can be especially visible with the open floor plan, the pilotis, the striped windows, and the open terrace. The overall aesthetic of the National Building has similar characteristics found in projects Le Corbusier was designing in the 1930s. Projects like the Maison Locative Ponsik in Algiers, Algeria (1933), where Le Corbusier was already proposing an open ground floor supported by pilotis and later projects
such as the Gustavo Capanema Palace (also known as the Ministry of Education and Health) built in 1943 in Brazil also have the characteristic open floor with pilotis as well as the brise-soleil representative of Le Corbusier’s work.

Le Corbusier traveled to Colombia in 1948 where he visited the National Buildings Section of the MOP and met Leopoldo Rother. They had conversations about architecture and Leopoldo proceded to show him projects that were being desgined in the MOP. Of the projects Rother showed to Le Corbusier, the French architect was most impressed with the drawings for the Naional Building of Barranquilla.⁵

When comparing the projects design by Le Corbusier and the National Building of Barranquilla, it becomes clear the strong influence of Le Corbusier in Rother’s work. Similarities in massing, scale, and materials, as well as the regularity of the facades and the absence of decorative elements are all characteristic of Le Corbusier. There is also an urban quality to the design of these buildings where the building interacted with the urban setting, a quality that the architecture before this period did not usually have. The open floor was intended to connect the building to the exterior, allowing the people to pass freely under the buildings.

The structure itself is one of the most representative qualities within this building of the Modern Movement. It is a symbol of the modern plan which seeks to represent the structure as points in a plan allowing the exterior walls to be just an enclosure, it also represents the intention of the architect to express the true character of the materials and the functionality of the building.

⁵ Hans Rother, Arquitecto Leopoldo Rother : vida y obra (Bogota: Fondo Editorial Escala, 1984), 60.
Current State of the Building

The National Building of Barranquilla, which today holds the judicial branch of the city, was declared a National Monument by Decree No. 1932 in 1993, which declares the National Building of Barranquilla and the Marketplace of Girardot the buildings that are most representative of Leopoldo Rother’s work. These buildings can all be classified as examples of the kind of work produced during the Modern Movement in Colombia, and it is characterized by the clarity in the handling of the parameters of this architectural movement, by its eminent rationalist conception, and the coordination of the aesthetic aspects, with the technical and structural ones. It was declared a National Monument before the Ministry of Culture was established (1997) and is known according to the new denomination an Asset of Cultural Interest of the Nation (BICNAL). This building is the only building of the three case studies that is recognized at the national level, or even at the departmental or municipal level.

The National Building of Barranquilla is considered by many architectural historians to be one of the most significant buildings that represent Colombian modern architecture and underwent a restoration in 1997. The restoration was led by the Colombian architect Roberto Rafael Angulo Garcia. The project was impulsed and financed by the Superior Council of the Judiciary in order to modernize the judicial branch in the Caribbean region of Colombia. The restoration/rehabilitation project won the Carlos Arbealez Camacho prize in 2008 for best restoration project in the XXI Biennial of Colombian Architecture (2008). According to the description by the Biennial: the restoration project’s main goal was to respect the modern formal language from the initial proposal of Leopoldo Rother in 1946. For this effect, the original design of the windows was recuperated, the interior spaces were redistributed according to the needs of the judicial branch but conserved the spatial parameters posed by Rother, the original elevators were optimized, and the

---

original colors of the facade were also recuperated, as well as the original slenderness of the pilotis was recuperated.\(^7\) The restoration project also included the restoration of the annex building (figure 4.9) designed by known architect Aníbal Moreno. The annex building is a 14-story building.

The annex building which was probably built in the 1960s is an unfortunate addition to the National Building, it detracts from the freestanding quality of the building and covers the East facade completely, where there was once a concrete brise-soleil which accentuated the location of the stairs, a distinctive element designed by Rother.

While the building does not face immediate risk of being demolished, there have already been projects carried out that have diminished its unique architectural characteristics, as mentioned above. The lack of proper documentation of these buildings and their additions/renovations is a recurring threat that all these buildings face. Without the proper documentation of the building which can include updated architectural and structural drawings that can describe the physical characteristics and potential problems the building could face or is facing will not allow the professionals to conserve the building properly.

Proper maintenance is another threat to this building, again, since there is no proper documentation, the maintenance of these buildings is done with disregard of proper conservation processes. Proper documentation also allows for effective monitoring of these building in case of unforeseen events that could harm the buildings.

**The Significance of the National Building of Barranquilla**

The National Building of Barranquilla exemplifies the true arrival of the International Style and the Modern Movement in Colombia. This building as opposed to the National Buildings of Cúcuta and Túquerres, does not attempt to introduce a Modern Idiom in its design, but instead it introduces a cohesive Modern language.

---

\(^7\) Bienal Colombiana de Arquitectura, XXI Bienal Colombiana de Arquitectura (Bogotá: Sociedad Colombiana de Arquitectos, 2008). 264
The design of the National Building of Barranquilla leaves aside a mere aesthetic or material introduction of the Modern Idiom, and instead introduces a cohesive connection between function and form. Where not only the program is dictating the form, but the form is also responding to climatic conditions of the region. The intricate and highly developed design of the facades and the floor plans reflect the functionalism that Modern architecture sought to express.

While this building is already recognized at the national level as a representative project of Leopoldo Rother it is rarely associated with the MOP and the Liberal government, which demonstrates the lack of overall comprehension of the history of architecture produced during the Liberal Republic as well as the history of this building along with the other National Buildings of this period. While this building is much larger in scale in comparison to the other National Buildings discussed in this thesis, it still is part of the larger group of National Buildings. It shares the same characteristics of this typology, they all were designed to resolve the same program. The way each architect decided to resolve it, is what makes them unique to their context. These buildings become a representation of a typology used within the government to represent its services throughout the country.
In Colombia, cultural heritage is considered to encompass more than the tangible heritage of the built environment. It includes all cultural manifestations, traditions, and customs considered to be intangible heritage. The tangible together with the intangible heritage are what represent the national identity of Colombia.

Cultural heritage has always been used as a form of currency for countries at the international and even national level, and Colombia is no exception. In the past decades, Colombia has presented a national image of being rich in cultural heritage comprised of colonial architecture, historic centers as well as natural heritage in order to boost tourism in the country. While this has been successful and is a positive step towards expanding the country’s cultural assets it has undoubtedly left other categories of our built heritage aside.

Aside from acknowledging the fact that cultural heritage can be used as an economic asset, where tourism enhances the country’s economy, we must also consider the potential it has of forming a national identity, which can solidify a community’s sense of belonging and foster pride of place. Which in my opinion can be more powerful in generating actual efforts in preserving our cultural heritage.

As preservation professionals, it is our responsibility to promote awareness of our cultural heritage in order to argue for its preservation properly. Our job is not only designating buildings or monuments that we - preservation professionals - deem significant, but it is also our job to create the necessary tools for a community to benefit from its heritage. Fostering a sense of ownership within communities will ultimately translate in the communities interest in taking care of their cultural heritage.

Preservation as a professional practice in Colombia has gained increased momentum in
the past decades, and it has been only in the late twentieth century that a regulatory framework has been included within the government’s legislation to conserve and preserve its immovable cultural heritage. With this in mind, the general focus to shed light in the Pre-Columbine and Colonial architecture has left Colombia’s Modern architecture in a fragile state. While there have been several efforts to include Modern architecture into Colombia’s repertoire of architectural heritage, it still falls short in comparison to the architecture of the Colonial or Republican periods\(^1\) included in the BICNAL list.

In order to understand preservation as a field in Colombia, we must first understand the regulatory framework established by the government. This framework is the primary tool preservationists have to conserve, preserve, intervene and promote cultural heritage at the national, municipal and local level.

Colombia entered the international discourse of cultural heritage preservation in 1983 when it ratified the World Heritage Convention. Subsequently, more than a decade after, the Ministry of Culture was established in 1997, as the agency in charge of preserving and promoting cultural heritage in the country.

The two principle policy documents at the national level regarding cultural heritage are the Law 397 of 1997 known as the General Law of Cultural Heritage (Ley de Cultura General), and the Law 1185 of 2008 which modifies articles of the previous law regarding the definition of cultural heritage in Colombia. Within these two laws, cultural heritage is defined as:

\[\ldots\text{all material assets, intangible manifestations, products and representations of culture that are an expression of Colombian nationality, such as the Castilian language, the languages and dialects of the indigenous, black and Creole communities, tradition, ancestral knowledge, cultural landscape, customs and habits, as well as material assets of movable and immovable nature to which they are attributed, among others, special historical interest, artistic interest, scientific, aesthetic or symbolic in areas such as plastic, architectural, urban, archaeological, linguistic, sound, musical, audiovisual, film, testimonial, documentary, literary, bibliographic, museological or anthropological.}\] \(^2\)

---

1 Colonial Period refers to the years of 1550-1810 due to the presence and political dominance of the Spanish. Republican Period refers to the years of 1850-1930 where Colombia was establishing itself as a republic.
2 Congreso de La Republica, “Ley 1185 de 2008” (Bogota, Diario Oficial No. 46.929, 2008), 1.
The Law 1185 of 2008, also established the National System of Cultural Heritage (Sistema Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural de la Nacion) and a Special Regime of Protection for Assets of Cultural Interest of the Nation (Regimen Especial para Bienes de Interes Cultural de Ambito Nacional). With this law, the classification of cultural heritage was re-structured, separating tangible and intangible heritage. Tangible heritage comprises immovable (i.e. architecture) and movable (i.e. cultural artifacts) assets. Immovable heritage includes buildings, open spaces, historic centers and monuments, which are categorized as Assets of Cultural Interest (BIC). The BIC are further classified to be of special interest of the Nation (BICNAL), or of interest at the departmental or municipal level (BIC). The Assets of Cultural Interest of the Nation (BICNAL) are regulated at the national level, the Assets of Cultural Interest (BIC) of the departmental or municipal entities are regulated at the local level.

The two policies mentioned above, lay the ground work for the regulation and designtation of cultural heritage at the national level. At the departmental and municipal levels, the Secretary of Culture will be the agency in charge of the regulation and designation of the BIC, which should follow similar guidelines stipulated at the national level. Thus, each department of Colombia has its own list of BIC.

The General Law of Cultural Heritage stipulates that every BICNAL should have a Special Plan for Management and Protection (PEMP - Plan Especial de Manejo y Proteccion) which establishes the necessary actions and regulations in order to guarantee the protection, conservation and sustainability of the BICNAL. While this would provide the necessary regulations for the BICNAL, the PEMP’s are not actually a requisite, and only 13 out of the 1,055 BICNAL currently have a PEMP.

At the departmental and municipal level, there are also regulation plans that establish levels of interventions allowed for the BIC. These provide a set of tools at the local level with which the preservation professionals can properly intervene a heritage site. Designation of a BIC
at the local level can also be a tool of value, and a first step towards nominating them to become a BICNAL.

The regulatory framework overall has been very conservative when it comes to possible interventions to the BICNAL and BIC, and while this can be a positive attitude towards our cultural heritage (allowing for their proper conservation), in most cases it has had a negative effect, resulting in the abandonment and deterioration of our architectural heritage. The strong regulations don’t allow much space for interventions, which in many cases does not incentivize the private owner to properly maintain their property. The private owner rather prefers to abandon the property and wait for its full deterioration in order to justify demolishing it.

The overall values attributed to the immovable cultural heritage in Colombia are historical and architectural values (values that only deal with the built fabric), leaving out in most cases the social values that can also be attributed to the built fabric. These social values are the values communities ascribe to places and are ultimately the values which will drive a community to protect its heritage. Cultural heritage should be seen as collective heritage, a communitarian process of defining what is significant and why it should be preserved. This effort can begin by having a more inclusive designation process at the national and local level.
Colombia has 32 departments and is considered to be a country defined by its regions and their diversity which is due to the geography, climate conditions and demography. Each region/department has developed its own culture, traditions, and gastronomy, making every department of Colombia rich in cultural heritage.

According to the most recent BICNAL list (September 2018) available through the Ministry of Culture website, there are a total of 1,106 Assets of Cultural Interest of the Nation (BICNAL). From these, 1,055 are immovable cultural heritage which represents the architectural heritage throughout the country. Of these 1,055 BICNAL, more than half (57%) is concentrated in four departments (Valle de Cauca, Bolivar, Antioquia, Cundinamarca) and the district capital Bogotá (13%). These four departments also have the largest cities in the country (Cali, Cartagena, Medellín).

Further analysis of the BICNAL list also shows that currently there are five departments (Arauca, Guaviare, Putumayo, Vaupes, Vichada) that currently don’t have assets included in the BICNAL list, and 11 departments that have less than ten assets included in the list (figure 5.1), which means that there are sixteen departments that have less than 10 assets included in the BICNAL list, which represents half of the total departments of country.

The National Buildings of Cúcuta, Túquerres, and Barranquilla are located in the departments of Norte de Santander, Nariño and Atlantico respectively. The department Norte de Santander currently has 41 BICNAL, Nariño has 15 BICNAL and Atlantico 23 BICNAL, which are considered low numbers considering the potential architectural heritage these departments have.

---

3 Colombia is a unitary, constitutional republic comprising of thirty-two departments (administrative and political divisions), and each department has a capital.
The BICNAL list itself is presented to the public in a way that is not easy to understand or to navigate through. The information it does provide of each BICNAL is limited, leaving out valuable information such as the year the BICNAL was built, or a brief description as to why it was included in the list, being either because of its historical, architectural or social values or combinations of these.

The information the list provides does not leave the person reading it with an understanding as to why the assets are of value to the nation, nor it encourages further research. The list only provides the name of the asset, the department and city where it is located, an address (not for all), the name of the administrative act by which the asset is declared a BICNAL, the delimitated area of influence (again, not for all) and the approved PEMP (not for all).

This analysis shows that a large percentage of architectural heritage from more than half of the departments in the county are under-represented at the national level. In some cases, some departments do not have a BIC list that recognizes its architectural heritage at the local level either which further emphasizes the lack of attention cultural heritage receives in these departments. A more inclusive BICNAL list could stimulate and foster a sense of pride and incentivize economic development in these departments.

Another challenge within the preservation field in Colombia is that as of 2019, there is an insufficient number of advocacy groups or non-governmental organizations to deal with cultural heritage, more specifically the immovable cultural heritage. This becomes a problem because all the efforts for preserving cultural heritage are left in the hands of the government creating a top-down approach for cultural heritage.
Preservation Challenges: Buildings of the Twentieth Century

The architecture that we categorize in Colombia as Modern architecture, while it does not represent the Modern Movement and its ideals proposed in Europe, it does reflect certain design principles that can be characteristic of the Modern Movement and the International Style. These buildings also represent modernity in the sense of more functional designs, rational intent, new construction technologies such as reinforced concrete, steel, and glass. These buildings were modern and new in the Colombian context.

Colombian Modern architecture is different from the Modern architecture in Europe and the United States in the sense that it did not revolutionize the country the way the Modern Movement did in Europe, but rather it was a slow introduction of a Modern Idiom (architectural language) that represented the desires of a younger generation to be more pragmatic and up to date with the international community.

When it comes to architectural history in Colombia, the architecture produced in the country has always been categorized to be either Pre-Columbina, Colonial (1550-1810), Republican (1850-1930) or Modern (considered to be from 1945-1970). The problem with categorizing our architectural heritage in this way is that it limits what is considered to be significant and worthy of preservation efforts. These categories create gaps within our architectural history such as the gap between 1930-1945 which is precisely the period of the Liberal Republic this thesis focuses on. These gaps in Colombian architectural history leave the architecture produced in these unrecognized and potential risk of disappearing.

Unfortunately, in Colombia, the most effective tool for preserving and protecting its cultural heritage is by including it in the BICNAL list or the respective BIC list at the local level. As mentioned before, there are not enough non-governmental preservation advocacy organizations to raise awareness of our built fabric or to solicit the necessary funds to document, conserve or restore our architectural heritage. The interventions of architectural heritage are left in the hands of...
the government, private developers and the private owners. Which in most cases leads to neglect and abandonment. Private developers are not sufficiently incentivized to intervene in historic buildings, and private owners do not have the necessary funds to do so themselves. As a result, a percentage of the Modern architecture of the country has either been demolished or altered in such a way that it no longer has the original design intent.

The architectural heritage that is included in the BICNAL list is primarily made up of Colonial and Classical architecture, such as historic centers and religious buildings. Only a small percentage of the list includes Modern architecture that is unique to Colombia. By 1995 there were only about 16 buildings included in the BICNAL list that one would consider to be Modern.4

There has been a general perception that Modern architecture in Colombia is generally not at risk because these buildings are still “new” when comparing them to the Colonial architecture of the historic centers. However, that same perception is what has put this architectural heritage at risk, by not giving it the recognition and attention it deserves.

It would be interesting to further analyze the current BICNAL list in order to determine what percentage of the architecture considered Modern is included in the list. As I mentioned before, the BICNAL list has very scarce information of the architectural heritage included, and extensive research would have to be done in order to determine the year the buildings were built and to classify them by architectural style.

Preservation as a profession has a narrow threshold in the country, with only one program from the National University of Colombia that focuses on immovable cultural heritage. Other programs within the country exist, although limited as well, but these have a focus on movable

---

cultural heritage (i.e. cultural artifacts). The lack of preservation programs in the country results in limited possibilities for people that want to become preservation professionals. In most cases, to get training as a preservation professional, it is necessary to leave the country which results expensive and not accessible to many people.

One of the most critical challenges within the preservation field in Colombia is the accessibility of information and resources. A considerable percentage of information is centralized through governmental agencies which do not easily provide this information to the general public. The information that is accessible is not, and it does not provide the necessary tools for people in learning about their cultural heritage.

Along the lines of the philosophy, knowledge is power, the accessibility of resources to empower communities is necessary. Cultural heritage should be an asset for communities and heritage should be a tool from which communities can and should benefit from. Having an inclusive process in the decision making of what we consider to be our architectural heritage can incentivize the communities to be more engaged with their heritage.

Accessibility of information along with a bottom-up approach towards identifying what should be included as cultural heritage at the national and local level could allow for a collective process that would be inclusive and representative of the country as a whole. As I have mentioned before, the country’s cultural heritage is concentrated in a few departments and falls short of representing the architectural heritage of the country as a whole. Taking into account that the MOP during the twentieth century was creating outposts throughout the country is just one example of the modern architectural heritage that still needs to be recognized and which deserves attention and research.

The government should provide the tools necessary for these communities to benefit from these sites. Both from having access to these sites but also the potential economic benefits re-
resulting from these sites. Cultural heritage can be an asset of identity building, bringing a sense of pride and belonging to the communities that otherwise are marginalized. Introducing the Modern architecture of Colombia to the repertoire of architectural heritage with which the country builds an identity will enhance the sense of pride the communities have towards their heritage because we can move away from our colonial past towards a Colombia that by the twentieth century was modern.
Cultural heritage can be used as a tool to create sense of pride and belonging within a nation. It has been used historically to build a nation’s identity according to specific narratives aligned with government ideologies. Therefore, government buildings are not only designed as buildings to carry out administrative functions, but they also become the symbols of cultural and ethical values that a government wants to portray. With time, these buildings become part of a nation’s history, they become potential tools to represent authority, continuity and stability for the people.

The government’s effort during the period of the Liberal Republic to centralize all government construction through the MOP speaks to the idea of presenting a unified image to its people. They do so by creating a series of outposts throughout the country which represent the government as well as to provide its services. Architects working in the MOP had the opportunity to define what this new architecture should be both aesthetically as well as programmatically.

The use of a Modern Idiom during this period within the MOP is a result of the architects willingness to explore new avenues of architectural styles as well as a new wave of a liberal government that incentivized the ideas of progress and modernization within the country. While it is true that the country was already going through a process of modernization before the Liberal Republic period, we don’t see this reflected in the architecture that was being produced before the 1930s. Before this period, the architecture was heavily influenced by the European architectural styles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These styles were representative of an elite class that was trying to distance themselves from the “national” image of the colonial architecture of the eighteenth century.1

This idea of creating a new national image and breaking with the image of the past has

---

1 Aprile Griset, La Ciudad Colombiana. 220.
been characteristic of Colombia throughout the twentieth century. We see this effort during this period when architects introduced a Modern Idiom within their work. These architects were seeking to distance themselves of the architectural styles that were reminiscent of the past. They were being influenced by what was happening around the world and wanting to introduce these notions into their own work.

European architects came to work for the MOP by invitation of the Liberal government. This influenced the architecture produced by the MOP during this period, not only with the work they produced but by also influencing the younger architects that were working alongside them.

The Modern Idiom introduced during this period is corollary to the increasing progressive ideologies of the Liberal government. These two transitions were occurring in parallel with each other, and most importantly influencing one another. The general sentiment of the country, wanting progress in tandem with the progressive ideologies of the Liberal government set up the ideal environment for architects to introduce a Modern idiom within their work that would contrast with the colonial and neoclassical styles of the past.

The architecture produced in this period (1930-1946) set the foundations for the Modern Architecture of the country in the later periods. These buildings created the programmatic foundation of the modernist buildings in Colombia, much like the Architecture of the New Deal in the United States which set the foundation for Modern Architecture after World War II. The MOP played an important role within the early years of this architecture, at a time when the government construction was spreading throughout the country. In many instances, governmental architecture was the first outlet of this Modern Idiom in Colombia, and set a precedent for the architecture produced in the second half of the twentieth century, which is considered by many architectural historians to be the true Modern Architecture of the country.

Within the scope of government construction produced by the MOP during this period,
the National Buildings represent a unique building program used by the government to create outposts in growing cities and rural territories. They were part of a national effort to improve and expand the role of government in these territories and they did so by inserting a building of a Modern Idiom in cities and towns with mostly colonial architecture.

The National Buildings were all designed to resolve the same program, mail and telegraph offices, notaries, the judicial branch and other departments which included the sanitary department, tax collection department among others. Although these buildings had the same program, the way each architect resolved the program with its design makes them unique.

These buildings are also representative of a national effort to connect to rural territories in response to the rapid urbanization that was taking force. As mentioned previously, the fact that the architects within the MOP decided to design these buildings with a Modern Idiom speaks to the intent of presenting a new image of government buildings to the people.

When researching these buildings, it became clear that as whole they narrate a significant period of Colombian history, during which government construction was centralized through the MOP. That hey were designed centrally and built by the prevailing regime reinforces their significance because they are representative of this effort. They are also representative of a government agency that produced a significant number of buildings during its existence, government construction was eventually decentralized, and the MOP was later restructured as the Ministry of Transport in 1993.

The National Buildings of Cúcuta, Túquerres and Barranquilla, along with other National Buildings built during this period are significant and therefore should be designated as Assets of Cultural Interest of the Nation (BICNAL) in order ensure their stability and preservation.

From the research I have been able to gather, during the period of the Liberal Republic (1930-1946) there were approximately 20 National Buildings built by the MOP, out of these 20 buildings, only the National Building of Barranquilla is included in the BICNAL list. These 20
buildings were built in more than 14 different departments throughout the country. Unfortunately, it is difficult to confirm how many of these buildings are still existing, given that many of these buildings of lost their original use, making it difficult to identify them in a platform such as Google maps. More importantly, there is not enough research that is focused on these National Buildings.

In order to argue for the significance of the National Buildings, further research is needed in various aspects. There is a need to compile all historical information in order to assess how many of these buildings are still existing today. There are two excellent primary resources that will be fundamental to this research which are the yearly reports that the MOP presented to the National Congress and the historical archives of the MOP at the General Archive of the Nation in Bogotá. With these two resources as well as with other scholarly work, it will be possible to determine how many National Buildings were built by the MOP during this period.

Most importantly, there is a need of extensive research on the ground in order to determine how many of these buildings still exist today, what their current condition is, as well as to properly document them for future preservation efforts. A complete report should be done on the buildings that still exist in order to present them to the Ministry of Culture, as well as to argue that they should be declared Assets of Cultura Interest of the Nation.
Bibliography

Primary Sources

//catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009409541.

http://biblioteca.dane.gov.co/media/libros/LB_791_1938.PDF.

http://biblioteca.dane.gov.co/media/libros/LB_816_1938.PDF.

http://biblioteca.dane.gov.co/media/libros/LB_800_1938.PDF.

http://biblioteca.dane.gov.co/media/libros/LB_791_1951_V_1.PDF.


**Secondary Sources**


https://doi.org/10.5334/ah.230.


mento_de_Narino.


Internet Websites
“1927–1931 Construction of the Brandenburg-Görden Prison - Gedenkstätte Zuchthaus Branden-
https://www.brandenburg-zuchthaus-sbg.de/en/history/1927-1931-construction-of-the-bran-
denburg-goerden-prison/


http://www.tuquerres-narino.gov.co/.

https://www.barranquilla.gov.co/.

http://population.city/colombia/barranquilla/.

http://population.city/colombia/cucuta/.


https://www.bibliotecapiloto.gov.co/archivo-de-simesa/.

**Newspaper Articles**