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BOOK

MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE CITY *CONFLICT, URBAN TRANSFORMATION AND HERITAGE IN CALI, COLOMBIA*

By Santiago Araque Collazos (DAD - Dipartimento di Architettura e Design DAD, Politecnico di Torino)

ABSTRACT

The architectonic and urban organization is one of the most valuable sources of information available that portrait existing patterns and dynamics within a given human group. This characteristic contained by architecture and urbanism is present in times of peace but become particularly interesting in times of social tension and hostility, as they tend to materialize these phenomena into the urban landscape. Thus, the study of architecture and urbanism in complex scenarios could highlight, first social and cultural consequences that a given event has had on the community, and second, could point out opportunities for intervention and spatial renovation attempts that contrast the previously acknowledged consequences in their different dimensions. It is precisely this second point that transforms architecture and urban intervention into active peace building promotors, within torn scenarios trapped between overcoming the past or perpetuating present aggressive dynamics resulting from conflict. It is for this reason that the study and understanding of architecture and urbanism in contexts of conflict is of vital importance, especially when significant cultural sites are involved. As they have not only witnessed the beginning and development of the conflict but also tend to be urban symbols of collective memory and identity.

This is the case of Colombia, which has experienced since 1940s different waves of violence historiographical known, first as *La Violencia* and since 1960s as *Conflicto Armado Interno* (Inner Armed Conflict). These long periods of time, added to the impacts that years of confrontation have had in the cultural fabric of the country, have deeply marked the Colombian culture giving rise to architectural responses that reflect the polarization and social fragmentation that have characterized these periods. Thus, the following research seeks to analyze the Colombian city of Cali as case study, in order to understand the architectural and urban changes before, from 1910-1940, and from 1940s to the present day passing through each of the conflicts mentioned above. This process has allowed the identification of specific urban typologies that have been generated directly or indirectly from conflict dynamics. At the end, cultural heritage would be analyzed in this context as a tool that enables reparation and peacebuilding processes through memory preservation. This

new approach could contribute to the change in the vision of heritage and architecture from passive elements to active promoters of development and peacebuilding.

INTRODUCTION

The city, as structure is a complex construction where different dimensions coexist and determine the way spaces are inhabited and organized within a given territory. This means that urban spaces are not only physical or architectural configurations, but they are also containers of symbolic values, cultural practices, and shared memories that grant them meaning. These two realities, material and immaterial, therefore configure the dimensions that constantly generate and create the city, through a complex system of relations, influences, and interactions[1]. In this way, the urban structure can be understood, firstly, as a material projection of immaterial dynamics, composed of social, political, and economic processes, and secondly, it can be seen as a material structure that, in turn, conditions the ways in which immaterial practices manifest. This tight connection between material and the immaterial dimensions becomes particularly evident in contexts of crisis and conflict[2]. Since in these scenarios, urban processes tend to acquire the ability to silently adapt the impacts of violence, exclusion, and inequality, translating unstable social phenomena into lasting spatial configurations[3].In this sense, the study of the city and its architecture becomes a fundamental tool to understand the territorial consequences of prolonged conflicts, but also the way to enable intervention proposals upon the physical structure of the city that promote social changes that contribute to peacebuilding and social reparation in post-conflict scenarios.

In Colombia, these considerations acquire relevance, since throughout the 20th century, different episodes of political and armed violence have left deep marks both on the physical structure of the territory, urban and rural, and on the symbolic construction of the nation. The cities, especially those of rapid growth, became direct recipients of the demographic, economic, and cultural transformations that the conflicts stimulated. In these cases, the tension between modernization and inequality, between development and displacement, materialized in a fragmented urban landscape, where public spaces, dwellings, and architectonic compositions reflect adaptation attempts to a society marked by uncertainty. In this respect, the city of Cali represents a paradigmatic example of this relationship between conflict and urban transformation. Its accelerated process of expansion, which coincides with some of the most intense periods in Colombia's contemporary history, made it a privileged case study to observe how social and political dynamics are inscribed in the material city. Since the mid-20th century, waves of rural violence, internal displacement, and progressive spatial segregation have profoundly reconfigured its urban fabric, giving rise to new architectural typologies and to ways of inhabiting characterized by the constant search for security and belonging. Understanding these mutations implies, therefore, recognizing that each phase of its urban development constitutes a direct or indirect response to the conflicts that have traversed Colombian society, and that only through the joint reading of the material and immaterial dimensions, and especially of the urban elements that embody these symbolisms, such as architectonic heritage, is it possible to interpret the nature of these transformations and to project paths toward a construction of peace from

space. In this way, the present research has studied urban and architectural changes that the city of Cali has undergone during the 20th century, with special attention to the influences that the conflicts had through the generation of particular dynamics, which led to specific spatial responses that shaped the city and promoted a clear rupture with the traditional ways of inhabiting space that were present at the beginning of the century, and progressively abandoned in contemporaneity.

FROM COLONIAL TOWN TO REGIONAL CAPITAL (1910-1940)

Santiago de Cali, official name under which the city was founded by a Spanish expedition on July 25, 1536, was since its beginnings a small agricultural town located on the western slope of the geographical valley of the Cauca River. At the time, the new settlement joined a growing network of colonial towns structured along a north–south axis following the course of the Cauca River. From its earliest days, due to its distance from the routes that were connected to the colonial capital, *Santa Fé de Bogotá*, the city faced fierce economic and political competition from other settlements further north, such as *Cartago* and *Buga*[4] (fig. 1). Even so, the small town was founded to contribute to two main purposes: first, to exercise effective territorial, military and political control, and second, to integrate the area into the colonial economic system based on the agricultural exploitation of the extensive available plains, and the incorporation of the existing Indigenous population as workforce through subjugation. This system, known as *Encomienda*, granted large portions of land to families of Spanish origin, *Encomenderos*, who in return, oversaw the Christianization and teaching of the Spanish language to the Indigenous population[5]. Over time, these vast areas became economic units known as *Haciendas*, where the architectural typology of the *Casa de Hacienda* was developed. This architectonic typology is composed of a productive residential unit from which agricultural production, labor, and finances were managed[6].

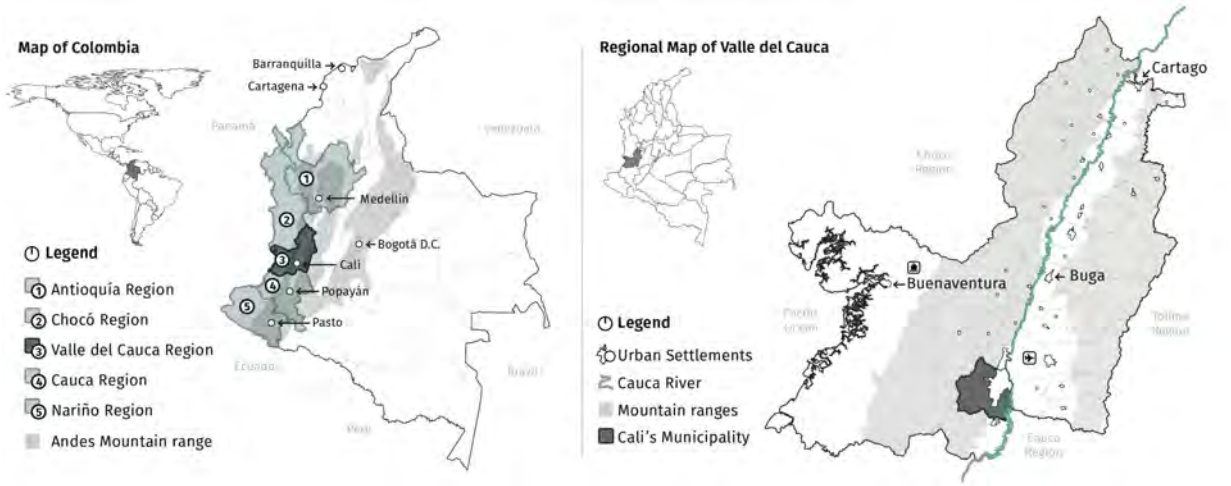


Figure 1. Map of Colombia and Valle del Cauca Region

In contrast to the rural space, Cali took shape as the urban center around which the large *Haciendas* revolved, serving as the seat from which the political and social power of the Spanish monarchy was exercised. One of the

legacies of this time, is the city's urban design, which followed the typical settlement model implemented by Spanish rule in its overseas territories, as defined in the *Leyes de Indias*. This urbanism was characterized by a square grid layout originating from a rectangular main square called *Plaza Mayor*, from whose corners the principal streets radiated, while the remaining rectangular blocks were laid out in parallel. In addition, the buildings of greatest hierarchy were to be concentrated around the square, forming a precinct around it. These buildings were mainly the major temples, the governors' houses, and other colonial institutions[7]. Today Cali's *Plaza Mayor* is known as *Plaza de Caycedo* and remains the city's central nucleus, around which important government and banking institutions are located. Simultaneously with the development of the town, the construction techniques and materials that characterized the colonial architecture emerged as a syncretism between Spanish models, locally available materials, and indigenous traditional construction knowledge. This gave rise to an architecture, sometimes defined as austere, that was usually characterized by thick perimeter walls in adobe built, which followed either the *tapia pisada* or *bahareque* techniques. These walls served as support for double-sloped roofs finished with clay tiles for the most important buildings, or with dry straw for humbler ones and were supported by wooden trusses[8]. Civil buildings, on the other hand, were required to maintain heights that did not compete hierarchically with religious buildings and their bell towers, which, together with the scarcity of economic resources, kept civil constructions between one or two stories. During the city's colonial period, from 1536 until the independence from the Spanish Empire in 1819, its urban layout and composition underwent few changes. The settlement expanded parallel to the *Plaza Mayor* but never beyond the limits of the Cali River to the north and what is today *Carrera 10* to the south. This urban composition contained, austere, that presented a strong rural-agricultural character, also experienced little alteration after the country's independence. On the contrary, a certain continuity persisted in the ways of occupying and building upon the territory, which preserved the city's image practically intact until well into the 20th century[9]. This urban stasis is reflected in the little demographic growth during the 19th century. In 1809, as an example, there were 7,546 inhabitants recorded, a number that decreased to 6,345 by 1830 and rose again to 11,848 by 1851[10]. Conversely, during the second half of the 19th century, the city experienced moderate growth influenced by two economic booms, caused mainly by the increasing demand for coffee and sugar in international markets. Which, in turn, reinforced major social phenomena that marked the history of Colombia. The first one was the *Colonización Antioqueña*, which consisted of waves of peasant migrations moving from various towns in the northern region of *Antioquía* southward, settling in previously unpopulated territories and founding plantations and towns (fig. 1). This process concluded toward the end of the century with the urbanization of the northern Cauca River Valley, which connected Cali with a web of cities now directly in contact with *Bogotá*[11]. The second one, was the consolidation of the railway system through the opening of *Ferrocarril del Pacífico* in 1915, which transformed the region into a commercial hub for Colombian products especially due to is connection to the Pacific port of *Buenaventura*. Thus, during the final years of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, a rapid industrial and economic expansion fostered significant demographic and urban growth. By 1910, the city had become the capital of the newly created region of *Valle del Cauca*, uniting the previous territories of *Cartago*, *Buga*, and Cali, counting a population in 1912 of 27,747 inhabitants, positioning it as the fourth-largest city in the country after *Bogotá*, *Medellín*, and *Barranquilla*[12].

CONFLICTS AND THE CITY OF CALI

Besides the economic and industrial development, conflict has always been a constant throughout Colombian history since the earliest moments of the country's formation in 1820, right after the process of independence from Spanish colonial rule. Even so, it was the conflicts of the mid and late 20th century that had the deepest impact on Cali's contemporary society, partly since they unfolded simultaneously with the city's most significant growth period. These conflicts are, *La Violencia* (1948–1958) and the Inner Armed Conflict (1960–Today). Over the years, both have given rise to urban forms and architectural typologies that directly respond to the immaterial social consequences generated by these events. Consequences that, in many cases, have been gradually naturalized by the civilian population. Next there will be a brief presentation of each of the conflicts mentioned before, with an emphasis on the social dynamics they produced and their consequences on the urban morphology of the *Valle del Cauca* region, and of Cali[13].

La Violencia (1948-1958)

The conflict known as *La Violencia* was a process characterized by the intensification in the confrontation between two opposing political ideologies, represented by the Conservative and Liberal parties. These two contrasting ways of understanding society, politics, and the state started to escalate their struggle throughout the 1930s, however, it was in 1946 that the dynamics which, two years later, would push the country into one of the most complicated political crises of the century began to take shape. In that year, the emerging Liberal political figure *Jorge Eliécer Gaitán* consolidated his position as one of the favorite presidential candidates. Although he lost the elections to a Conservative candidate, he succeeded in channeling the widespread discontent and loss of confidence in the Conservative Party, positioning himself as the politician with the greatest potential to win the following election four years later. However, in 1948, during a political speech in downtown *Bogotá*, *Gaitán* was assassinated, putting an end to all hopes for change and transformation that had been placed upon him. This event triggered a violent wave of uprisings known as *El Bogotazo*, which, although centered in *Bogotá*, quickly spread throughout the country, generating a series of rebellions and attacks that further exacerbated the already tense social atmosphere. In Cali, the news of the assassination caused spontaneous uprisings that resulted in the takeover of several public buildings. The city was only "pacified" a few days later through the direct intervention of the army commanded at the time by the general *Gustavo Rojas Pinilla*, who a decade later would become Colombia's only dictator during the 20th century. The reestablishment of government control in *Valle del Cauca*, as in the rest of the country, was accompanied by intense repression and political persecution of Liberals and their sympathizers[14]. This situation set off a chain of cause-and-effect events that led to the gradual flight of Liberal politicians to rural areas where they adopted, radicalized by the circumstances, armed struggle strategies against the Conservative government and its political and civilian representatives. This, in turn, encouraged the emergence of Conservative armed groups that operated parallelly to the government, with the idea of resisting the actions of Liberals who had taken up arms. However, these groups seeking to gain greater control and respect from the civilian population, gradually began to employ excessive violence in the shape of massacres, torture, persecution, and all kinds of atrocities. The impunity of

their actions, especially in urban centers, had a paradoxical effect, as it spurred the formation of more radicalized Liberal militias, that grouped in rural zones beyond state control. In this way, the dynamics of extreme violence spread throughout the 1950s, until around 1957, when *La Violencia* theoretically came to an end. As a result of the agreement between Conservatives and Liberals known as *Frente Nacional*, which consisted in the alternation of power between the two parties. It was during these years that *Cali* began to show the first signs of change in its urban structure, especially visible in the city demographics. In 1938, the census recorded a population of 101,883 inhabitants, the result of the steady increase in the population described above. This number, however, skyrocketed in the following years, particularly visible in the next census in 1951 that showed an increment of 25%, right at the height of the social crisis caused by *La Violencia*, reaching 284,186 inhabitants. This trend continued, and by 1964 the population had risen another 36%, reaching 637,929 inhabitants. In this way, the strong demographic pressure, not explainable by Cali's natural population growth, generated significant changes in the use of urban land, both within consolidated areas and on the urban periphery. Although population growth was already constant before, it was the dynamics generated by the violence that ultimately forced much of the rural population to leave their lands and seek refuge inside the city[15]. This, in turn, promoted a series of internal movements that altered the relationship of inhabitants with the traditional city spaces[16].

The Inner Armed Conflict (1960-Today)

At the beginning of 1960, although the political dynamics that generated the previous hostilities were partially resolved, it was the injustices caused by those solutions that would later lead to the reconfiguration of confrontations[17]. However, although the political pacts brought an end to the struggle between the Conservative and Liberal parties, it didn't contemplate the inclusion of new political forces to the government, thereby excluding them. Especially important were liberal sectors that in previous years adopted socialist and communist ideologies, partly inspired by the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. In Colombia, in 1960, two main rebel liberal factions had transitioned into a socialist-communist ideologies, these were located at the eastern regions of *Llanos Orientales*, and the central mountainous region of *Tolima* (fig. 2). Yet, although these groups had reached agreements with the government, they never truly laid down their arms; instead, they reorganized as rural non-belligerent, self-defense groups. However, the fear of a communist revolution eventually pushed the government to attempt to reduce the military capacity these militias had, which favored once again an increase in hostilities. Thus, in 1962, the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) was formed after the militias in the east, and in 1964, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) emerged after the *Tolima*'s militias; and in 1970, the *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (M-19) appeared as an urban militia. Since then, this war, which remains active to this day, has passed through different stages, constantly adapting and reconfiguring itself, responding to both internal and external dynamics of the country. To better understand these processes, historians La Rosa and Mejía have divided the phenomenon into five phases, spanning from 1960 to 2016, followed by a proposed sixth phase covering past years:

1960–1982: Characterized by the emergence of the first armed groups and their initial attacks on the government and state institutions. Strong influence of the Cold War.
1982–1996: Marked by the significant growth of the ELN and FARC, and the creation of rural self-defense groups to contrast the actions of these militias. These groups are known as Paramilitares. The influence of the Cold War begins to lose relevance within the conflict.
1996–2005: The most intense phase of the conflict, defined by open war among all the actors and the central government. This period also saw, for the first time, the military and economic influence of the emergence of drug cartels.
2005–2012: A period during which the central government succeeded in deploying military forces effectively, limiting the control and territorial reach of the armed groups.
2012–2016: Characterized primarily by the peace agreement reached between the government and the FARC. These years coincided with a notable reduction in the overall level of violence in the country.
2016–Today: Since then, the country has witnessed a resurgence of hostilities due to the fragmentation of FARC dissident groups that rejected the peace agreement, along with a rise in violent actions against the state and the civilian population carried out by new groups seeking to control illegal economies.



Figure 2. Tolima and Llanos Orientales Regions

Throughout these decades, violence has had a significant impact on civil society, especially in rural areas where confrontations between armed

factions seeking territorial control are most common. As a result, the same refuge phenomenon reappeared, as people left unsafe territories and moved to cities, considered safer and distant from the countryside's violence. This idea was partially true, but it doesn't mean urban areas were exempt from direct attacks; in fact, they often became strategic scenarios used to pressure the central government. Consequently, large cities witnessed bombings, assaults, widespread destruction, and a deterioration of their social fabric, while facing intense demographic and urban expansion. These shifts deeply affected how Colombians perceive and relate to cities and their spaces. Cali exemplifies this process, as the main institutional center of southern and western Colombia, which has attracted conflict dynamics from regions such as *Nariño*, *Cauca*, and *Chocó*. This has generated an atmosphere of mistrust and paranoia, driving a persistent search for more enclosed and controlled environments perceived as safer. Over time, this altered traditional ways of inhabiting and understanding the city, first, through the abandonment of urban spaces deemed threatening, and second, through the rapid adoption of new residential and commercial typologies based on an inherently segregated urban model. Thus, immaterial phenomena arising from conflict-driven social disruptions have shaped new ways of living and building the urban landscape, defining the contemporary city as the material expression of these dynamics and giving rise to an urban form previously unknown[18].

URBAN AFFECTATIONS OF THE CONFLICT IN CALI



Figure 3. Map of Cali with its Historic City Center and neighborhoods

Presently, to understand the conflict's effects on Cali's urban composition, a regional documentary investigation was carried out in 2023. This preliminary analysis was later compared with the city's historical urban development during the same years, aiming to identify patterns and correlations linked to conflict-related events. As a result, it was possible to identify social dynamics that encouraged the adoption and spread of three architectural typologies, foreign to the city's traditional composition, and that shape today's urban reality. Although these typologies contrast with earlier city models, citizens rarely associate them with the conflict, attributing them instead to economic, social, or political factors. Additionally, it's crucial to highlight that these urban phenomena are not unique to Colombia but appear across Latin America and other regions. What stands out in the Colombian case, and particularly in Cali, is the unusual speed and scale with which these transformations emerged, reshaping the city in just 50 years and revealing

consistent links to conflict dynamics. The typologies are the following:

1-Progressive deterioration of the historic center, its neighborhoods, and traditional public spaces due to strong demographic pressure caused by the massive arrival of refugees, known as *Desplazados*. Initially, these newcomers sought to organize themselves within traditional residential houses located within consolidated urban zones, which were progressively adapted to accommodate a larger number of people. Over time, this constant cycle of occupations and interventions led to generalized deterioration of structures and the disappearance of distinctive architectural language. Gradually, the perception of these areas shifted, and they started to be seen as dangerous, obsolete, and degraded. As a result, former owners, no longer finding economic incentives to preserve the buildings, often decided to demolish them to make way for new functions, often counterproductive to the cultural values traditionally associated with the historic urban center. In Cali, this first phenomenon can be seen, particularly in the neighborhoods of *San Pedro* (around *Plaza de Caycedo*), *La Merced*, *Santa Rosa*, *El Calvario*, and *San Nicolás* (fig. 3), where numerous buildings remain until today in severe deterioration state or complete abandonment. Partial facadism can also be observed as the result of heritage regulation voids and improper transformations that ultimately lead to demolition of the whole structure besides the main façade. The rest of the now-empty plot is often repurposed, like parking lots (fig. 4). This loss of value and appeal is also reflected in the extremely low population density of the historic center, one of the lowest in the entire city.



Figure 4. Image of a facade in Cali's historic center, belonging to a historic building that has since been demolished. Photo taken at Carrera 8 No. 7-99A, formerly Calle de La Floresta

2- The second phenomenon is as a progressive consequence of the growing demographic pressure. Over time, the city's capacity to absorb new inhabitants decreased, particularly in terms of labor market integration. Unable to achieve economic stability, refugee population experienced a process of precarization that fueled increasingly aggressive and predatory forms of social competition, which in return increased insecurity levels in those same areas. Eventually, those unable to sustain themselves were forced to leave the consolidated city and seek informal refuge along its peripheries. These peripheral areas are gradually occupied and urbanized spontaneously, giving rise to informal settlements, *favelas* or *baraccopolis*. In Colombia, such settlements are colloquially referred to as *Invasiones* (Invasions), a term that reveals the negative perception towards these expanding areas. In Cali, the rapid growth of these zones is reflected again by the vertiginous population increase, especially between 1973 (991,549 inhabitants) and 1985 (1,429,026 inhabitants). Within just 47 years, from 1938 to 1985, Cali's population grew from 100,000[19] to nearly 1.5 million inhabitants, with a migration rate of 11 "newcomers" (not born in Cali) per 1,000 inhabitants, percentage that grew up to 15.5 by 1993. One of the most notable examples of informal settlements is *Distrito de Aguablanca*, located to the east, between the historic center and the western bank of the Cauca River (fig. 3). Historically, this area was a vast floodplain that began to show signs of incipient urbanization by 1950, though it failed to consolidate due to unstable ground conditions. Nevertheless, from 1970s onward, the area experienced accelerated urbanization, eventually becoming entirely occupied by informal neighborhoods. Today, this sector concentrates around 25% of Cali's 2,238,228 inhabitants in approximately 17% of the city's urban total area, which makes the area have the highest residential densities level in the whole city.

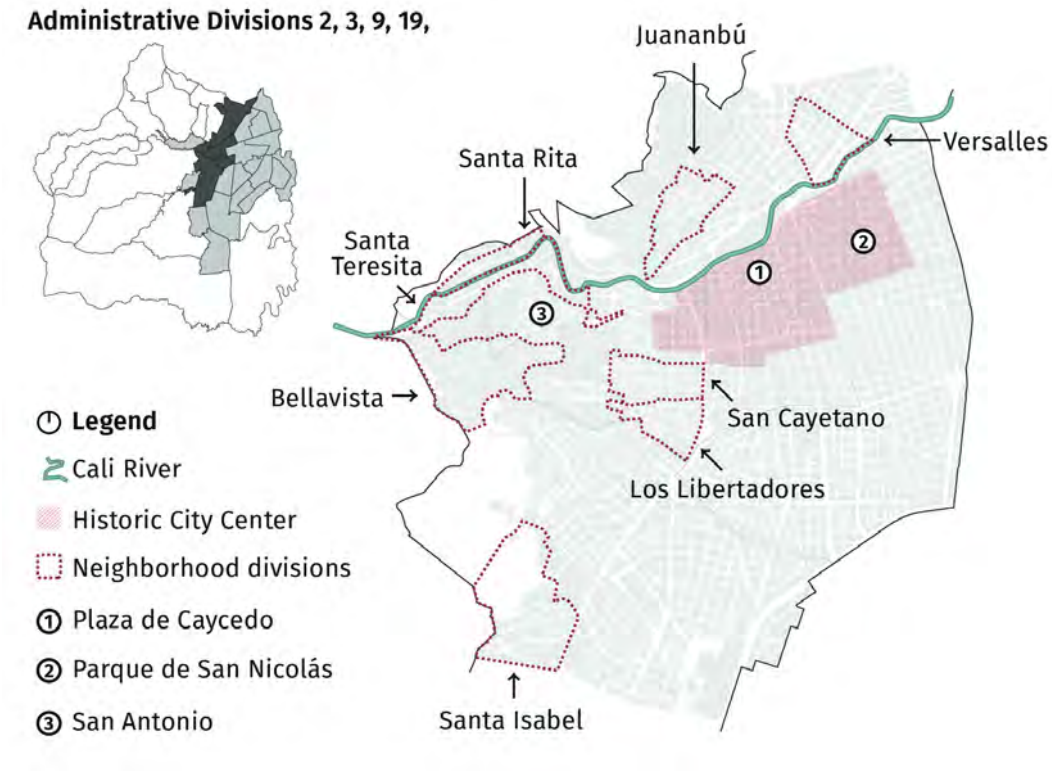


Figure 5. 20th Century Urban Developments in Cali around the Historic City Center

3- The third phenomenon configurates a response from the population that once inhabited the traditional neighborhoods. These inhabitants found themselves immersed in a rapidly transforming urban and social environment, where former cultural and material references were rapidly dissolving, firstly due to the city's expansion and secondly by the physical degradation of spaces increasingly perceived as dangerous. In addition, a general distrust started to emerge, fostered in part by the official narratives and the increasing violence linked to the conflict. This complex situation promoted a progressive exodus of traditional residents toward newly developed neighborhoods outside the consolidated zones. To distance themselves from contexts perceived as chaotic or unsafe, spatial separations were introduced to limit interactions with individuals considered "outsiders". In Cali, this phenomenon presented itself through the consolidation of middle- and upper-class neighborhoods toward the north, northeast, and south of the historic perimeter. Between 1940 and 1960 towards the southwest, the neighborhoods of *Los Libertadores, San Cayetano, Bellavista,* and parts of *Santa Isabel* developed around the *San Antonio* hill, an already established traditional neighborhood since the early 20th century. North of the Cali River, the neighborhoods of *Versalles* and *Juanambú* emerged, while *Santa Rita* and *Santa Teresita* were consolidated outside the historical perimeter of Cali (fig. 5). In this way, within a few years, the city greatly surpassed the boundaries that had contained it for centuries. Initially, these upper-class neighborhoods were designed to maintain a certain relationship with the surrounding public space, though in a controlled way through the implementation of a frontal garden called *Antejardín*, which separated the house interiors from the street. This element, entirely foreign to the previous urban model, distanced the residences from the dynamics that had always taken place on the streets, even though it still maintained a mediated visual connection using vegetation[20]. This model, dominant since the 1940s, changed again in the 1970s as public spaces' perception worsened, coinciding with the transition between phases 1 and 2 of the conflict described before. For this reason, a new typological response emerged, initially only in residential architecture, but later also expanding into commercial typologies. These new forms sought to withdraw completely from urban space through enclosed developments, composed of architectural barriers such as walls, fences, and vegetative perimeters. This phenomenon, known as Gated Communities, represented a strong rupture with the traditional urban model[21]. A clear example of this residential typology is the *Unidad Residencial Santiago de Cali* (URESA), built in 1971 (fig. 6). Considered to be the city's first gated housing complex, it became the reference model for much of the southern neighborhoods' development, even though it did not originally include perimeter barriers, these were added later for security reasons. As for commercial typologies, from the 1980s onward, the *Centro Comercial Cerrado* (enclosed shopping mall) gained popularity as a new way of conceiving commercial and recreational spaces. Although this typology in Cali was partly influenced by American malls, its interpretation, materialities, and spatial organizations reveal an attempt to maintain a degree of continuity with the imaginary of traditional city's commercial spaces. Such as large open-air pedestrian plazas framed by architecture and wide covered corridors accompanied by colonnades. As examples we can see *Centro Comercial Unicentro*, opened in 1980 as the first enclosed commercial mall, *Centro Comercial Cosmocentro* 1981, and *Centro Comercial Chipichape* opened in 1995 (fig. 7).



Figure 6. View of the controlled entrance to the URESA residential complex, located at Cra. 45a #5A-150, in Cali



Figure 7. View of one of the interior spaces of the Unicentro shopping center, where reflecting pools, indoor gardens, and wide pedestrian areas have been implemented

HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN A WOUNDED CITY

Since the late 1990s, the contemporary Cali has consolidated itself as a deeply divided urban environment, where two parallel cities coexist, the first, with a consolidated urban origin, and the second of informal and precarious origin, where the highest rates of poverty and insecurity are concentrated. This spatial separation has, over time, generated divergent value systems, as well as contrasting ways of inhabiting and relating to urban space. Situation that added to the long years of conflict and war trauma, has formed a population that lives with caution and suspicion toward others, where "strangers" are perceived as potential risks to be mitigated through clear spatial, social, and economic divisions[22]. As a result, society has progressively become more polarized divided by increasingly distant positions, reinforced by radicalized ideological stances that continually give rise to violent confrontations, which exacerbate the perception of fear and insecurity throughout the entire urban landscape. In this way, Cali has come to be interpreted by its citizens as an accidental and inevitable result of history, incapable of being modified or renewed. However, the cyclical relationship of the material and immaterial dimensions that make up the city proposed by Sennett, shows that it is, in fact, possible to generate urban physical change through the promotion of new functions and social activities, since both systems are closely interconnected and constantly influence one another. In this sense, it becomes possible to promote spatial interventions that contribute to the gradual improvement of the entire urban system. Among the different possibilities that urban renewal may offer, buildings with significant cultural value, often recognized as heritage, present unique opportunities. These buildings not only occupy important positions within the urban structure, often due to their historical value, but are also widely understood by communities as cultural and identity symbols of vital importance. This, in practice, defines what can be understood as the dual nature of heritage, a condition that allows it to move fluidly between the city's material and immaterial dimensions. These dimensions are usually composed of stratified interpretations of the historical events that have unfolded around these buildings, projecting the memories of inhabitants into the material dimension of the city, connecting them to it and to its heritage in a subconscious level[23]. Today, Cali possesses 16 buildings declared as national heritage and 263 as local heritage, meaning they are recognized only at a regional level. This extensive network of structures, many in advanced state of decay and abandonment, offers the possibility of designing comprehensive intervention projects, that bring conservation needs into dialogue with valorization strategies aimed at regenerating Cali's social fabric, heavily affected by conflict's negative consequences. This transformative potential has been recognized in Colombia through the concept of the heritage social role, conceived not only as an intrinsic characteristic of heritage buildings but also as a necessary and inherent responsibility of any heritage intervention project in the country. Due to historical and social conditions, it is essential to include integral components that promote social development and a culture of peace, especially in spaces that have been scenarios of confrontations and atrocities related to the armed conflict[24].

This heritage responsibility to transform society arises partly from the need to provide effective means of reparation for affected communities, a notion that has been consolidating in Colombia for roughly two decades, when the preservation of memory began to be understood not only as a tool for reparation but also as a key factor in promoting non-repetition. In other words, it is a tool of fostering historical consciousness that prevents similar

dynamics from recurring in the future. Within this context, the sensitive intervention of heritage embedded in the city, which has witnessed the profound changes experienced over the past century, is understood as a fundamental activity capable of enabling social transformations and new ways of understanding and relating to the urban environment. However, identifying the possible functions capable of generating these immaterial changes remains one of the greatest challenges faced by such projects, as it requires a deep understanding of the unique social complexities of the communities that will inhabit those spaces. Fortunately, in 2022, the *Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia*, an institution established by the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the now-defunct *FARC* militias, consolidated in its final report a set of recommendations aimed at fostering a genuine pursuit of peace within the country. While these recommendations cannot be directly translated into specific project functions, they serve as guiding social objectives capable of inspiring innovative approaches and proposals that contribute to a more holistic and integrated understanding of the role of active architectural heritage in building a culture of peace in Cali and across Colombia.

CONCLUSION

Nevertheless, Cali is today a complex system constantly striving to overcome serious social and economic challenges, whose origins come partly from the difficult legacies of the past, but also from the resurgence of armed conflict in recent years. This has once again drawn the city into violent and destructive dynamics that, as in the past, have deepened social divisions, political polarization, and spatial injustices. These forces, in turn, threaten to further alienate the already complex morphological and architectural reality of the city. In response, the need to foster a culture of memory, reparation, and non-repetition becomes a matter of vital importance, to contrast the harmful materialized social dynamics that are still being generated. In this regard, the sensitive and socially oriented conservation and valorization of heritage represent a unique opportunity to generate significant social change capable, over time, of contributing to the regeneration of the immaterial components of society, which as seen before, would eventually be translated into physical improvements in the city's urban composition. At the same time, it is necessary for Colombian heritage conservation theory to develop methodological frameworks that put in dialogue, the protection and safeguarding requirements with valorization projects aimed to regenerate the social fabric of the city, while promoting an improvement in the life conditions in Cali. Only through this integrated approach can a genuine transformation of the way the city is perceived, understood, and lived be achieved. In this way, heritage conservation and valorization would take on an active role in the construction of peace, memory, and social and economic development.

NOTES

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