

Returning to Center: Two Views of the Centro Internacional of Bogota (1959–1982)*

By Miguel Y. Mayorga¹ and Maria Pia Fontana²

In the present-day city, both the architecture and the quality of its urban spaces are key issues for defining urban strategies that are aimed at improving the livability in the city, in its new metropolitan state. Given the inevitability of the changes that the city itself demonstrates, implicitly and explicitly, a return to the center, to the places with relationships between men and things and with humanized space, offers a possible solution.

In this light, the Tequendama–Bavaria complex (1950–1982) within the International Center of Bogota is a center that reveals a series of urban values that may be used as reference points in the challenge of building a polycentric city and in the configuration of livable urban spaces. By analyzing different views since the origins of the city, we can appreciate the consolidation of a project based on the values of territorial and urban “mediation”, which are able to assemble rather than disperse, to integrate rather than segregate, invite rather than repel, and open up rather than close in.

Keywords: modern urban space; modern centrality; polycentrism; Centro Internacional, Bogota; Bavaria complex; Tequendama Complex.

1. The consolidation of a new, Modern center A bird’s-eye view: the area

“In Notre–Dame de Paris Victor Hugo inserisce una descrizione tipicamente moderna: Paris à vol d’oiseau. Il suo occhio, dall’alto di una delle torri della cattedrale, abbraccia dapprima l’intera città e la sua storia per scendere poi lentamente e coglierne singolarità, emergenze e dettagli più vicini. Alla fine di questo movimento cinematografico c’è come un sussulto, il timore che essersi tanto addentrato nel dettaglio rischi di “polverizzare” l’immagine d’insieme; se l’espressione non fosse anacronistica si potrebbe dire “la struttura spaziale della città”.

Bernardo Secchi. *Prima Lezione di urbanistica*.

Panoramic views produce a set of iconographic texts, fully autonomous from the written text, which document the morphologies of the sites, the urban structure, and architecture of the city, and also show their symbolic value depending on the date when the scene was viewed. As noted by Cesare de Seta (*Città d’Europa*, 1996), the iconographic source is a complex system of knowledge that depends as much on the source itself as an artifact with its own characteristics, as it does on the city it represents. In this way, we take in a privileged view of the panorama that leads our eyes to perceive them as single units: the city and the geog-

raphy, the layout and the land, the buildings and the open space, the urban space and the collective life, the symbolic values, and so on.

Aparicio Morata’s Bogota Urbanorama, which appeared in 1772, provided the first representation of the city of Bogota³, and it contained all of the elements necessary to understand the city with respect to its area and its symbolic elements [figure 2].

The city follows a linear structure in which all of the built elements correspond to an arrangement of longitudinal strips, tiered and parallel to the mountains, which does not correspond to the reality of the map but rather to how the city is perceived.

Additionally, to reinforce this image of a linear city, almost all of the taller religious buildings, with their steeples and towers, have proportions that have been altered to appear to be arranged along a single line⁴.

In periods such as the colonial one, which was dominated by pedestrian locomotion, religious buildings, gates, squares, roads, and intersections, the city structure was based on the relationship of superimposition and intersection between the geographical base and the urban designing. This promoted major focal points, for which territorial hierarchy has been reaffirmed over time. These points of geographic intensity, which are also centers of urban intensity, consist of what we can define as a linear polycentric system.

The subsequent connection of the city’s consolidated core with the new suburb in 1880 Chapinero by tram confirmed that the city was following a pattern of polycentric growth with linear but discontinuous development, which left a gap between the main center and the new north section of the city.

Finally, the emergence of car use in the 1950s produced a new adaptation of the form of the urban center that ushered in a new era of westernization in urban development while, at the same time, reinforced a strategic road intersection between the Carrera Séptima, the Carrera Décima, and the Avenida 26. This development led to a significant adaptive reuse and recovery of areas with obsolete uses (such as the Military School and the Bavaria brewery) and also generated the space for a new modern city center to be located [figures, 1, 3, 4].

During the 1950s and 1960s, major urban interventions occurred for the city in several areas and focal points that were determined either by their geographical and territorial location, or because they were strategic crosspoints between the road infrastructure and the geographical base of the city⁵. One of these is the Tequendama–Bavaria complex, located in the International Center, which was a new center that was brought about by the convergence of several processes in the city. These processes include: the strategic definition of the San Diego area as a new urban centrality and the subsequent formalization of its site (subdivision); the process of adapting the city to car use, with the consequent increase in the area of new road connections to the center and to the city periphery (urbanization); and finally, the process of substituting buildings by renewal or reconstruction along these transit roads, whereby the same type of high-rise buildings, composed of a horizontal “base” and a vertical “tower/block”, were systematically used; these type of buildings were used for architectural planning and the urban areas (edification)⁶ [figure 5].

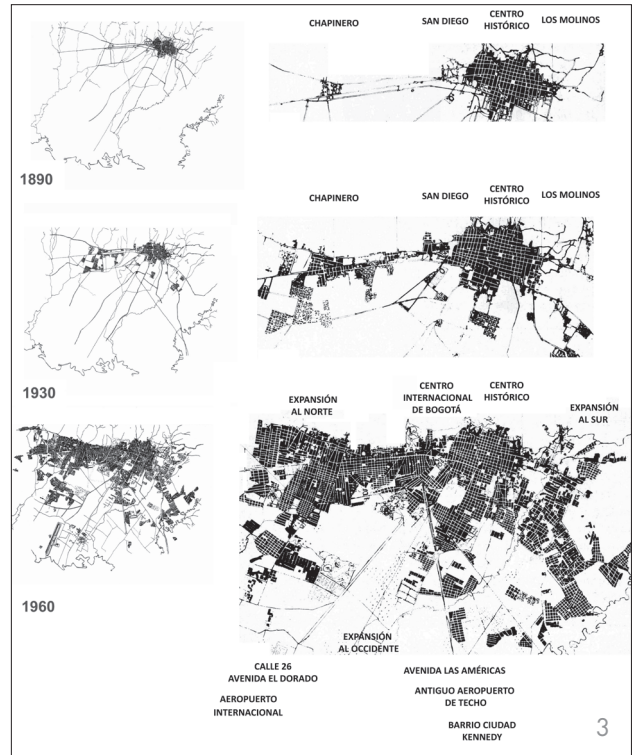
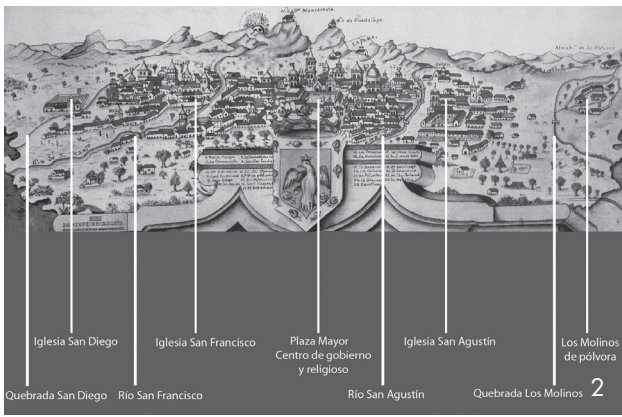
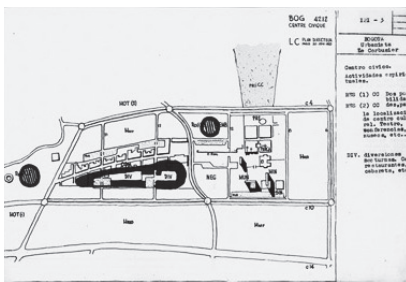


Figure 1. Holabird-Root-Burge, Cuéllar-Serrano-Gómez, Obregón-Valenzuela Tequendama-Bavaria complex in the International Center of Bogota. 1950-1982: a current aerial view. Composed by the authors based on Google Earth, 2009.

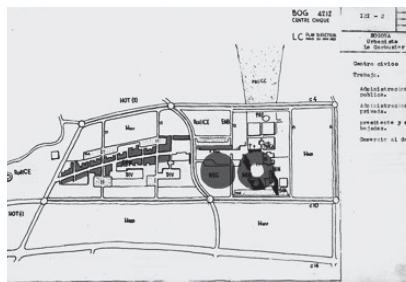
Figure 2. Aparicio Morata, Urbanorama of Santafe de Bogota. 1772: linear and polycentric structure of the colonial city. Composed by the authors based on image of Martínez, C. 1987.

Figure 3. Bogota, urban growth: development of its polycentric structure until 1960. Composed by the authors based on image of Cartilla del espacio público, 1993.

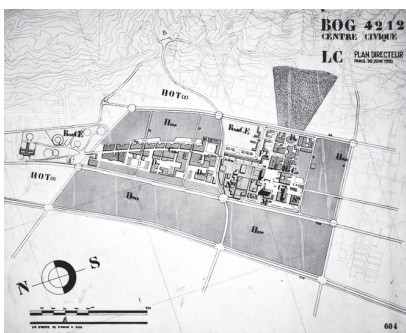
Figure 4. Le Corbusier, Wiener-Sert, 1947-1951, Plan Piloto for Bogota. Wiener-Sert and Le Corbusier, 1951-1954, Plan Regulator for Bogota: linear structure of the centers of the Civic Center of Bogota. (a,b) Plan of the civic center in: *Le Corbusier en Bogota*, 2010. (c) Plan of the civic center in *Le Corbusier DVD*, 2010. (d) Plan of the civic center in Bastlund, K. 1967.



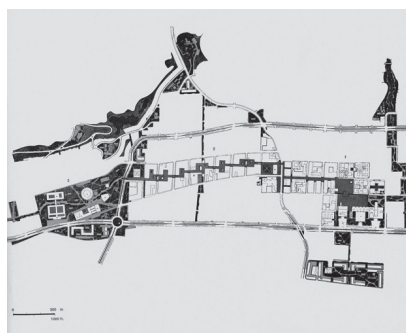
4a



4b



4c



4d



A new Modern center was thereby consolidated that strengthened the polycentric linear urban structure of the center, in a location with a high degree of accessibility, through an urban form based on an open order that blended uses and activities.⁸ On the other hand, the high-rise buildings gave the city a new three-dimensionality, and the multiple variations in the type of edification, and the possibilities of the relationships among them, allowed a new configuration of the urban spaces [figure 6].

In a 1966 conference, delivered at the Royal Institute of British Architects in London⁷, the architect Josep Lluís Sert drew attention to the importance of the distant view as a way to refocus a building, and to identify its basic parts and the elements necessary to raise primary relationships with the ground, against the sky and each other. A photo taken from the plane of Saúl Orduz [figure 6] exemplifies one of the distant views that Sert referred to: it allows us to identify the entirety as a unit, in an environment still unbound within an area of new opportunity for the city, while at the same time allows us to recognize each of the buildings, their specific configuration, and some of the relationships established between them [figure 7].

2. The consolidation of a modern urban space: complexes, buildings, sections, and relationships.

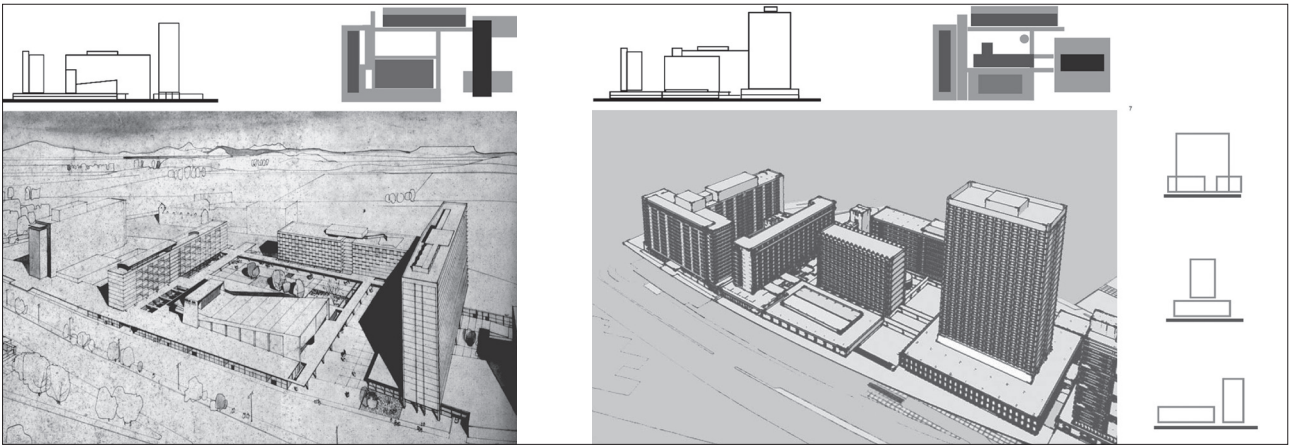
The sidewalk view: the details

The Tequendama–Bavaria complex occupies a block that consists of three plots; however, we will refer to the two major sub-areas, which we term the Tequendama complex,⁹ which occupy two sites, and the Bavaria complex.¹⁰

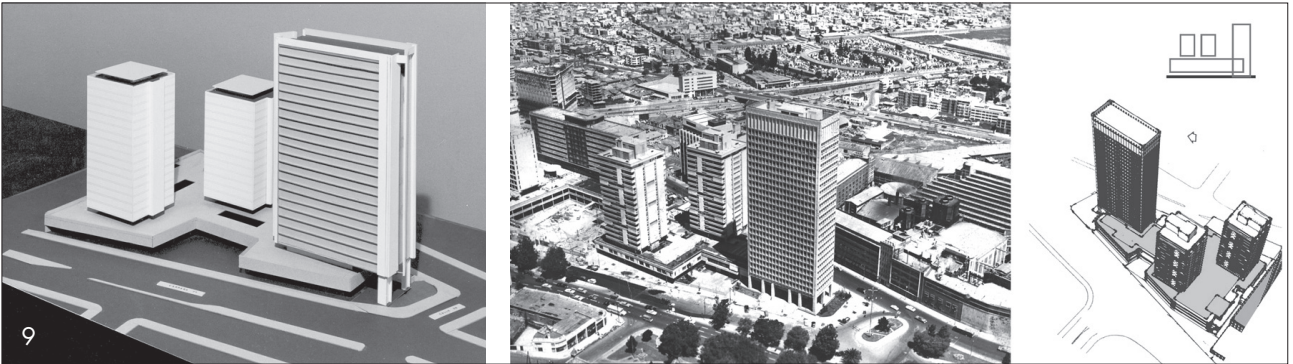
Figure 5. Holabird–Root–Burge, Cuéllar–Serrano–Gómez, Obregón–Valenzuela, Tequendama–Bavaria Complex, Centro Internacional de Bogotá, 1950–1982: Urban relationship of the complex (composed by the authors based on Google Earth, 2009) Construction of the complex (composed by the authors).

Figure 6. Aerial view. High-rise buildings and the urban transformation of the historic center of Bogotá. Photo by Saúl Orduz, 1960s, Museum of Bogotá.

Figure 7. Aerial view. Tequendama and Bavaria complex. The new modern center. 1970s Museum of Bogotá. Photo by Saúl Orduz, 1960s, Museum of Bogotá.

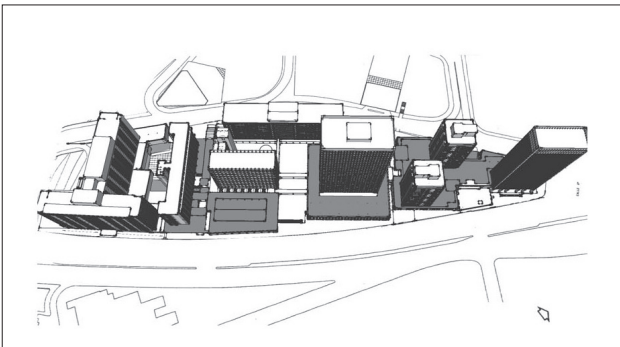


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10



11

The Tequendama complex, which comprises 5 buildings, has undergone a long and complex construction process that began in 1950 with the Hotel Tequendama and ended in 1982 with the Bache Residential building (now Tequendama); it arose from an initial draft of the complex from Cuéllar-Serrano-Gomez.¹¹ During the development, the project was modified in both its composition and its form, such as in the orientation of some of the buildings. Nonetheless, the basic approach of the project was maintained, based on some of the following invariants: the layout of the buildings in relation to the public open spaces that link the buildings to each other, various types of urban and architectural elements (e.g., pedestrian streets, plazas, public stairs,

gazebos, and projections); the arrangement of the buildings around the lot perimeter, with the foundations aligned with respect to the lot perimeter and the streets layout; and a consistent use of the same type of high-rise buildings—consisting of a horizontal base and a vertical tower/block—with multiple urban variations and combinations¹² [figure 8].

In contrast, the project for the Bavaria complex was carried out in a single phase. The area consists of three high-rise buildings, two which are residential and one which contains offices, and a horizontal base section that is commercial and contains offices. Different versions of the project were applied: a study was proposed in January, 1962, an initial draft in March of the same year, and then some in-

termediate versions and ground floor studies were developed prior to finalizing the draft in November 1962¹³. Some invariants were maintained throughout the project development: the organization into two principle areas—residential and office space—connected through the horizontal base; occupancy of the entire perimeter with the horizontal base; a connection with the environment by three transversal access spaces; and group of business premises around the entrance lobbies of the three higher towers [figure 9].

In the Tequendama complex, public and collective spaces are related through the horizontal base by the presence of an exterior “plaza”, while in the Bavaria complex, these spaces are located inside of the horizontal base. Both cases clearly illustrate an intervention strategy that is based on a logical compatibility between the different parts—that is, the connection, the union, and the transitions between the buildings—by resolving the relationship between horizontal bases, ground floors, open spaces, and circulation spaces. An approach was taken in which the design of the building limits, or the edges of the complex, was set as a “mediation” of varying thickness; this achieved an interface between exterior and the interior, using urban squares, plazas, public, semi-public, or semi-private spaces, community spaces, open ground floors, galleries, lodges, balconies, terraces, gardens, and so on. These are relational spaces that allow integration, transition, and union between the parts, providing an overall environmental system that is the basic requirement for quality urban livability [figure 10].



Figure 8. **Cuéllar-Serrano-Gómez**, Tequendama complex, *Centro Internacional* of Bogota, 1950-1982: comparison of the initial and final projects for the Tequendama complex. Schematics relationship between the parts of the complex. Preliminary view in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 1958. Current perspective and schemas (composed by the authors; 2009).

Figure 9. **Obregón-Valenzuela**, Tequendama-Bavaria complex, *Centro Internacional* of Bogota, 1950-1982: initial project and the final construction of the project for the Bavaria complex, and the schematics of the relationship between the parts of the complex. Proposed model in: *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 1958. Photo by Saúl Orduz, Museum of Bogota; Perspectives and schemas (composed by the authors, 2009).

Figure 10. **Cuéllar-Serrano-Gómez, Obregón-Valenzuela**, Tequendama-Bavaria complex, *Centro Internacional* of Bogota, 1950-1982: urban relationships incorporated into the ground floors of the Tequendama and the Bavaria complexes using diverse solutions. Photos by Germán Téllez, 1970 and Paul Beer, 1965. Museum of Bogota.

Figure 11. Bogota, 2010. Territorial dispersion, urban segregation, and spacial disconnection in the present-day city. Photo by Rudolf.com and Skycrapercity.com.

Figure 12. **Obregón-Valenzuela**, Bavaria Complex, *Centro Internacional* of Bogota, 1963-1965: mediation urban space. Photo by Paul Beer, 1965. Museum of Bogota.

3. Epilog: Returning to the Center

The current image of the city of Bogota, especially in its vast zones of sprawl, reminds us, and many others, of an open city, widespread and disorganized, a city that is vast and diffuse at the territorial level, that has converted itself into a dispersed and fragmented system. Here, the relationship between the center and the periphery is blurred by connections of the transit systems, which are interspersed conurbations between urban and rural, and in which multiple “centers” and peripheries are interspersed. And where the new city centers are in fact monofunctional, specialized polarities, which are moving away from the idea of an “urban center” that is understood as a symbolic reference space for meeting and socializing, characterized by its mixed uses and with the ability to attract and sustain group urban dynamics.

On the other hand, at the urban level, once there is a greater independence of the “architectural object,” with more specialized functions, an autistic

and segregated infrastructure, and an isolation of open spaces, a city will be built in which the buildings are largely disconnected with respect to their environment but rather linked almost exclusively to the flow of traffic and communication, resulting in communal and private waste space. This results in an accumulation of systems, urban elements, and material for which the "mediation space" between the buildings, including parts of the city and the geographic basis, are almost entirely eliminated [figure 11].

Faced with these processes of deconfiguration that are characteristic of the present-day city, it is highly useful to refer back to urban centralities and groups of buildings, such as the Tequendama-Bavaria complexes in Bogota. For those for which the projects have been rescued, weight has been given to such fundamental issues as the configuration of centers and livable urban spaces, constructed from the values of territorial and urban "mediation", incorporating spaces that are capable to assemble rather than disperse, integrate rather than segregate, invite rather than repel, and open up rather than close in (Gehl, 1971) [figure 12].

* This article refers in part to the following doctoral theses which is currently being finalized: *El espacio urbano Moderno*, M.P. Fontana, ETSAB-UPC; and *Espacios de Centralidad urbana y redes de infraestructura*, M. Y. Mayorga, ITT-UPC.

Notes

1. Miguel Y. Mayorga is Professor of Urbanism at UPC.
2. Maria Pia Fontana is Professor of Projects at UdG.
3. Marcela Cuéllar, Germán Mejía, *Atlas histórico de Bogotá*, Bogota, Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2007.
4. "Its purpose was actually to demonstrate to the king that the viceroy's capital of New Granada was a city that was ordered, Catholic, dignified, and richly constructed. If this was the author's purpose, some license might easily have been taken." Marcela Cuéllar and Germán Mejía, introduction to *Historical Atlas of Bogotá*, Bogota, Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2007.
5. The pilot plan of Le Corbusier (with Wiener and Sert as consultants) was being developed for Bogota in these same years (1947-1951). This was part of a global assessment of the city which proposed a system of parks and green corridors that would structure and reconnect with their environment and their geographical setting. Additionally, the plan incorporated a "new", extended civic center for the central area, to be organized and structured along the Carrera Séptima in several centers located at major intersections formed by the rivers and the main roads parallel to the mountains. In their later proposal for the Regulatory Plan for Bogota (1951-1953), Wiener and Sert (with Le Corbusier as a consultant this time) proposed some overall important changes with respect to the proposal of Le Corbusier (Hernandez, 2004). However, in the central area of the city, which is our specific area of interest, both projects had a similar premise at the level of urban structure, namely, using main central areas, with correspondence to the Plaza

de Bolívar, the Santander park, and the San Diego area, linked to green areas and structured by a road system parallel to the longitudinal ridges. The civic center of Bogota was presented at Hoddesdon in the CIAM VIII in 1951, dedicated to The Core of the City as "the element that makes a community a community and not merely a casual aggregation of individuals", in the words of S. Giedion.

6. In this case, the urbanization process of "subdivision + urbanization + development" is carried out in an almost unified manner, following the manner of building up the city by urban complexes. From Solà-Morales, Manuel, *Las formas del crecimiento urbano*, Edicions UPC, Barcelona, 1997
7. Hotel Tequendama (hotel and commercial); 2. Bochica building (commercial and offices); 3. residential building Tequendama (hotel and commercial); 4. Bavaria complex (commercial, residential, and offices); 5. Bachué building (commercial, entertainment, and offices) 6. Bachué residential building (presently the Tequendama; commercial, hotel).
8. Sert, Josep Lluís, "Opiniones cambiantes sobre el entorno urbano," *Cuadernos de Arquitectura y urbanismo*, n. 93, Nov. - Dec. 1972, 45.
9. The Tequendama complex is composed of the following buildings: 1. Hotel Tequendama. 1950-53, Holabird-Root-Burgee and Cuéllar-Serrano-Gómez, ETAPA 1 and extension, finalized in 1960, Cuéllar-Serrano-Gómez ETAPA 2 (hotel and commercial); 2. Bochica building, 1952-1956, Cuéllar-Serrano-Gómez (commercial and offices); 3. Tequendama residential building. 1957-62, Cuéllar-Serrano-Gómez (hotel and commercial); 4. Bachué building. 1964-66, Cuéllar-Serrano-Gómez (commercial, entertainment, and offices); 5. Bachué residential building (presently the Tequendama). 1978-82, Cuéllar-Serrano-Gómez (commercial and hotel). The entire block, which also includes the Bavaria complex, is presently called the *Centro Internacional* Tequendama. However we thought it important to identify and separate the two areas of the complex, to explain each of the specific forms of organization.
10. Bavaria complex, 1962-1965, Obregón-Valenzuela; Pizano-Pradilla-Caro (commercial, residential, and offices). This is a project composed of two residential towers and one office tower, related to each other through a commercial horizontal base.
11. The proposal was published in the journal *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, number 80, 1958.
12. These variations are found in the different buildings that form the complex: the horizontal base composed of sections fit into the block, in the Hotel Tequendama; three variations of a block superimposed on the base found in the Bochica building, Edificio Residencias the Tequendama residential building, and the Bachué residential building (currently the Tequendama); and finally, a block offset with respect to the base in the Bachué building.
13. Archive Obregón-Valenzuela. Archivo Distrital, Bogota.

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