

## MEDELLÍN'S BOOM: PARADOXIES OF THE NEW METROPOLITAN MAINSTREAM

Medellín is the second economic centre of Colombia. The capital of the Antioquia province is situated at 1.538 meters, amidst high hills. In 1980, the Metropolitan Region Medellín and Aburrá Valley was constituted, it integrates ten municipalities together with Medellín, and today has a population of about 3.4 millions. The urban region has an extension of 1157 km<sup>2</sup> and a population density of 2877 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.

Medellín once enjoyed the reputation of being one of Latin America's most progressive industrial centres with a long tradition of civic minded public service and urban planning. Medellín's rapid industrialization and modernization during the first half of the 20th century were not initiated by external investors, but by local capital and local elites, unlike other Latin American industrial regions. Textile industry was the engine of economic growth. The historical particularity of Medellín's economic history contradicted current Third-World-development theories. Medellín's elite promoted the image of a city where high rates of capitalist productivity were possible thanks to the elite's social responsibility. In the mid-1970s, Medellín was still Colombia's first economic centre.

World-wide deindustrialisation, however, sharpened the contra-

dictions of the local economic model which entered in a deep crisis. The crisis was confronted by the concentration of regional capital and the constitution of an economic group, Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño, in 1979. The group headed the metropolitan region's economic restructuring; today it is Colombia's first economic group. Deep industrial crisis, economic restructuring, growing informality (50.2% of all urban jobs in 1984, and 55.7% in 2000), as well as the expansion of the global drug economy, helped transform Medellín into the first drug capital of the world. The expansion of the drug economy opened new economic perspectives in Medellín. During the late 1990s, in the wake of a huge influx of money, a globalized consumer and shopping-centre culture spread across the city, the housing market was booming: luxurious apartment towers, fenced in and tightly monitored by private security forces, appeared everywhere in Medellín. At the same time, a wave of extreme violence eroded Medellín's social fabric.

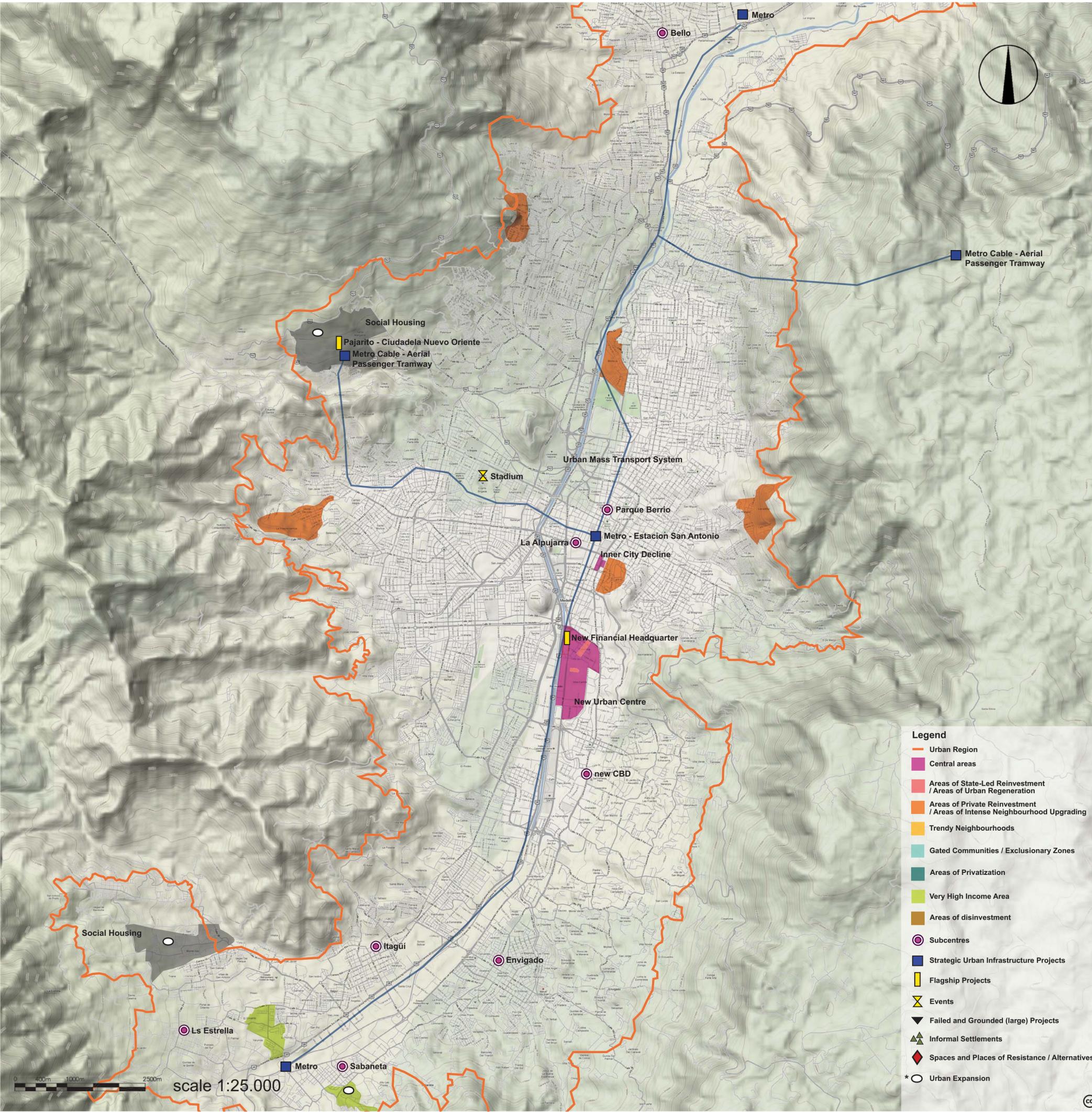
From 1989 to 1993, the year when the icon of the global narcotics trade, the Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar, was killed in Medellín, 28.700 people were assassinated in the city. Most were young men between fourteen and twenty-six years old of the urban 'underclass'. Between 1994 and 2004, other 34.600

people were killed; only after 2004 this numbers diminished. The more the urban crisis increased the more the city's industrial past became glorified in community memory. During the 1990s, public debates at Round Tables and Open Forums between grassroots organizations, local NGOs, trade unions, universities, the municipality and the city's business sector, as well as strategic planning, aimed at managing the urban crisis, and at developing a postindustrial model of a City of the Future. The debates pushed Medellín's transition from an industrial to a service metropole.

The background of Medellín's makeover and its recent boom is paradoxical: on the one hand, the debates, and on the other hand, the formation of paramilitary-led corporate mercenaries which pacified the city.

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Colombia 1'137'748Km<sup>2</sup> \* Inhabitants 41'966'004  
Urban Region 1'157Km<sup>2</sup> \* Inhabitants 3'400'000



## Flagship Project: Headquarter Bancolombia

Purpose	Regeneration of former industrial areas, transition from an industrial to a financial centre in Latin America
Dimensions	constructed area: 125.000 sqm, employees: 6.000, security cameras: 1200
Projets costs	approx. US\$ 190 millions
Investors	Bancolombia
Architects	Interior Architects (USA), Consorcio Convel-AIA.



The new headquarter of BANCOLOMBIA was inaugurated in 2009. It is the strongest symbol of Medellín's transition from a declining industrial region to an emerging financial centre. The building was constructed in the city's most important former industrial area, near the historic centre. The regeneration of the city's declined industrial areas is the key strategic goal of Medellín's strategic plan Medellín 2015. It aims at re-establishing Medellín's image as a booming metropole in Latin America. BANCOLOMBIA is Colombia's first bank, it belongs to the country's first economic group Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño, which is rooted in Medellín. Bancolombia's headquarter is the hugest building a bank ever built in Latin America. The building has direct access to Medellín's metro system and to the city's main express highways. It is the flagship project of a number of important regeneration projects realised in the same area during the last 5 years. The sculpture of superman posing like Rodin's "Thinker" in front of the building reinforces the building's symbolic meaning.

Below: The sculpture of superman



## Infrastructure: Metro de Medellín

Purpose	Transform the urban transport system and render urban transport more efficient
Dimensions	system length 32 km, part of the system is a 15 meter high concrete viaduct, 25 stations and 6 Metrocable stations, 500.000 users
Projets costs	US\$ 2.174 millions, US\$ 1.009 millions corresponds to the real cost of the project, the rest of US\$ 1165 millions corresponds to the overcost due to corruption
Investors	Colombian State, Department of Antioquia, Municipality of Medellín.

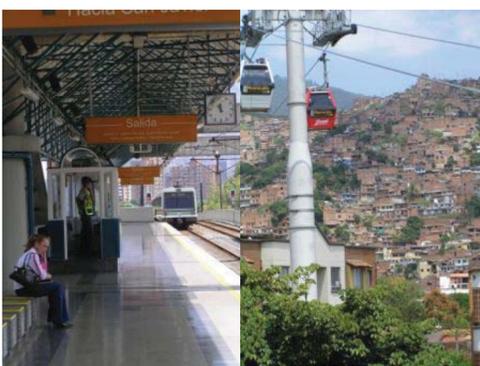


The mega-project Metro de Medellín was the impetus of Medellín's urban renewal and restructuring. The Metro started operation in 1995. It crosses the city on a fifteen meter high concrete viaduct from North to South (line A) and from downtown to the West (line B). The Metro radically transformed the city's transport system. The metro operation company (Empresa de Transporte Masivo del Valle de Aburrá) was created in 1979 in association with the municipality of Medellín and the provincial government. In 1982 the metro project was approved by the national government, and in 1984 the company contracted a German-Spanish consortium to realise the construction works. The works were executed during the city's deepest economic crisis. They were stopped, between 1989 and 1992, due to corruption, and finished in 1995. The Metro Style (Estética Metro) today is a kind of brand of the city's upgraded and renewed public space. In 2004 and 2007, Metro Cable, two aerial passenger tramways have connected part of the lowest income districts on Medellín's hillsides to the Metro system. Aerial passenger tramways are not often used as mass transportation system. The project had been brought to the city's public Round Tables in 1996. At that time, however, it was planned as a tourist attraction that linked together the city's panoramic sites. The project raised a heated public debate. The public debate may have pushed Medellín's first independent mayor, Sergio Fajardo, to transform a tourist project into a project for mass transportation.



The realisation of the Metro project has been strongly criticised by the left because of its high cost, demolitions and resettlements, heavy architecture, surveillance and repression in the Metrospace. Low income groups, however, are much more in favour of the metro. Many consider that the metro improved their life conditions: The metro's price scheme is relatively balanced, and the transport system is very efficient: It takes more than 2 hours to cross the city by bus from North to South, while the Metro covers the same distance in 37 minutes. From downtown to the city's West it takes 9 minutes by metro and 1 hour by bus.

Above: Metro Station Fútbol stadium



## Urban Expansion: Housing

Purpose	Urban expansion of high income housing and social housing. The latter aims at confronting the city's housing shortage and at relocating people from the city's geological "high risk zones".
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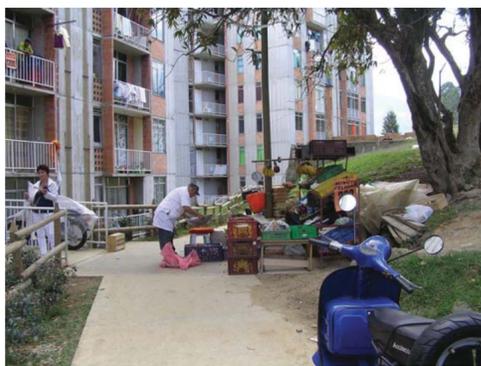
Urban expansion in Medellín has been limited due to geological risks. Housing shortage is severe, specially, for low income sectors. Strategic planning defined two strategic zones of urban expansion in the South and West of the metropolitan region. In the South (municipality of Sabaneta), private investors realised two huge projects of high income housing: the Gated Communities Aves Maria (constructed area 99.000 m2) and Suramerica. The investor of the first project is the economic group Monarca which represents the region's Emergent Capital (narco dollars). The investors of the second project are economic groups of the region's traditional elite. The projects stand for competing interests between traditional and emergent capital factions in the urban region. They became more obvious after the reinsertion of the paramilitary forces and the legalisation of narco capital. Both projects represent a trend in urban development: High income sectors move to gated communities in green areas at the city's edge. The projects put in danger important natural reserves of the metropolitan region, and were built against the resistance of conservation movements.

Below: High Income Housing Aves Maria and Suramerica



In the Western zone of urban expansion, the municipality together with private social compensation funds, and funds of the national government realised a huge social housing project Pajarito/Ciudadela Nuevo Occidente. The project is the result of participatory planning in the context of Medellín's 1999 Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial-POT. The project was designed to relocate families from the city's geological "high risk zones". It was articulated to the new mass transport system, Metro Cable, which connects it to the centre of the city. During the South American Championship in Medellín, in March 2010, some of the buildings had hosted international sport delegations. The social housing project has approx. 40.000 residents. The impact of the project is ambivalent: Housing conditions improved considerably, while underemployment could only partially be faced by the construction of a market. Relocated residents lost direct access to their former informal working place downtown.

Below: Social Housing Pajarito/Medellin



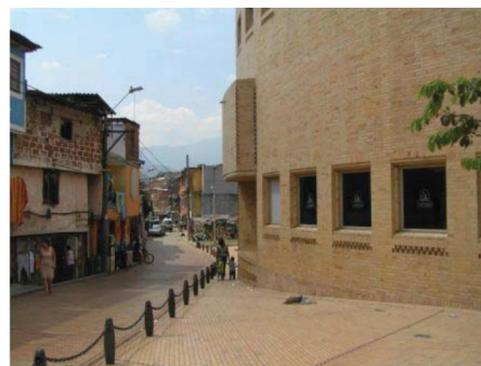
## Alternative: Participate Upgrading

Purpose	Neighbourhood upgrading and conflict management.
Dimensions	Neighbourhood with an area of 451.810 m2 and with 34.000 residents when the upgrading project started in 2004.
Projets costs	Approx. US\$ 78 millions
Investors	Municipality of Medellín



The city's first participative upgrading program was implemented in Moravia, a neighbourhood close to the city's historical centre. The neighbourhood was part of Medellín's former dump. Between 1977 and 1983 around 15'000 people settled on the dump, which was 30 meter high and had an area of 76.000 m2. In 1983, the municipality closed the dump. Residents resisted to relocation and started negotiating participative upgrading with the municipality: decontamination, legalization of land tenure, public services, improvement of housing and public space. In 1990, the municipality declared Moravia a special area of urban upgrading. During the 1990s, Moravia turned into a dynamic centre of informal economy: Recuperar, a cooperative specialized in waste management emerged in the neighbourhood and expanded to more than 1000 workers. 70% of the waste gathered by the cooperative is recovered by its associates through the Source Separation Programme which serves industries, businesses and public and private institutions. But at that time, Moravia also turned into an epicentre of Medellín's urban conflict. The neighbourhood became a laboratory of conflict management when the municipality started negotiations with the armed gangs. In 2004 the municipality declared Moravia's participatory upgrading a strategic urban project. Today, Moravia is localized close to strategic infrastructures: the city's new central bus station, universities, hospitals, new leisure parks; its ground rent potential is high and inhabitants constantly feel the pressure of being relocated. The residents' organization, mobilization and combativeness provoked a wave of solidarity in the city which forced the municipality to declare Moravia "a zone of re-development where residents must be protected from being expelled by future mega-projects". During participative planning in Medellín (POT), Moravia's residents negotiated the figure of "residents' protection" with the municipality. This figure means that upgrading projects in the city must conserve the existing social tissue and economic networks. The negotiations' outcome was Moravia's Global Upgrading Plan. This plan is an exemplar result of successful social resistance to profit oriented urban regeneration.

Below: Moravia Neighbourhood Centre



## Synthesis over all four projects and outlook

Medellín is one of Latin Americas booming cities. The city's makeover during the last six years is breathtaking. In the 1990s, the city was the capital of the global narcotics trade and the most dangerous city of the world. The public debates during the 1990s are the beginning of Medellín's discursive and material re-signification and reconstruction. They aimed at pacifying the city and at making it rise like a phoenix at the turn of the century. The public slogan of the municipality during the 1990s read: "Tomorrow we will live in the city that we all dream of today". Some consider Medellín "the capital of reaction in Latin America" and see its boom as result of the formation of paramilitary-led corporate mercenaries after the arrival of Colombia's President Alvaro Uribe Vélez, in 2002. The 4 projects, however, represent the paradoxes of Medellín's boom: on the one hand, the boom is the triumph of capital and of reaction; but on the other hand, it is also the triumph of social resistance to profit oriented urban reconstruction, by the imposition of basic civic rights.



1972 Edificio Coltejer, headquarter of the city's leading textile company, symbol of the industrial boom



1997 Edificio Inteligente, headquarter of the city's efficient public utility company, symbol of the technological transition



2009 COLOMBIA: headquarter of Colombia's leading bank, symbol of the transition to a financial centre.