

CHALLENGES OF THE MUISCA CULTURAL REVIVAL

Lessons From Māori Architectural Resistance

ABSTRACT

Colombia's Muisca Indigenous culture, once flourishing in the Bogotá region, has undergone significant transformation due to Spanish colonisation in the sixteenth century, which led to the displacement of Muisca traditions and their merging with Spanish traditions over centuries. Despite these changes, the Muisca community maintains a distinct cultural presence on Bogotá's outskirts, particularly in Bosa municipality, now known as El Porvenir. The Muisca community has pursued further recognition and land rights to safeguard their heritage. However, they have faced challenges from urban development and historical injustices, highlighting the need for strategic architectural interventions to preserve their identity.

This article explores how architectural practices could empower Indigenous communities through an analysis of historical, cultural and social contexts, identifying Māori architectural strategies that act as a form of resistance to prevent assimilation by the Western culture. The goal is to gather insights from Māori architectural experience that could be applicable to the revitalisation of Muisca culture in Bogotá, Colombia. Cultural, historical and social contexts will be analysed, focusing on the role of architecture in shaping and preserving identity.

Keywords: Muisca culture, Colombia, Māori architecture, Indigenous architecture, decolonisation, resistance

INTRODUCTION

I am from Fusagasugá, Colombia, a city once part of the Muisca territories. I embarked on a journey to Aotearoa New Zealand, seeking deeper insights into the incredible evolution of Māori architectural experience and discovering how their architecture can be a powerful tool for cultural resilience and identity preservation. Thanks to Unitec staff members, I learned a respectful approach to Māori knowledge, being guided to understand how establishing a

solid connection between architectural design and cultural values has successfully integrated Māori heritage into Aotearoa's urban and rural landscapes, ensuring continuity and relevance.

To further contextualise how architecture influences cultural preservation, it is essential to examine Colombia's Muisca culture and the impact of colonisation on its architectural practices. The colonisation of the territory now known as Colombia by the Spanish Empire during the sixteenth century altered its people's society, politics and culture, and therefore their architectural expression.¹ Among the Indigenous cultures impacted by this process was that of the Muisca, who inhabited the territory's heart in the area now known as Bogotá, the country's capital.²



Figure 1. What we know nowadays as Colombia in South America. Modified image based on a map from *BBC News Mundo*.³

1. Carl Henrik Langebaek Rueda, "La Élite no Siempre Piensa lo Mismo," in *Muisca, Representaciones, Cartografías y Etnopolíticas de La Memoria*, 21st ed., edited by Ana María Londoño (Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2005), 181–196.
2. Miguel Alberto Pérez García, "La Organización de los Muisca a la Llegada de los Españoles," *Revista de Derecho* 20 (March 29, 2017): 479–498, <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6097037>
3. "Como Fue el Imperio Español y por Qué Colapsó," *BBC News Mundo*, October 13, 2024, 0:15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3x32Th640Q4&t=14s&ab_channel=BBCNewsMundo



Figure 2. Muisca territories during the sixteenth century. Modified image based on Falchetti's 1973 map.⁴

Spanish colonisation led to the displacement of the Muisca settlements, which were gradually replaced by colonial towns.⁵ Over 500 years, Spanish and Muisca cultures have gradually merged, mixing with, overlapping and even replacing Muisca traditions and identities. Despite the assimilative process, the Muisca culture persists on the outskirts of Bogotá, far removed from the city's core.⁶

Given this context, it has become imperative for Muisca to establish an architectural and urban presence. It could be possible for this community to use architectural strategies to safeguard their cultural identity from the expansion of urban developments.⁸ Therefore, the Muisca community assumes high priority in urbanism and architecture.⁹ Drawing inspiration from examples of cultural preservation overseas to benefit Muisca, this initiative is based on examining case studies in architectural academic research.¹⁰

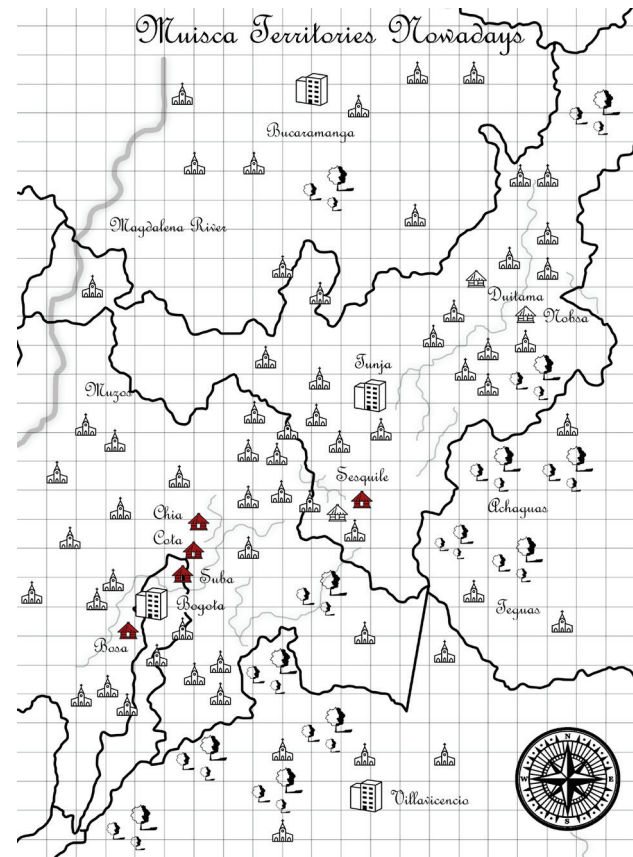


Figure 3. Actual Muisca territories that are recognised as Cabildo. Modified image based on a map from Geoportal IGAC, 2012.⁷

This article explores how architecture could become a tool for the Muisca community to preserve their heritage and resist cultural assimilation, after respectfully studying the valuable lessons learned from Māori architectural practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

4. Ana María Falchetti, "El Territorio de los Muisca a la Llegada de Los Españoles," in *Cuadernos de Antropología*, edited by Clemencia Plazas de Nieto (Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, 1973), 1–65.
5. Marcela Quiroga Zuluaga, "El Proceso de Reducciones Entre los Pueblos Muisca de Santafé Durante los Siglos XVI y XVII," *Historia Crítica* 52 (2014): 179–203, <https://doi.org/10.7440/histcrit52.2014.08>
6. Paula Andrea Díaz Ramírez et al., "Saberes Propios, Resistencia y Procesos de Recuperación de Memoria Histórica en la Comunidad Muisca de la Ciudad de Bogotá," *Novum* 2 (May 31, 2019): 86–100, <https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/novum/article/view/78813/71398>
7. "Mapa Oficial Físico Político 2012," Geoportal IGAC, accessed November 7, 2024, <https://geoportal.igac.gov.co/contenido/mapas-nacionales>
8. William Gamboa Rodríguez and Lina Rocío Viasús Figueredo, "Cosmovisión de la Comunidad Indígena Muisca de Bosa con el Territorio y Su Relación con el Ordenamiento Territorial de Bogotá" (Bachelor's thesis, UDCA, Bogotá, 2015), 129, <https://repository.udca.edu.co/handle/11158/414>
9. Gamboa Rodríguez and Viasús Figueredo, *Cosmovisión de la Comunidad Indígena Muisca de Bosa con el Territorio y Su Relación con el Ordenamiento Territorial de Bogotá*, 129.
10. Hernán Casakin and Shulamith Kreitler, "El Significado de los Referentes en la Enseñanza del Diseño," *Actas de Diseño* 16 (November 2020): 165–171, <https://doi.org/10.18682/add.vi16>

THE MUISCA COMMUNITY IN BOSA

Colombia has recognised five Muisca communities: in Sesquilé, Chía, Cota, Suba and Bosa.¹¹ This article will focus on the Bosa community due to its unique historical and cultural significance within the Muisca heritage, and because it has been part of recent debate in Colombian urbanism and architecture.¹²

The earliest documented records of the Muisca community in Bosa date back to the sixteenth century, when the colonial administration provided lands to host an Indigenous reserve for Muisca.¹³ This allowed them to have a sort of autonomy during the subsequent two centuries. However, following the country's independence from the Spanish empire in 1810, the republican government began a campaign to suppress the Indigenous identity and sculpt a homogenous national distinctiveness. In 1853, under the presidency of José María Obando, authorities reclassified these lands as rural territories,¹⁴ significantly impacting land ownership rights.¹⁵

Muisca people still struggle to get political recognition from the national government. In 1999, they were recognised as a Cabildo.¹⁶ In Colombia, a Cabildo is a political organisation for Indigenous groups, which empowers them to represent Indigenous authority to the national government.¹⁷ However, this status does not allow them to exercise power over any land, whether private or public property. Consequently, since 2007 the community has pursued recognition for an Indigenous reserve.¹⁸ This designation would offer substantial authority over their lands.¹⁹ Furthermore, it could be a significant step towards reclaiming their ancestral rights and sovereignty.

THE MUISCA WORLDVIEW

Gamboa Rodríguez and Viasús Figueredo have studied the Muisca worldview, in which the Tchiminigagua defines their way of life, involving nine fundamental principles.²⁰ Language plays a pivotal role in cultural preservation, with efforts underway to revive the Chibcha language. Territory holds profound significance, as the connection between humans, their bodies and spirits is deeply rooted in the land, where sustenance is derived from what grows underneath. 'Siembro' means the path to abundance through cultivation; it includes the sacred plants that facilitate connection with ancestral laws and are used in traditional medicinal practices.²¹

For Indigenous communities, stories often serve as a tool for educating new generations; whereas rituals provide structure to life's order. At the core of the Muisca worldview lies The Origin's Law, which emerges from the authority of both father and mother, guiding human conception. This law is linked to the Spiral, which divides into four cardinal directions, symbolising wind, fire, water and earth, thus ordering the nine principles within a cosmology. Moreover, ceremonial houses are the physical representation of their culture.

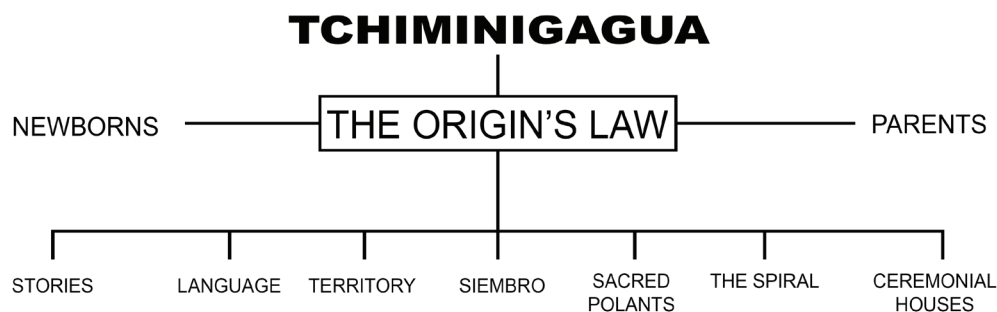


Figure 4. A self-elaborated graphic explaining the Muisca worldview and the nine principles that compose the Tchiminigagua.

11. Gamboa Rodríguez and Viasús Figueredo, *Cosmovisión de la Comunidad Indígena Muisca de Bosa con el Territorio y Su Relación con el Ordenamiento Territorial de Bogotá*, 129.
12. Santiago Martínez Medina, Richard Casallas Rodríguez and María Nelsy Chiguasuque, "Fortalecimiento de la Medicina Tradicional en el Cabildo Indígena Muisca de Bosa, Una Experiencia Intercultural Exitosa," *Investigaciones en Seguridad Social y Salud* 9 (2004): 99–122, https://erudit.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/cabildo-muisca-bosa/Fortalecimiento_de_la_Medicina_Tradicion.pdf
13. Pérez García, "La Organización de los Muiscas a la Llegada de los Españoles."
14. Oscar Julián Cuesta Moreno, "Pueblo Muisca de Bosa: Lucha, Identidad y Comunalización Urbana," *Revista Kavilando* 13, no. 1 (2021): 20–28, <http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/377/3772803002/>
15. Blanca María Peralta, Jorge Arturo Huérfano and Jairzinho Francisco Pánqueba, "Revisión Histórica de la Educación en el Territorio Muisca de Bosa, por Entre sus Memorias Cotidianas," *Educación y Ciudad* 21 (2011): 130–154. <https://revistas.idep.edu.co/index.php/educacion-y-ciudad/article/view/109/98>
16. Martínez Medina et al., "Fortalecimiento de la Medicina Tradicional en el Cabildo Indígena Muisca de Bosa, Una Experiencia Intercultural Exitosa."
17. Ernesto Samper et al., *Decreto 2164 de 1995* (Presidencia de la República, December 7, 1995).
18. Cuesta Moreno, "Pueblo Muisca de Bosa: Lucha, Identidad y Comunalización Urbana."
19. Presidencia de la República, *Decreto 1953 de 2014* (Presidencia de la República, October 7, 2014).
20. Gamboa Rodríguez and Viasús Figueredo, *Cosmovisión de la Comunidad Indígena Muisca de Bosa con el Territorio y Su Relación con el Ordenamiento Territorial de Bogotá*, 129.
21. Andrés Felipe Amaris-Álvarez et al., "Medicina en Comunidad y Memoria Biocultural en el Pueblo Muisca de Sesquilé, Cundinamarca, Colombia," *Revista Etnobiología* 19, no. 2 (March 2021): 14–29.

MUISCA ARCHITECTURE

With this understanding of the Muisca worldview, we can now explore how their architecture historically reflected these principles. Ceremonial houses are sacred in Muisca culture, serving as venues for communal rituals. In 1987 researchers Inés Casilimas and María López delved into historical accounts left by Spanish monks who chronicled the Spanish colonisation of the Muisca civilisation.²² According to these testimonies, Muisca architectural structures exhibited distinctive features. Circular in design, these buildings displayed conical thatched roofs crafted from wood supported by robust pillars. These ceremonial structures were partially subterranean, intentionally concealed from casual observers. To access the interior, pedestrians navigated labyrinthine pathways, ultimately arriving at the heart of the temple. Within these hidden sanctuaries, Muisca leaders safeguarded precious gold treasures, an embodiment of their spiritual and cultural wealth.

Besides the testimonies, there is nothing remaining of original Muisca buildings today. There have been, however, anthropological studies of excavations that revealed the ancestral foundations of certain settlements, such as El Carmen, Nueva Esperanza and El Tunjo, all in Bogotá's surrounding areas.²³

THE MUISCA RESISTANCE

The Muisca community has faced significant threats from modern urbanisation and historical injustices. However, they have shown impressive cultural resilience: in 2017, the Colombian Constitutional Court established the Auto 266 statute, recognising the Muisca culture as one of Colombia's most threatened communities due to the proximity of its settlements to significant urban developments.²⁴ Inevitably, this urbanisation has led to an alienation of their values.²⁵

Given the rapid urbanisation process and the increasing population surrounding the Muisca community in Bosa, non-Indigenous individuals often find it challenging to acknowledge the presence of Indigenous communities.²⁶ Republicans perpetuated a disrespectful perception of Indigenous cultures within the country, no longer considering them essential after the war of independence.²⁷ This disregard is evident in the republican documents from the nineteenth century,

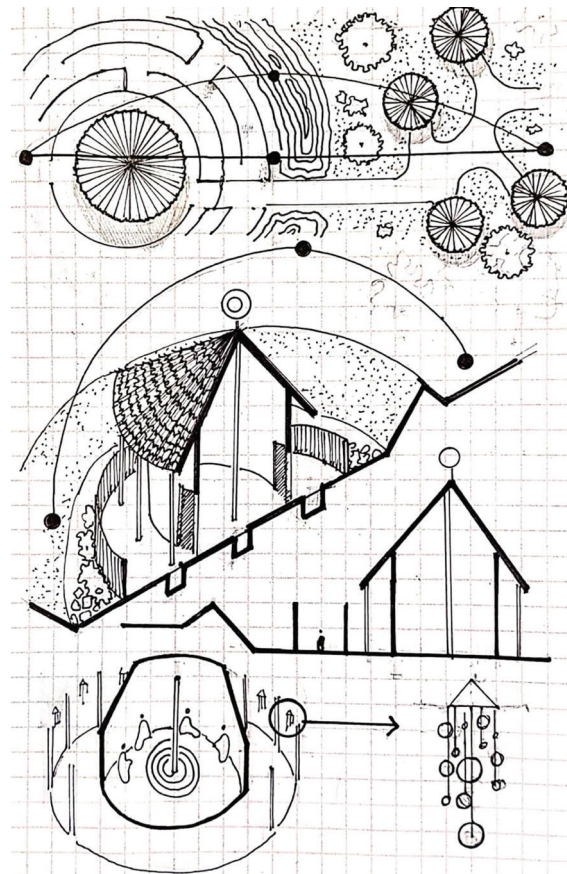


Figure 5. How the Muisca temple used to look back in the sixteenth century. Modified image based on Casilimas Rojas and María López Ávila's work.

which labelled Indigenous people 'savages'.²⁸ Subsequently, government policies were implemented to dispossess Indigenous communities of their lands, transforming them into haciendas for economic exploitation.²⁹

In Colombia, a law that promotes urban planning strategies is known as the Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial.³⁰ Based on this law, the City Council decreed Muisca ancestral lands as urban areas, further complicating their struggle for cultural preservation and land rights.³¹ Furthermore, these planning tools are structured within government-defined stages that only last twelve years, divided into three periods of four years each — a fundamental contradiction for the Indigenous people, whose viewpoint on planning is that it extends through lifetimes.³²

21. Andrés Felipe Amaris-Álvarez et al., "Medicina en Comunidad y Memoria Biocultural en el Pueblo Muisca de Sesquilé, Cundinamarca, Colombia," *Revista Etnobiología* 19, no. 2 (March 2021): 14-29.
22. Clara Inés Casilimas Rojas and María Imelda López Ávila, "El Templo Muisca," *Maguaré* 5 (1987): 127-150, <https://repositorio.unal.edu.co/handle/unal/28238>
23. Carl Henrik Langebaek Rueda, *Los Muiscas: La Historia Milenaria de un Pueblo Chibcha* (Editorial Debate, 2019).
24. Corte Constitucional de Colombia, *Sala Especial de Seguimiento Sentencia T-025 DE 2004, Auto 266 de 2017* (Corte Constitucional de Colombia, June 6, 2017), <https://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/T-025-04/AUTOS%202016/Auto%20266%20del%2012%20de%20junio%202017%20Etnicos.pdf>
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26. Oscar Julián Cuesta Moreno, "Pueblo Muisca de Bosa: Lucha, Identidad y Comunalización Urbana," *Revista Kavilando* 13, no. 1 (2021): 20-28.
27. Langebaek Rueda, *Los Muiscas*.
28. Díaz Ramirez et al., "Saberes Propios, Resistencia y Procesos de Recuperación de Memoria Histórica en la Comunidad Muisca de la Ciudad de Bogotá."
29. Blanca María Peralta et al., "Revisión Histórica de la Educación en el Territorio Muisca de Bosa, por Entre sus Memorias Cotidianas," 130-154.
30. Presidencia de la República, *Ley 1454 de 2011* (Presidencia de la República, July 28, 2011).
31. Oscar Julián Cuesta Moreno, "Pueblo Muisca de Bosa: Lucha, Identidad y Comunalización Urbana," *Revista Kavilando* 13, no. 1 (2021): 20-28, <http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/377/3772803002/>
32. Díaz Ramirez et al., "Saberes Propios, Resistencia y Procesos de Recuperación de Memoria Histórica en la Comunidad Muisca de la Ciudad de Bogotá."

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In the face of threats to their sacred lands,³³ the Muisca community in Bosa has reached some agreements with the City Council,³⁴ but not all their concerns have been addressed,³⁵ particularly regarding high-density housing projects that risk eroding Muisca culture through cultural assimilation.³⁶

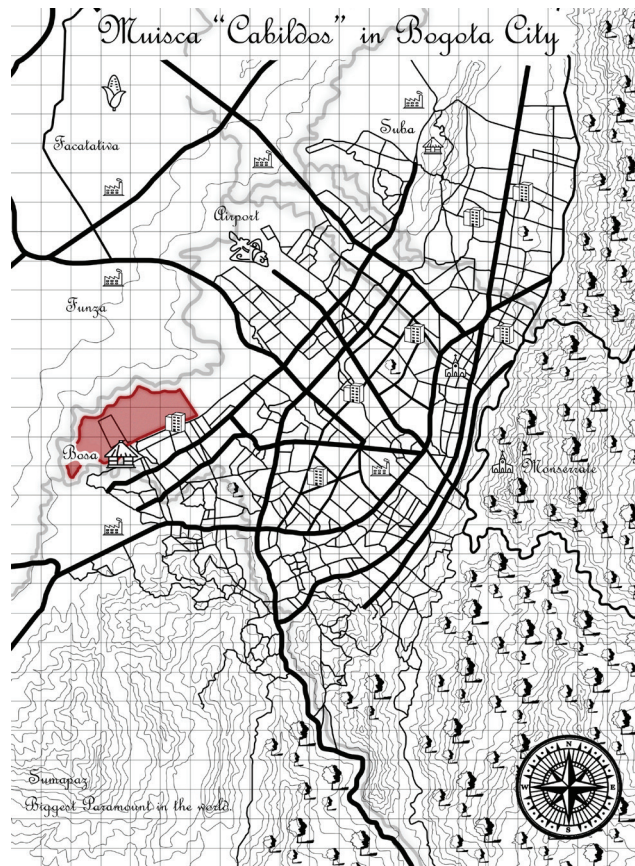


Figure 6. Bogotá city and the Bosa municipality (now known as El Porvenir). This is where the Muisca Cabildo is located. Modified image based on Jiménez et al's work in *DTS: Formulación de la Modificación del Plan Parcial El Edén – El Descanso*, 2023.

THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE IN SETTLER COLONISATION AND DECOLONISATION

Looking beyond the Muisca experience, we can identify global patterns of colonisation and resistance, particularly through

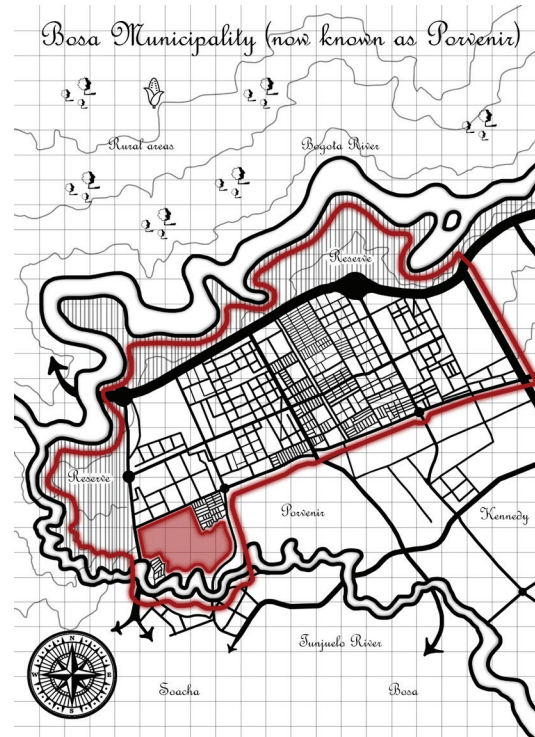


Figure 7. The Bosa municipality (now known as El Porvenir) and El Edén – El Descanso Urban Plan (in red). This urban plan will directly affect the Muisca sacred territories, threatening their culture. Modified image based on Jiménez et al's work in *DTS: Formulación de la Modificación del Plan Parcial El Edén – El Descanso*, 2023.

architecture across the globe. Many cultures have faced a fate akin to that experienced by the Muisca people; the process of settler colonisation has resulted in the gradual disappearance of Indigenous cultures. European powers propagated this model during the colonisation of the Americas and Oceania and Indigenous settlements were systematically dismantled or gradually replaced by towns and cities designed under a 'Western' worldview. Simultaneously, local traditions were discarded.³⁷ In our contemporary context, a concerted effort exists to decolonise, challenge, replace, dismantle and transgress previous structures and hierarchies related to spaces, power and knowledge within global architectural and urban paradigms.³⁸

33. Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, *Decreto No. 521 de 2023: Por Medio del Cuál se Adopta la Modificación del Plan Parcial de Desarrollo El Edén – El Descanso Ubicado en la Localidad de Bosa, Expedido Mediante el Decreto Distrital 521 de 2006, y se Dictan Otras Disposiciones* (Secretaría Distrital de Bogotá, November 9, 2023).
34. Paula Rodríguez, "Este es el Proyecto Que Deja Listo Claudia López para Hacer una Ciudadela Indígena en Bosa, en el Sur de Bogotá," *Infobae*, November 10, 2023, <https://www.infobae.com/colombia/2023/11/10/este-es-el-proyecto-que-deja-listo-claudia-lopez-para-hacer-una-ciudadela-indigena-en-bosa-en-el-sur-de-bogota/>
35. Planeación Bogotá, "Jornada de Socialización de la Propuesta de Modificación del Plan Parcial 'Edén – El Descanso', Bosa," 3:58, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmZmwjFvPnw>
36. Michael Hibbard, "Indigenous Planning: From Forced Assimilation to Self-Determination," *Journal of Planning Literature* 37, no. 1 (2022): 17–27, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353495294_Indigenous_Planning_From_Forced_Assimilation_to_Self-determination
37. Lorenzo Veracini, "Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation," *Borderlands* 6, no. 2: (2006) 1–11, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/1337/>
38. Yat Ming Loo, "Towards a Decolonisation of Architecture," *Journal of Architecture* 22, no. 4 (2017): 631–638, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1338412>



SEARCHING FOR SUCCESSFUL CASES OF DECOLONISATION IN ARCHITECTURE ACROSS THE GLOBE

To seek inspiration for decolonising architecture in Colombia, examining examples from Indigenous cultures in other parts of the world is valuable. Indigenous architecture serves as a powerful lens through which we examine the impact of colonisation. To navigate this complex terrain, our focus is on the Americas and Oceania as areas that experienced European settler colonisation.³⁹

It is not the intention of this research to directly compare Indigenous cultures. Instead, the scope is to identify examples that can inform our understanding of architectural models that resonate with the Muisca community in Bosa.

The International Labour Organization's report sheds light on the economic challenges Indigenous communities face in Latin America. Economic challenges among these groups surpass those of other Indigenous populations globally, according to the 2020 report.⁴⁰ These economic disparities pose significant barriers to developing Indigenous architecture in this region, impacting those peoples' technical and artistic expression within urban contexts.

Due to these challenges, we look to Aotearoa New Zealand, where the Māori people have cultivated a remarkable architectural tradition, that of the marae. This cluster of buildings embodies Māori culture, spirituality and social cohesion; its design reflects intricate connections to land, ancestors and community. By delving into the role of the marae within Māori society, we hope to extract valuable lessons applicable to the Muisca context.

MĀORI ARCHITECTURE AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE

European explorers who arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand in the eighteenth century considered Indigenous architecture as folk art; they also believed it was improper for Māori to use Western techniques and tools to develop their artistic expressions.⁴¹ Māori have continued to use traditional tools to preserve their culture and its architectural expression as a form of resistance for over 200 years, making this country a relevant architectural point of reference.⁴²

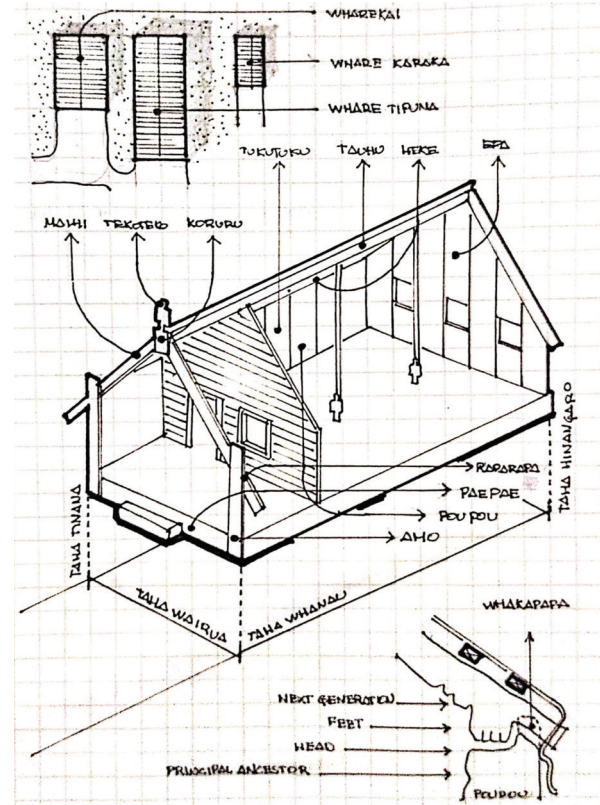


Figure 8. Parts of the whareniui. Modified image based on Deidre Brown and Jeremy Treadwell's work in "Māori Architecture" in *Vernacular Architecture Atlas for Living Throughout the World*, 2019, 275–7.

MĀORI ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGIES: PRESERVING CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH DESIGN

One pivotal historical moment that profoundly influenced the trajectory of Māori architecture was the establishment of the Māori School of Arts and Crafts in 1926 under the visionary leadership of Tā Apirana Ngata. This institution sparked a cultural revival, catalysed by the completion of its inaugural marae project, Te Pohoro-Rāwiri. As the success of this endeavour reverberated, it inspired a wave of architects and builders across Aotearoa New Zealand to engage in marae construction.

However, the beginning of World War II disrupted these creative endeavours. Despite the challenges, Ngata tenaciously guided the continuity of the School of Māori Arts and Crafts in Rotorua,⁴³ which continues to this day.

39. Veracini, "Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation."

40. Rishabh Kumar Dhir et al., *Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169: Towards an Inclusive, Sustainable and Just Future* (International Labour Organization, February 3, 2020), <https://www.ilo.org/publications/implementing-ilo-indigenous-and-tribal-peoples-convention-no-169-towards>

41. Bill McKay and Antonia Walmsley, "Māori Time: Notions of Space, Time and Building Form in the South Pacific," *Idea Journal* 4, no. 1 (2004b): 85–95, <https://doi.org/10.37113/idea.vi0.236>

42. Maia Ratana, "Māori Architecture: A Response to Colonisation," *Asylum* 2 (2021): 128–33, https://www.unitec.ac.nz/epress/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ASYLUM-2021_Maia-Ratana.pdf

43. Deidre Brown, "Pacific Spaces: Translations and Transmutations," in *Pacific Spaces: Translations and Transmutations*, ed. Anna Christina Engels-Schwarzpaul, Lana Lopesi and Albert Refiti (Berghahn Books, 2022), 11–20; Deidre Brown, "The Architecture of the School of Māori Arts and Crafts," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 108, no. 3 (1999): 241–276, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20706872>; Deidre Brown and Jeremy Treadwell, "Māori Architecture," in *Vernacular Architecture Atlas for Living Throughout the World*, ed. Keonaona Peterson et al. (Birkhäuser Basel, 2019), 272–277.

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Over subsequent decades, the foundation for a cultural renaissance in Māori design and construction was established. Notable Tāmaki Makarau Auckland examples include Te Puea Memorial Marae and Makaurau Marae, where the evolution of these architectural practices remains evident. Marae buildings have been crucial for Māori in reclaiming part of the space lost through colonisation, and have been keystones in maintaining cohesive connections among people and to place.⁴⁴

The profound connection between the people of Te Puea Memorial Marae and Makaurau Marae and their ancestral lands – and rich and intricate histories⁴⁵ – provides invaluable insights for the Muisca community, who also have strong connections with the land, as they have inhabited their territory for over 500 years.

Fast-forward to 2012, and Te Aranga Principles emerged as a dynamic tool adopted by Auckland Council. These principles are Mana, Whakapapa, Taiao, Mauri Tū, Mahi Toi, Tohu and Ahi Kā, which are rooted in Māori local knowledge and Indigenous wisdom, and based on the six Māori values of Rangatiratanga, Manaakitanga, Wairuatanga, Kotahitanga, Whanaungatanga and Mātauranga. Major architectural projects such as Te Oro art centre in Glen Innes and Commercial Bay shopping precinct in the Auckland CBD have reaped the benefits of this discourse, which, far from being perfect, is in constant development.⁴⁶

In analysing insights from Māori architectural experience, I do not intend to copy Māori strategies. Instead, I seek to collect lessons learned and ideas that may illuminate potential pathways to highlight the Muisca culture.⁴⁷ By doing so, we empower their insertion and active participation in Bogotá's architectural and urban context, reclaiming the space colonisation and cultural assimilation have taken away from them over five centuries.

To clarify the historical context, while the Muisca and Māori histories are distinct, the two cultures share important similarities regarding their colonial experiences and struggles for cultural preservation. According to Ioannidis et al., before European colonisation, the Polynesian communities had contact with Indigenous groups in what is now known as Colombia.⁴⁸

In addition, the Indigenous people from both countries were dispossessed from their land in the name of urban development, by British colonisers in the case of Māori⁴⁹ and Spanish conquistadores

in the case of the Muisca.⁵⁰ It is essential to highlight the difference in both historical contexts, however: colonisation of New Zealand occurred during the nineteenth century,⁵¹ in the case of the Muisca, the colonisation of their lands occurred between 1536 CE and 1810 CE, when Colombia gained independence from the Spanish empire.⁵²

ACTION STEPS FOR THE MUISCA COMMUNITY

Physical buildings play a vital role in developing rituals and expressing cultural identity. These structures also allow communities to demonstrate their presence in a territory. The Māori School of Arts and Crafts has been crucial for Māori education and cultural identity, and Muisca buildings must also embody their values and worldview.

Drawing inspiration from Te Aranga Principles, we can honour ancestral lands by integrating Muisca perspectives into urban design regulations. However, despite the City Council's efforts over the past six years to establish cultural centres across the city,⁵³ the Bosa municipality (now known as El Porvenir), home to the Muisca community, has yet to witness the realisation of any projects.⁵⁴

An example is the El Edén – El Descanso Urban Plan, developed by the City Council, which has been a point of disagreement between the Muisca community and the government over the last decade. Fortunately, both parties have now agreed to construct the House of the Sun and the Moon,⁵⁵ a cultural centre inspired by Muisca heritage. However, this opportunity depends on continued dialogue and the government's commitment to addressing Muisca concerns.



44. Casakin and Kreidler, "El Significado de los Referentes en la Enseñanza del Diseño."
45. Jenny Lee-Morgan et al., "Marae Ora Kāinga Ora: Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Solutions via Time-Honoured Indigenous Spaces," *Genealogy* 5, no. 4 (2024): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5040099>
46. Auckland Council, "Te Aranga Principles," *Auckland Design Manual*, accessed May 21, 2024, https://www.aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz/en/places-and-spaces/m_ori-design/te-aranga-principles.html
47. Casakin and Kreidler, "El Significado de los Referentes en la Enseñanza del Diseño."
48. Alexander G. Ioannidis et al., "Native American Gene Flow into Polynesia Predating Easter Island Settlement," *Nature* 583, no. 7817 (2020): 572–577, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2487-2>
49. McKay and Walmsley, "Māori Time: Notions of Space, Time and Building Form in the South Pacific."
50. Langebaek Rueda, "La Élite no Siempre Piensa lo Mismo."
51. McKay and Walmsley, "Māori Time: Notions of Space, Time and Building Form in the South Pacific."
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54. Jhon Cerón, "Así Serán los Nuevos Centros de Felicidad de Bogotá," *El Tiempo*, November 26, 2018, <https://www.eltiempo.com/bogota/asi-seran-los-nuevos-centros-de-felicidad-de-bogota-298204>
55. Jiménez et al., *DTS: Formulación de la Modificación del Plan Parcial El Edén – El Descanso*.

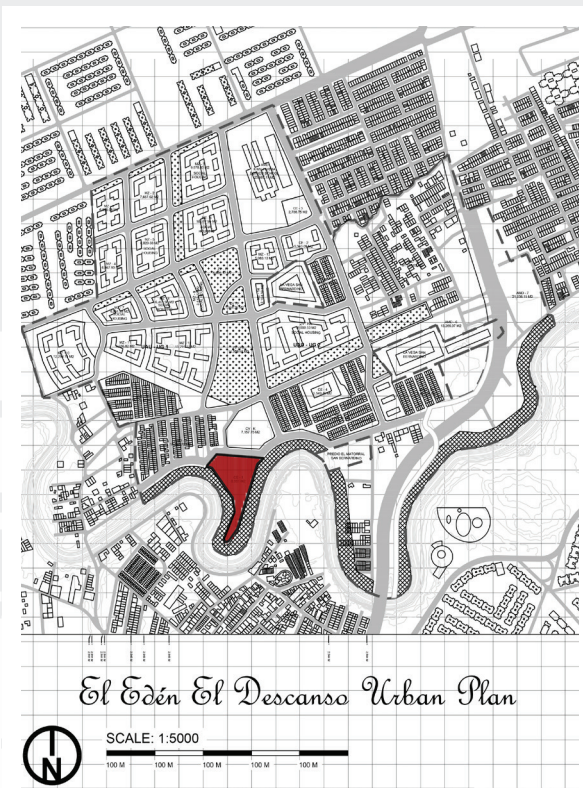


Figure 9. The El Eden–El Descanso Urban Plan, in red, is the site chosen to build The House of the Sun and the Moon. Modified image based on work in Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, Decreto No. 521 de 2023, 2023.

In Colombia, a cultural centre has a similar impact on communities as the marae do for Māori. These centres serve diverse purposes and activities tailored to the needs of the surrounding neighbourhoods.⁵⁶ For the Muisca, aspects like metalwork and Indigenous rituals take centre stage.

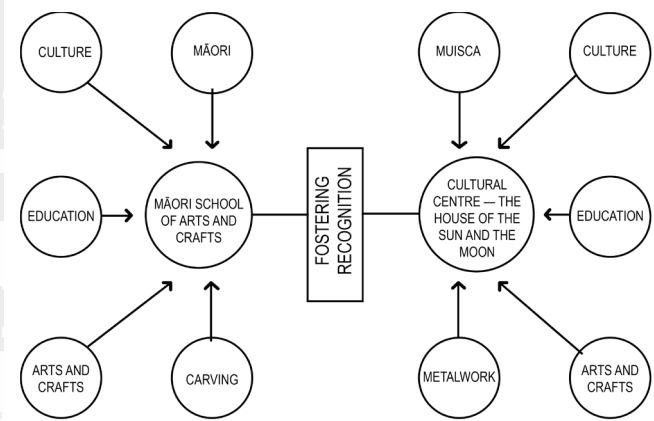


Figure 11. Significance of traditional arts and crafts education for Muisca and Māori cultures.

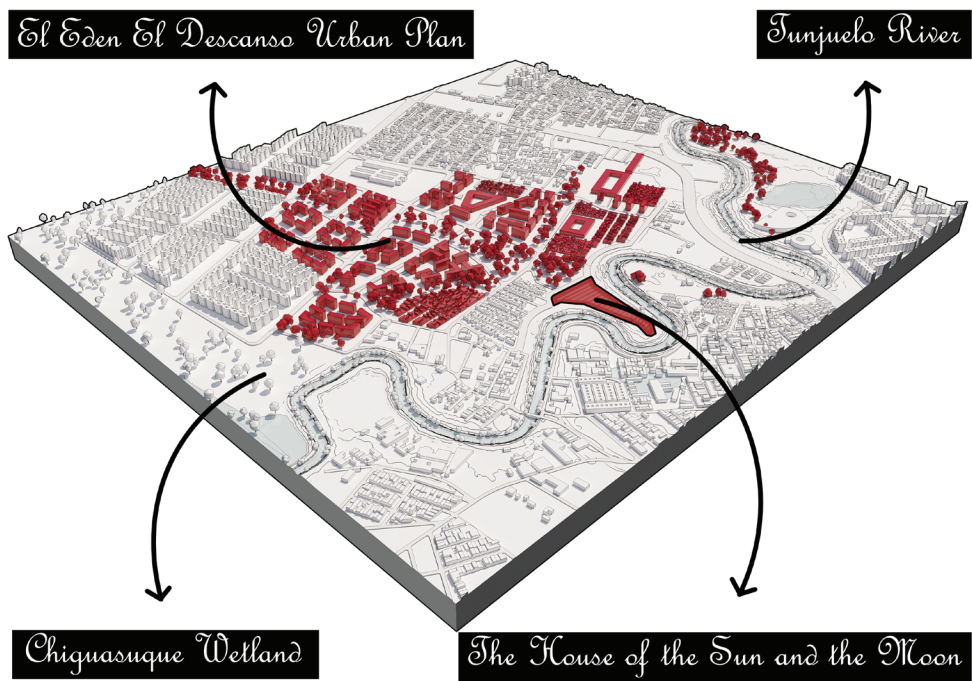


Figure 10. The El Eden – El Descanso Urban Plan, in red, is the site chosen to build The House of the Sun and the Moon.

56. Jennifer S. Holmes and Sheila Amin Gutiérrez de Piñeres, “Medellín’s Biblioteca España: Progress in Unlikely Places,” *Stability* 3, no. 1 (2014): 1–13, <https://stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.cz>

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As we reflect on these findings, architectural solutions must honour cultural traditions and modern needs in a decolonised approach. Establishing a cultural centre inspired by the Muisca worldview holds immense potential. Traditions can find a safe harbour within these tangible spaces, and cultural practices can flourish. By drawing on a framework such as Te Aranga Principles, but adapting it specifically to Muisca perspectives in Colombia, this initiative could empower the Muisca community to resist cultural assimilation. These architectural elements would serve as cornerstones for cultural revival.

Key aspects of Muisca's worldview could be translated into architectural decisions to function as principles of design for future projects. This paper suggests organising these principles into four thematic cardinal points based on the essential elements of Fire, Wind, Water and Earth. In Muisca traditions, elders' experiences (The Origin's Law) are told through the language and carried by the wind. Stories of the past form the foundation of their worldview and, continuously evolving and fluxing like water, are celebrated through rituals. These rituals are performed within ceremonial houses, often circumscribed in a spiral where fire is preserved at the heart of the structure. Earth's direct connection to the territory is vital, as it provides sustenance through siembro (cultivation) and sacred plants for medicinal purposes, ensuring the community's wellbeing.

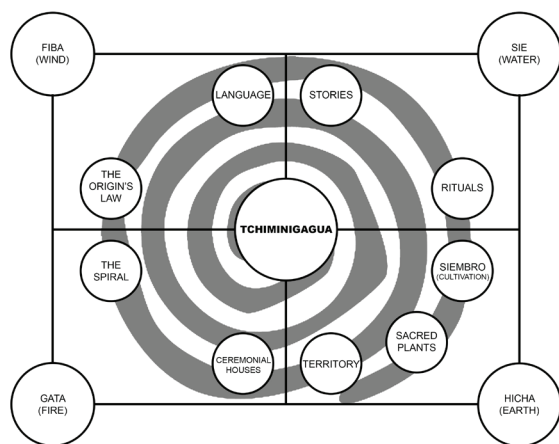


Figure 12. An initial approach to group the Muisca design principles. Modified image based on Gamboa Rodríguez et al's work in *Cosmovisión de la Comunidad Indígena Muisca de Bosa con el Territorio y Su Relación con el Ordenamiento Territorial de Bogotá*, 2015.

CONCLUSION

This paper lays the groundwork for designing the future House of the Sun and the Moon cultural centre, offering an initial approach to the project. Inspiration could be drawn from historical Muisca architectural practices, such as underground or partially submerged structures reminiscent of ancient ceremonial houses. Blending the building with the landscape, incorporating communal spaces for rituals, craftwork and agriculture, and using sustainable, locally sourced materials, could foster a living connection to Muisca heritage.

This collaborative approach, in which architects work closely with the community, mirrors the success of Māori architectural practices in Aotearoa. However, this paper is merely a starting point for future work. Further research could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the Muisca worldview, potentially integrating insights from other disciplines alongside architecture. Additionally, it is important not to fear modernity – traditions can be preserved through contemporary materials and innovative design decisions. This paper aims to serve as a guide while remaining true to the humble spirit of the Muisca tradition.

In the dance between architecture and cultural resilience, the Māori and Muisca communities imagine a future where our built environment reflects physical structures and the indomitable spirit of those who inhabit it. As we continue to learn from these rich traditions, may our architectural endeavours echo the heartbeat of heritage, weaving narratives that resist time and honour the land beneath our feet – gracias, Fié nzhinga. Thank you for embarking on this enlightening journey with me.

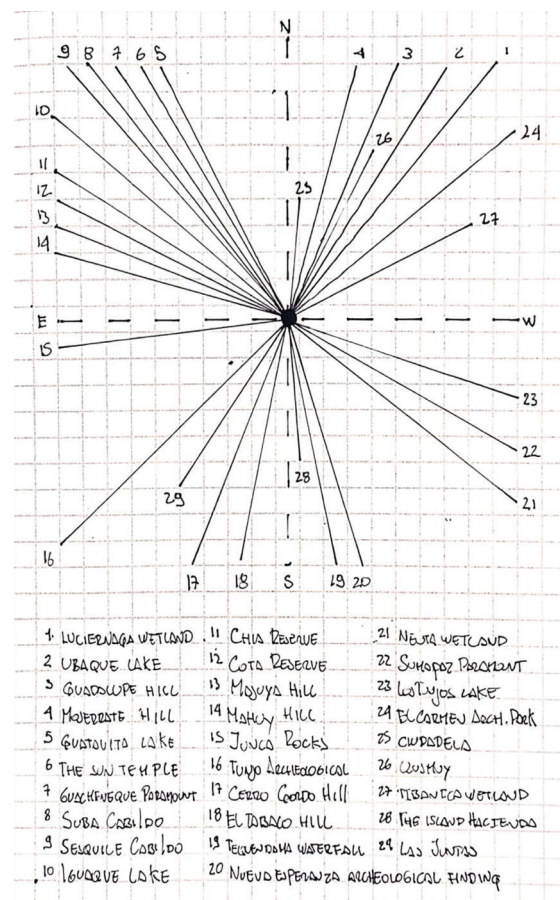


Figure 13. Sacred places for Muisca. Modified image based on Nayibe et al's work in *Suna Pedagógica Muisca*, 2023, 17.

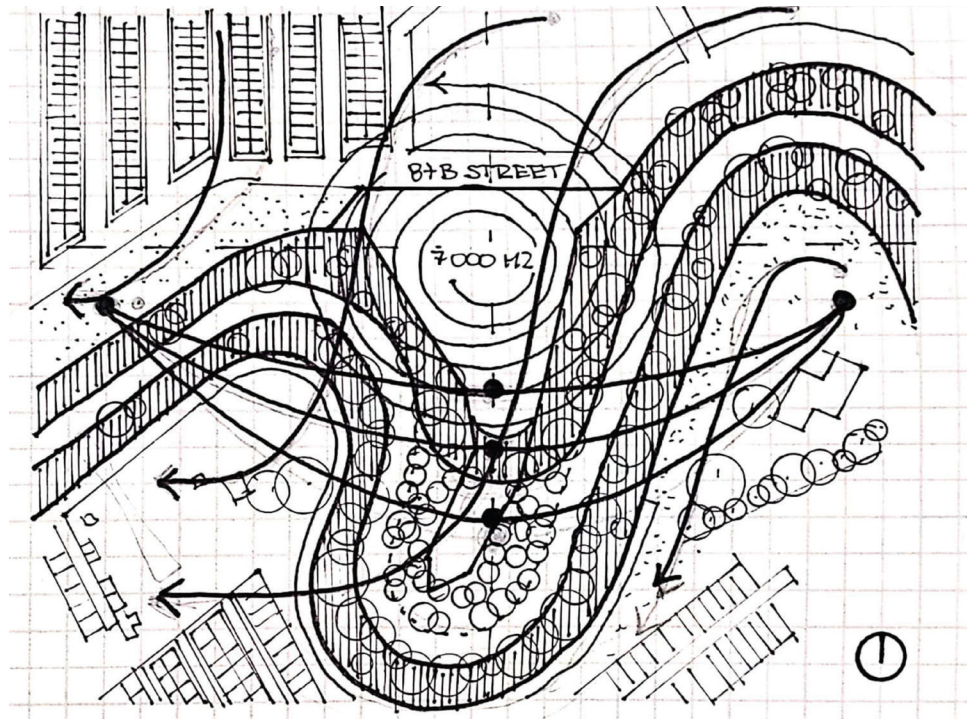


Figure 14. The overlapping layers of the site's natural conditions, such as the wind, the river and the sun's path, combined with the spiral, the four cardinal points and sacred places for the Muisca community.

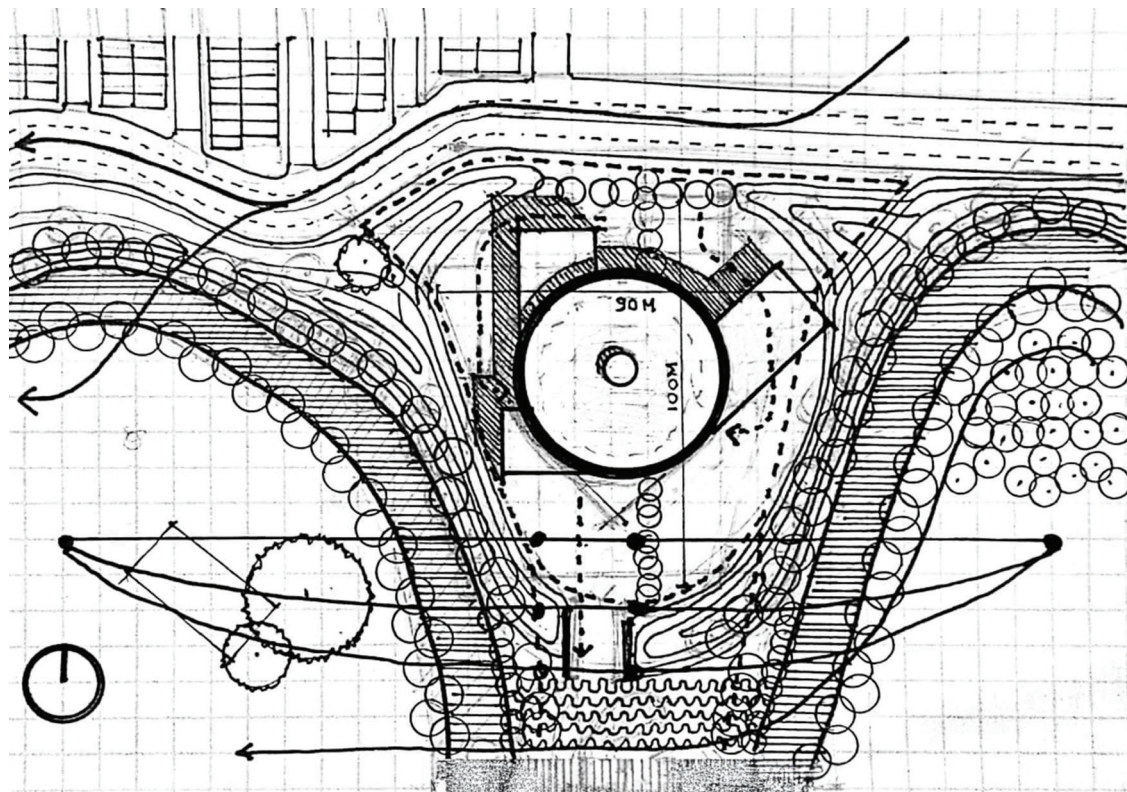


Figure 15. A very basic approach to the footprint of the Muisca House of the Sun and the Moon, showing the results of the effort to decolonise the way architecture could be approached from the Muisca worldview.



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