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MILITARY MUSEUMS: PRESERVING THE PAST, PROTECTING THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

Military museums have gained renewed relevance as institutional spaces where heritage, memory, and education converge to shape collective identity within the armed forces and to mediate civil-military relations. This study examines how military museums contribute to the preservation of historical heritage and the formation of institutional identity, with particular attention to the General José María Córdova Military Academy and selected Colombian museum experiences (e.g., the Military Museum of Colombia and the Infantry Museum). Adopting a qualitative design, the research employs documentary analysis of institutional reports, academic publications, and museological materials to identify the functions, narratives, and educational practices through which these museums operate. Findings suggest that military museums extend beyond custodial roles: they structure coherent institutional narratives, reinforce belonging and cohesion among military members through commemorative and pedagogical practices, and provide interpretive frameworks that facilitate public understanding of military service and sacrifice. The study argues that strengthening military museum capacities—particularly in curation, documentation, and educational programming—can enhance institutional memory while supporting more constructive engagement with civilian communities. These insights inform heritage management strategies and policy discussions on safeguarding military cultural legacy in contemporary Colombia.

KEYWORDS: military museums, institutional memory, heritage preservation, museum education, civil-military relations, institutional identity, Colombia.

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Introduction

This chapter analyzes the importance of museums within military institutions, emphasizing their fundamental role in the preservation of historical heritage and in the construction of institutional identity among their members. Using the General José María Córdova Military Academy as a representative case of an institution that embodies a significant cultural legacy, this study examines the defining characteristics and functions of military museums, their relevance within the military sphere, and their impact on cohesion among members of the force as well as on relationships with the civilian community. The central premise is that museums do not merely preserve historical memory; they also contribute actively to education, identity formation, and the continuity of traditions that define and sustain the institution.

Although the Military Academy "General José María Córdova" is widely recognized as the *alma mater* of the Colombian Army and as an emblematic institution due to its historical trajectory and traditions, it currently lacks an integrated and adequately consolidated space for the systematic collection, preservation, and dissemination of its institutional memory. There is no cohesive narrative that articulates its historical development from its foundation in 1907 to the present, highlighting the events, processes, and individuals that have been essential to its consolidation and evolution. This absence underscores the need to examine the relevance of museum institutions within the military context and to assess how such spaces can support institutional memory, strengthen collective identity, and reinforce organizational cohesion.

Throughout its history, the importance of preserving institutional memory has been acknowledged through initiatives aimed at

establishing a museum conceived as an appropriate space for the conservation, study, communication, and exhibition of both tangible and intangible heritage. A significant effort took place in 1950, when President Mariano Ospina Pérez laid the foundation stone for the Museo de las Armas, which was completed in 1963 during the presidency of Guillermo León Valencia. At the time, this museum was regarded as one of the most comprehensive and significant weapons collections in the country (Martínez & Díaz Castiblanco, 2021). However, over time, this collection was progressively dispersed and transferred to various military units or incorporated into what is now the Military Forces Museum located in downtown Bogotá. In an effort to reverse this process of patrimonial fragmentation, the museum was reopened in the early 2000s within the facilities of the Incorporation Office of the Military Academy. Nevertheless, this initiative functioned only until 2011, when the space was closed once again, and its collection experienced a further reduction. Currently, approximately 170 objects remain preserved, stored in what was formerly known as the Museum Room of the "Bar del Cadete" tower. In recent years, attempts have been made to reactivate this space as a didactic environment through the organization of temporary exhibitions (Martínez & Díaz Castiblanco, 2021). Given the historical significance and institutional relevance of the Military Academy "General José María Córdova" within the broader context of Colombian national history and the development of the Colombian Army, the creation of a new and properly structured museum space has been proposed. The purpose of this initiative is to safeguard and disseminate institutional memory, as well as to preserve, research, communicate, and exhibit elements of cultural heritage that represent

not only the Colombian Army but also the nation as a whole. The proposed museum would be located in the Western Casino of the Military Academy, a building recognized as an Asset of Cultural Interest. In light of this situation, it becomes imperative to advocate for the establishment of a dedicated institutional space within the Military Academy “General José María Córdova” responsible for managing, recovering, documenting, curating, and disseminating both its movable heritage and its institutional memory, including intangible heritage expressions. Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the following question: How do museums in military institutions contribute to the preservation of heritage and to the formation of institutional identity among their members? From this guiding question emerges the general objective of this study: to analyze the importance of museums in military institutions, emphasizing their role in the conservation of historical heritage and in the formation of institutional identity among their members. Three specific objectives are derived from this general aim. First, to define the characteristics and functions of museums within military institutions, establishing their importance as spaces of conservation and education. Second, to analyze the relevance of museums in the military sphere, highlighting their role in preserving institutional history, traditions, and values. Third, to examine the impact of museums on institutional identity and cohesion among members of the force, as well as their influence on relationships with the civilian community. These objectives guide the development of the research and facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the essential role that museums play within military institutions—not only as guardians of heritage, but also as catalysts for identity formation and institutional cohesion. This study adopts a qualitative methodological approach, which is particularly appropriate for examining the social and institutional meanings associated with museums in military contexts. Qualitative inquiry allows for the exploration and interpretation of social reality from the perspective of participants and institutional actors, capturing experiences, perceptions, and shared meanings (Creswell, 2014). Within this framework, the study seeks not merely to document the existence and functions of military museums, but to understand their influence on institutional identity and collective memory within the Military Academy “General José María Córdova” and related museum experiences. To address the stated objectives, the research employs documentary

collection and analysis as its primary methodological technique. Documentary analysis involves the systematic review and interpretation of relevant sources that illuminate the historical development, functions, collections, and educational practices of military museums. This approach enables the generation of contextualized and analytically rich interpretations of complex institutional phenomena (González, 2018). The documentary corpus includes institutional reports, academic publications, previous studies, and materials related to heritage management and museological practices within the Military Academy and selected Colombian military museums. Through this method, the study examines both tangible dimensions—such as collections, exhibitions, and physical spaces—and intangible dimensions—such as narratives, meanings, traditions, and identity formation processes. The integration of these dimensions supports a holistic understanding of the role that museums play in the construction of institutional memory and in the consolidation of military identity. The documentary corpus examined in this study comprises institutional reports, museum catalogues, academic publications, and heritage management documents produced between 2000 and 2023. Sources were selected based on their relevance to institutional memory, museum practices, and civil-military engagement within Colombian military institutions. The analysis followed a thematic interpretive approach, identifying recurring patterns related to preservation strategies, identity construction, commemorative practices, and public engagement. This methodological delimitation allows for a focused yet analytically grounded interpretation of the role of military museums in shaping institutional identity.

By situating the Colombian case within broader Latin American debates on military heritage, collective memory, and civil-military relations, this study contributes to regional discussions on how armed institutions in post-conflict and transitional societies construct, preserve, and communicate their historical narratives. In Latin America, where military institutions have played complex and often controversial roles in political and social processes, the management of heritage and memory becomes a strategic dimension of institutional legitimacy. The analysis presented here demonstrates how military museums can function not only as custodians of material culture, but also as mediating spaces through which institutions negotiate identity, historical responsibility, and societal engagement.

In this sense, the Colombian experience offers an analytically relevant case for understanding the broader relationship between military history and society in the region.

Development

Theory

The emergence of the so-called “new military history” represents a significant shift from traditional approaches centered exclusively on campaigns, battles, and military leadership. Instead, this perspective broadens the analytical lens to include the social, political, and cultural contexts within which military experiences are produced, interpreted, and remembered. By emphasizing the lived experiences of soldiers, families, and civilian communities, new military history promotes a multidimensional understanding of armed institutions and their historical trajectories (Pérez, 2010). This paradigm invites scholars to reconsider how military history is narrated and transmitted—an issue directly connected to the educational and interpretive role of museums. Museums, understood as institutional entities, are commonly defined as organizations that collect, conserve, research, and exhibit objects and documents of historical, cultural, or artistic significance (Bennett, 1995). However, their function extends beyond preservation and display. Museums operate as mediating spaces where heritage is interpreted, contextualized, and transformed into educational experience. Through curatorial decisions, narrative framing, and exhibition design, museums shape how audiences engage with the past. Their educational function is therefore central, as they foster learning, critical reflection, and dialogue on issues of historical and social relevance. The principles of new military history align closely with this interpretive mission. By encouraging inclusive narratives that move beyond heroic or celebratory accounts, museums have the potential to represent multiple voices and experiences—including those of rank- and-file personnel and civilian populations affected by conflict. Such inclusivity enables visitors to confront complex and sometimes uncomfortable dimensions of military history, thereby fostering deeper and more critical forms of understanding. Arbués and Naval (2014) argue that museums function as social spaces of education that contribute to knowledge construction and competency development. From this perspective, museums should not be regarded merely as

repositories of artifacts but as interactive platforms that facilitate meaningful exchanges between objects, narratives, and audiences. This conception is particularly relevant within the framework of new military history, as it allows museums to incorporate diverse narratives and encourage interpretive engagement rather than passive consumption. Similarly, Zabala and Roura (2006) highlight the dynamic relationship between heritage and education within museum environments. They contend that museums can promote critical awareness of the past by linking conservation practices with pedagogical strategies that engage heterogeneous audiences. In the military context, this capacity becomes especially important, as museums contribute to the formation of collective identity while simultaneously opening spaces for reflection on institutional development and historical responsibility. The intersection between new military history and museum studies therefore provides a solid theoretical foundation for analyzing the importance of museums within armed institutions. Through the collection, interpretation, and public presentation of institutional experiences, museums can contribute to the construction of coherent narratives that reflect both continuity and transformation. Moreover, by critically examining their own curatorial practices, military museums can avoid reproducing simplified or exclusionary accounts of the past and instead foster historically grounded and socially responsible interpretations (Macdonald, 2011). An additional theoretical dimension concerns collective memory. Museums function as guardians of institutional memory, ensuring that narratives of sacrifice, service, and transformation remain accessible to successive generations. In doing so, they contribute to the consolidation of identity and belonging within the military community. Memory-building processes are particularly significant in military institutions, where shared historical references reinforce organizational cohesion and professional commitment. Finally, research on the role of museums within military institutions has implications for public policy and heritage management. By demonstrating the educational, cultural, and social value of military museums, such research can support initiatives aimed at strengthening conservation practices and expanding interpretive capacities. In this sense, museums become not only spaces of remembrance but also strategic instruments for safeguarding and communicating institutional legacy.

The Essence of Museums in Military Institutions: Preservation and Education in Cultural Heritage

Museums have long been recognized as central institutions in the preservation of cultural heritage, and their relevance becomes even more pronounced within military contexts. In military institutions, museums do not merely safeguard objects of historical significance; they function as spaces where institutional identity is constructed, reinforced, and transmitted across generations. These spaces contribute simultaneously to heritage conservation, professional education, and the consolidation of collective memory. In this section, the defining characteristics and core functions of museums within military institutions are examined in detail, highlighting their role as spaces of preservation, research, interpretation, and education.

One of the principal characteristics of military museums lies in their capacity to conserve a wide and heterogeneous range of material culture. Collections typically include uniforms, weapons, medals, insignia, archival documents, photographs, personal artifacts, works of art, and symbolic objects associated with institutional milestones. Preservation in this context extends beyond physical protection. It requires systematic documentation, cataloguing, contextualization, and adherence to museological standards that ensure long-term accessibility and interpretability. As Eberhart (2014) emphasizes, conservation practices are essential not only to maintain the material integrity of objects but also to preserve their historical meaning. Through rigorous documentation and professional care, military museums ensure that future generations can understand the relevance of these materials within broader institutional and national narratives. In addition to conservation, military museums frequently organize thematic exhibitions that address specific aspects of institutional history, including military campaigns, technological evolution, doctrinal transformations, and the development of traditions. These exhibitions play a crucial interpretive role. They do not simply display objects; rather, they construct narratives that contextualize artifacts within historical processes. As Macdonald (2011) argues, curatorial practice is inherently interpretive and shapes how audiences perceive and understand the past. Effective exhibitions therefore communicate complexity, acknowledge multiple perspectives, and situate military experiences within wider social and political contexts. The educational function of

military museums represents another fundamental dimension. These institutions are designed to engage diverse audiences, including cadets, officers, non-commissioned personnel, families, researchers, and members of the civilian community. Educational activities may encompass guided tours, academic seminars, workshops, school outreach programs, temporary exhibitions, and interactive learning modules. Hein (1998) underscores that learning within museums is most effective when visitors actively construct meaning through interaction with material culture. In military education, such engagement facilitates historical awareness, encourages reflection on institutional values, and connects abstract principles—such as honor, discipline, and service—to concrete historical experiences. Military museums also serve as research centers. Their collections constitute valuable primary sources for historians, social scientists, and institutional researchers seeking to explore military history from multiple perspectives. The systematic documentation and preservation of archival materials, artifacts, and institutional records allow scholars to reconstruct historical processes with greater rigor. Bennett (1995) highlights that museums contribute to knowledge production by providing structured access to material evidence. Within military institutions, this research function strengthens academic inquiry and supports evidence-based interpretations of organizational development, technological change, and the social dimensions of armed conflict. A distinctive feature of military museums is their commemorative function. Many institutions incorporate memorial spaces dedicated to fallen soldiers or to significant historical events. These commemorative elements provide opportunities for reflection, remembrance, and collective mourning. According to Low (2014), commemoration within museum spaces not only honors the deceased but also contributes to the construction of collective identity by linking memory to contemporary institutional values. In military settings, where sacrifice and service are central to organizational culture, commemorative practices reinforce shared narratives of duty and commitment. The importance of museums within the military sphere becomes particularly evident when considering their contribution to professional formation. Exposure to institutional history through curated narratives and preserved artifacts enables cadets and officers to situate themselves within a broader historical continuum. Arbués and Naval (2014) argue that museums operate as social spaces

of education that promote the construction of knowledge and competencies. Within military institutions, this pedagogical dimension supports the internalization of values and strengthens identification with organizational traditions. Furthermore, military museums play a crucial role in preserving institutional memory. By collecting, documenting, and interpreting historical materials, they contribute to the construction of a coherent narrative that articulates continuity and change across time. Pérez (2010) emphasizes that the reinterpretation of military history through multidimensional perspectives allows institutions to reflect critically on their past while maintaining a sense of identity. In this sense, museums act as custodians of collective memory, ensuring that experiences, achievements, and lessons learned are neither forgotten nor oversimplified.

Another significant dimension concerns the relationship between military museums and the civilian community. By opening their doors to the public, museums create opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding. Schlör (2018) suggests that museum spaces can contribute to improved civil-military relations by fostering transparency and providing accessible narratives about institutional roles and responsibilities. Through exhibitions and educational programs, museums help civilians understand the historical contributions, challenges, and sacrifices associated with military service.

The integration of digital technologies and interdisciplinary approaches further enhances the potential of military museums. Interactive displays, multimedia resources, and digital archives can broaden accessibility and enrich interpretive experiences. Such innovations ensure that museums remain relevant in contemporary contexts characterized by rapid technological transformation and evolving public expectations. As Hein (1998) notes, adaptive educational strategies enable museums to remain dynamic rather than static institutions.

Ultimately, museums within military institutions fulfill a multifaceted mission. They preserve cultural heritage while simultaneously advancing education, research, commemoration, professional identity, and societal dialogue. Their significance extends beyond the mere exhibition of artifacts; they operate as strategic instruments for sustaining institutional continuity and reinforcing collective memory. Understanding their role in this comprehensive manner is essential for appreciating their contribution to the long-term vitality of

military institutions and to the preservation of national heritage.

Military Museums: Preserving the Institution's History and Values

Museums have historically played a decisive role in the preservation and dissemination of culture and historical knowledge. Within the military sphere, their relevance becomes even more pronounced, as they function not only as custodians of material heritage but also as institutions responsible for transmitting traditions, values, and institutional memory. Military museums safeguard objects of historical significance while simultaneously shaping the narratives through which the institution understands and communicates its past. In this sense, their role transcends conservation; they become educational, symbolic, and cultural spaces that preserve and reinterpret the institutional trajectory of the Armed Forces. Military history encompasses defining moments that have shaped nations, political orders, and social structures. From armed conflicts and technological innovations to doctrinal transformations and peace-building efforts, each phase of military development reflects broader historical processes. Museums within military institutions serve as guardians of this collective memory, ensuring that the experiences and sacrifices associated with these processes are not relegated to oblivion. As Eberhart (2014) emphasizes, the mission of military museums extends beyond preserving artifacts; they create interpretive environments where present and future generations can critically engage with the past.

A central dimension of military museums lies in their ability to narrate institutional history. Through carefully curated exhibitions, these museums present a chronological and thematic account of the institution's origins, transformations, achievements, and challenges. Such narratives do not merely celebrate victories; they also contextualize institutional evolution within broader social and political frameworks. Macdonald (2011) argues that curatorial strategies are fundamental in constructing historically grounded narratives that avoid simplification while acknowledging complexity. In the military context, this balanced approach enables audiences to understand both the strategic achievements and the ethical dilemmas associated with military action.

Preservation of traditions constitutes another essential function. Military institutions are deeply rooted in ceremonial practices, symbolic rituals, and

codes of conduct transmitted across generations. These traditions are not static relics; they form part of the living culture of the institution. Museums contribute to the preservation and reinterpretation of these traditions by contextualizing them historically and explaining their symbolic meaning. Katz (2015) suggests that museums serve as mechanisms for reinforcing patriotism and institutional belonging by connecting contemporary members of the Armed Forces with foundational narratives and symbolic references.

The educational function of military museums reinforces this transmission of traditions and values. Museums offer structured learning environments where cadets, officers, and civilians can engage with institutional history in a reflective manner. Hein (1998) emphasizes that museum-based learning is most effective when it promotes interaction and dialogue rather than passive reception. In military education, this pedagogical approach strengthens historical consciousness and encourages individuals to understand their professional responsibilities within a broader historical continuum.

Military museums also fulfill a commemorative role that reinforces institutional values. Memorial exhibits dedicated to fallen soldiers and significant events cultivate respect, gratitude, and collective remembrance. Low (2014) notes that commemorative practices in museums contribute to identity construction by linking memory with shared values and collective narratives. Within military institutions, such commemorative spaces underscore the ethical dimension of service and highlight the human cost associated with defense and security responsibilities.

Another relevant dimension concerns the relationship between military museums and the civilian community. By opening their spaces to the public, military museums foster dialogue and contribute to the development of informed public understanding. Schlör (2018) argues that museums can play a mediating role in civil-military relations by presenting accessible narratives that clarify institutional missions and historical contributions. Through educational programming and public exhibitions, museums demystify the military institution and facilitate mutual respect.

Furthermore, military museums are not static institutions; they must adapt to contemporary expectations and technological developments. The incorporation of digital resources, interactive displays, and multimedia content can enhance accessibility and broaden audience engagement.

Such innovations allow museums to communicate complex historical processes in ways that resonate with younger generations while preserving scholarly rigor. As Bennett (1995) suggests, museums that integrate interpretive innovation with conservation practices are better positioned to maintain relevance in evolving social contexts.

In addition to preserving achievements and institutional milestones, military museums can encourage critical reflection on past conflicts and institutional transformations. By acknowledging challenges, strategic errors, and ethical debates, museums contribute to a mature understanding of military history. This critical dimension does not undermine institutional identity; rather, it strengthens it by fostering transparency and reflective professionalism (Macdonald, 2011). Through balanced representation, museums reinforce credibility and enhance public trust.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that museums—like all heritage institutions—operate within frameworks of narrative selection. Curatorial decisions inevitably shape which events, actors, and interpretations are emphasized and which remain marginal. In military contexts, this dynamic may involve tensions between institutional narratives and broader societal debates about historical responsibility. Recognizing this dimension does not diminish the value of military museums; rather, it underscores the importance of reflexive and inclusive museological practices that remain attentive to plurality and critical engagement.

Ultimately, the relevance of military museums lies in their capacity to preserve history, transmit traditions, and reinforce institutional values in a coherent and educational manner. By integrating conservation, interpretation, education, commemoration, and public engagement, these institutions become central pillars in sustaining the historical consciousness of the Armed Forces. Their work ensures that military history remains accessible, critically examined, and meaningfully connected to contemporary institutional life.

Military Museums: Catalysts of Identity and Cohesion in the Armed Forces

The existence of museums within the context of the Armed Forces plays a decisive role in the construction and reinforcement of institutional identity and cohesion among their members. These spaces not only preserve historical memory but also function as symbolic and educational environments that strengthen a sense of belonging, continuity,

and professional commitment among soldiers, officers, and military personnel. Furthermore, military museums operate as bridges between the armed institution and the civilian community, contributing to a more nuanced and informed understanding of the role played by the Armed Forces in society. This section examines the impact of military museums on institutional identity and cohesion, as well as their influence on civil-military relations.

Museums such as the Museo Naval del Caribe, the Museo Militar de Colombia, and the Museo Aeroespacial de la Fuerza Aérea Colombiana exemplify how institutional history is curated and communicated within the Colombian context. These institutions not only preserve collections of artifacts and archival materials but also articulate narratives of service, sacrifice, and institutional transformation. Such narratives are central to the formation of a coherent institutional identity. According to Fiske (2010), cultural institutions contribute to identity construction by producing narratives through which communities interpret their past and define their collective character. Within military institutions, these narratives enable members to situate themselves within a historical continuum of service and responsibility.

Cohesion among members of the Armed Forces is reinforced through engagement with these museum spaces. Museums provide environments in which soldiers and officers can reflect upon shared experiences, institutional traditions, and symbolic references. This collective reflection contributes to the strengthening of bonds of camaraderie and solidarity. Johnson (2014) argues that shared historical consciousness fosters unity by creating common points of reference that reinforce trust and cooperation. In military contexts—where operational effectiveness depends heavily on cohesion—such shared narratives acquire strategic significance.

The relationship between military museums and the civilian community constitutes another crucial dimension. By opening their spaces to society, these institutions promote transparency and contribute to reducing misunderstandings or stereotypes about the Armed Forces. Exhibitions and educational programs allow civilians to engage with military history in a structured and contextualized manner. Smith (2018) emphasizes that museums can influence public perception by framing institutional narratives in accessible and balanced ways. In this sense, military museums facilitate dialogue and help cultivate mutual respect between military

personnel and civilian audiences.

Examples such as the Infantry Museum located in Cantón Norte and the Demining Museum in Tolemaida illustrate how museums can highlight specific institutional missions and humanitarian contributions. By presenting demining operations and peace-support activities within historical and operational contexts, these museums emphasize the ethical and social dimensions of military service. Valdés (2021) notes that educational initiatives focusing on humanitarian actions can reshape public understanding of the Armed Forces by foregrounding their contributions to national stability and human security. Through such narratives, museums extend beyond traditional representations of combat and emphasize broader institutional responsibilities.

The institutional commitment to maintaining museum spaces further demonstrates recognition of their strategic value. Across different military units throughout the national territory, exhibition halls and heritage rooms have been established to preserve local and operational histories. Although not all of these spaces are permanently open to the general public, their existence reflects an institutional awareness of the importance of safeguarding cultural legacy and reinforcing internal identity. The maintenance of such spaces signals an understanding that historical continuity contributes to organizational stability.

Moreover, military museums often host training sessions, seminars, and professional development activities that reinforce identity formation processes. These initiatives may involve both military personnel and civilian participants, thereby fostering shared learning environments. González (2020) highlights that participatory museum practices can strengthen social bonds by encouraging dialogue and collaborative engagement. In the Colombian context—where civil-military relations have evolved through complex historical phases—such initiatives contribute to strengthening the social fabric.

As military institutions continue to adapt to contemporary challenges, the role of museums becomes increasingly significant. In societies where demands for transparency and accountability are prominent, museums provide a structured mechanism for communicating institutional history in an open and educational manner. Schlör (2018) suggests that museums can serve as mediating institutions that facilitate civil-military dialogue and enhance public trust. By presenting nuanced narratives that incorporate both achievements and

challenges, military museums contribute to a more mature and balanced public understanding. In sum, museums within the Armed Forces exert a profound influence on institutional identity and cohesion. Through the preservation and interpretation of history and traditions, these spaces cultivate a sense of belonging and professional pride among military members. At the same time, by engaging civilian audiences, they promote dialogue, transparency, and mutual respect. The institutional investment in museum development reflects recognition of their strategic importance—not merely as repositories of artifacts, but as dynamic environments that reinforce identity, cohesion, and constructive civil-military relations.

Conclusions

First, by defining the characteristics and functions of museums within military institutions, this study has demonstrated their fundamental importance as spaces dedicated to both conservation and education. Military museums are not merely repositories of artifacts; they are dynamic institutions that play a crucial role in safeguarding institutional memory. Through the preservation and documentation of historically significant objects and archival materials, they ensure that present and future generations maintain access to their cultural and organizational legacy. Simultaneously, by operating as educational environments, museums contribute to the professional formation of members of the Armed Forces. They provide spaces in which history is not only observed but actively experienced and interpreted. This dual function—conservation and education—reinforces their position as guardians of heritage and facilitators of institutional learning. Second, the analysis of the relevance of museums within the military sphere has highlighted their essential role in preserving institutional history, traditions, and values. Military museums enable history to be narrated in ways that transcend chronological description by embedding artifacts within coherent interpretive frameworks. Through thematic exhibitions and structured educational programs, these institutions facilitate the transmission of traditions that are central to institutional identity. The recognition of shared history as a foundational component of organizational culture strengthens the sense of belonging among members of the Armed Forces. In this respect, museums function as institutional continuities linking past and present, creating an emotional and symbolic continuity that reinforces commitment to institutional mission and values. Third, by examining the impact of museums on institutional identity and cohesion, as

well as their influence on relations with the civilian community, this study has illustrated how museum spaces contribute to the construction of collective narratives. Engagement with institutional history fosters unity among members of the Armed Forces by reinforcing shared references and professional heritage. At the same time, the opening of museum spaces to civilian audiences facilitates dialogue and mutual understanding. Museums thus operate as bridges between military institutions and society, enabling recognition of the sacrifices and contributions associated with military service. Such interaction contributes to the cultivation of respect, transparency, and constructive civil-military relations. Taken together, these findings allow for a comprehensive assessment of the importance of museums within military institutions. The analysis underscores their role in preserving historical heritage while shaping institutional identity and supporting internal cohesion. By integrating conservation, interpretation, education, and public engagement, military museums become agents that not only safeguard the past but also influence the present and future development of the institution. Their contribution extends beyond cultural preservation; they serve as instruments through which institutional narratives are structured, communicated, and critically examined.

Moreover, this research contributes to the field of military history by foregrounding the role of museums as spaces where institutional identity, collective memory, and professional education converge. In contexts where historical narratives may shape public perception and institutional legitimacy, understanding the function of museums becomes particularly significant. By analyzing museums as environments of conservation, interpretation, and dialogue, this study enriches scholarly discussions on heritage management and civil-military engagement. Ultimately, strengthening military museums supports both institutional continuity and broader societal understanding of the Armed Forces' historical legacy and contemporary role.

The Colombian case analyzed here reflects broader dynamics observable across Latin America, where military institutions confront complex historical legacies and evolving societal expectations. In several countries of the region, debates surrounding memory, heritage governance, and civil-military relations remain deeply intertwined with processes of democratization and post-conflict transformation. In this broader context, military museums emerge as strategic arenas in which

institutions negotiate historical representation, legitimacy, and public engagement.

By conceptualizing military museums as strategic sites of institutional identity formation and civil-

military mediation in Latin American contexts, this study advances ongoing debates on the relationship between military history, heritage governance, and societal legitimacy.

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