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ART DÉCO ARCHITECTURE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN A RELIGIOUS PRIVATE SCHOOL AND A SECULAR PUBLIC SCHOOL

ARQUITECTURA ART DÉCO EN INSTITUCIONES DE
ENSEÑANZA: LA DICOTOMÍA ENTRE UNA ESCUELA
PRIVADA RELIGIOSA Y UNA ESCUELA PÚBLICA
SECULAR

A ARQUITETURA ART DÉCO EM INSTITUIÇÕES
DE ENSINO: A DICOTOMIA ENTRE UMA ESCOLA
PRIVADA E RELIGIOSA E UMA ESCOLA PÚBLICA E
LAICA



Figura 0. Escola Normal Assis Brasil, 1960. Source: Almanac do bicentenário de Pelotas, v. 3, 2014. Accessed in 2024.

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RESUMEN

En la década de 1930, en Brasil, se introdujeron nuevas pautas de diseño en las instituciones educativas, dando relevancia a los temas sanitarios y nacionalistas, lo que representó un progreso. En este contexto social, educativo y político, fue necesario construir edificios escolares que incluyeran un nuevo programa con un nuevo lenguaje arquitectónico, tanto en edificios educativos públicos como privados. Sabiendo que las características constructivas del edificio escolar ejercen influencias en los individuos, este trabajo tiene como objetivo comparar e identificar las variaciones y proximidades que existen entre los proyectos de una escuela privada y una escuela pública, a través de análisis bibliográficos, documentales y arquitectónicos, en un estudio de caso comparativo entre el Ginásio Santa Margaria (1935) y el Instituto Estatal de Educación Assis Brasil (1942), ubicados en el sur de Brasil, en la ciudad de Pelotas/RS. Se puede observar, a través de este estudio, que si bien el uso del lenguaje está relacionado con la materialización de la construcción, su interpretación depende del contexto sociocultural en el que se inserta la obra.

Palabras clave: *art déco*, arquitectura escolar, arquitectura moderna, política cultural, edificios culturales.

ABSTRACT

In 1930s Brazil, new design guidelines were introduced to educational institutions, highlighting health and nationalist issues, which represented progress. Within this social, educational, and political context, it was necessary to build new schools that included a new program with a new architectural language, both in public and private educational buildings. Knowing that the constructive characteristics of a school building exert influences on individuals, this work aims to compare and identify the variations and proximities there are between the designs of a private and a public school through a bibliographic, documentary, and architectural analysis, in a comparative case study between the Ginásio Santa Margaria (1935) and the Instituto Estadual de Educação Assis Brasil (1942), located in the South of Brazil, in the city of Pelotas/RS. Through this paper, it can be observed that although the use of language is related to the materialization of the construction, its interpretation depends on the sociocultural context where the work is located.

Keywords: *art déco*, school architecture, modern architecture, cultural policy, cultural buildings.

RESUMO

Na década de 1930, no Brasil, foram introduzidas novas diretrizes projetuais às instituições de ensino, trazendo relevância às questões sanitárias e nacionalistas, que representavam o progresso. Dentro desse contexto social, educacional e político, foi necessária a construção de prédios escolares que contemplaram um novo programa com uma nova linguagem arquitetônica, tanto em edificações de ensino públicas quanto em particulares. Sabendo que as características construtivas do prédio escolar exercem influências sobre os indivíduos, este trabalho tem o objetivo de comparar e identificar quais são as variações e proximidades existentes entre os projetos de uma escola privada e uma pública, por meio de análise bibliográfica, documental e arquitetônica, em estudo de caso comparativo entre o Ginásio Santa Margaria (1935) e o Instituto Estadual de Educação Assis Brasil (1942), localizados no Sul do Brasil, na cidade de Pelotas/RS. Pôde-se observar por meio deste estudo que, apesar do uso da linguagem estar relacionado com a materialização da construção, sua interpretação depende do contexto sociocultural no qual a obra está inserida.

Palavras-chave: *art déco*, arquitetura escolar, arquitetura moderna, política cultural, edifícios culturais.

INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, at the beginning of the 20th century, with the transition from the imperial regime to the Republican government, the relevance of school buildings grew. Built as new imposing buildings that stood out from their surroundings, these schools, called School Groups, labeled education and health under the concepts of progress and fundamental elements of society. They became a model and reference in the urban environment. The educational institutions idealized in the First Republic had two floors and eclectic architecture, with U or H-shaped typologies configuring spaces around internal courtyards. The School Groups consolidated the idea of an exclusive building for school use (Faria Filho, 1998).

Despite investment in the educational sector, which came to be understood as a tool for progress, public education had only been for the wealthiest part of the population, causing an increase in illiteracy (Faria Filho, 1998). However, between 1920 and 1930, in an attempt to provide widespread democratized access to education for the entire population, the Escola Nova or New School movement arose in southeastern Brazil. New school buildings were conceived with architectural and constructive characteristics that promoted rationalization and speed in their construction (Buffa & Pinto, 2002; Oliveira, 2007).

In the 1930s, Getúlio Vargas, the newly elected President of the Republic, would appropriate part of the New School discourse, adding nationalist and patriotic thoughts. Meanwhile, with the creation of the Ministry of Education and Health in the same presidential period, a reformulation in the education system was seen that would emphasize health and nationalist issues through progress and modernity using Art Deco architecture. This generated approximations with an architectural building style dedicated to religious education (Azevedo, Bastos & Blower, 2007; Faria Filho, 1998; Oliveira, 2007; Schwartzman, 1982), ultimately forming new model schools as a result of this set of social, political, and educational factors.

To meet the new demands, under Getulism, a new school program was proposed that would be consolidated through new educational buildings to add spaces for an auditorium, library, gym, and medical and dental rooms (Oliveira, 2007). The latter health aspects transformed the typologies of school buildings, and L, U, E, or Z shapes were used, improving the rooms' lighting and ventilation (Goldfarb & Tinem, 2017). Initially applied in the southeast region of Brazil, in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, these typologies would later be applied in other states.

Art Deco constructions in Brazil were characterized by the use of reinforced concrete, positioning on corner lots with markings, articulation, and play between pure volumes, little ornamentation,

geometric lines, vertical and horizontal friezes that outline the shapes of the building, and emphasis on porticoes and staircases (Segawa, 2018; Silveira Junior, 2012). Its language found references in machines and means of transport, such as airplanes and transatlantic ships, represented by shapes, friezes, frames, and guardrails (Viana, 2011).

The rationalization of *Art Deco* was fundamental for disseminating the construction of school buildings in Brazil in this period, whether for public or private education. Examples of this are the Marina Cintra State School, in the state of São Paulo, from 1939; the Vilhena Alves school group in Pará built between 1937 and 1943; and in Paraná, from 1940 to 1950, where rationalist school projects multiplied, such as the case of the State College of Paraná.

In Rio Grande do Sul, during the 1930s, standardized projects were followed for educational institutions where the same set of floor plans and facades were replicated in different cities, complying with the new health, sanitary, moral, and civic guidelines (Cabral, 2020). The teaching environment had a complex network of pedagogical methods, educational agents, and school buildings, and the political ideals could be transmitted to society through the curriculum, pedagogical practice, and its built spaces (Escolano, 2017).

“[...] the school's location, its insertion in urban architecture, the building's layout, its symbolic elements, and the indoor/outdoor decorative aspects outline explicit cultural/pedagogical values that determine norms that interfere with what the student internalizes and learns. It is, therefore, as a school space, a historical-cultural construction “ (Lombardi & Nascimento, 2004, p.221).

In the period of the *Estado Novo* or New State (1937-1945), led by Vargas and characterized by an approach to authoritarian regimes in force in Europe at the time, public buildings were an instrument of political propaganda, representing power and progress through the monumentality of buildings (Ribeiro, 1991; Chaves, 2008). The *Art Deco* language was used in institutional buildings in several Brazilian states, such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and Rio Grande do Sul (Oliveira, 2007; Manzo, 2012).

The ties between school architecture and social and political relations began to be studied in the 19th and 20th centuries. According to Ramírez (2017), ideological issues and pedagogical methods influenced the typology of public school buildings built in Colombia. In Argentina, according to Espinoza (2017), public educational buildings associated with public policies were part of a design tradition consolidated between 1884 and 1910. In Brazil, Manzo (2012), in his thesis, points out that during the Vargas government in 1930, the *Art Deco* language was applied to state buildings to represent the political moment, becoming a symbol and example for other buildings. However, it is observed that even though these references do not include all of Latin America, the ideological discourse reflects the architectural discourse of the built school object.

1 Standardized designs were used in the country's public institutions to optimize the design and construction process. The standardized project was then replicated identically or similarly in different regions.

METHODOLOGY

This article aims to identify the variations and proximities between the designs of these educational buildings through bibliographic, documentary, and architectural analysis within exploratory research, with a case study in two school buildings with Art Deco architecture. Between 1930 and 1960, in the city of Pelotas², education was provided by public secular institutions and religious private schools (Amaral, 2003). In this context, a private religious school, Ginásio Santa Margarida (Santa Margarida Gymnasium, 1935), and a public and secular institution, Instituto de Educação Assis Brasil (State Institute of Education Assis Brasil, 1942), were chosen as objects of study.

The bibliographic research sought sources that addressed school architecture, the municipality's history, and the two institutions studied in this article. The consultation took place using the collections of the Secretariat of Public Works of Rio Grande do Sul. Based on Martínez (2000) and Ching (2013), the buildings' architectural analysis was conducted by comparing the layout, entrances, and the organization of the rooms, corridors, and standout elements. Redesigns were made using the AutoCAD and SketchUp programs, along with tools such as Google *Street View* and Google *Maps*, complemented by material provided by the 5th Regional Coordination of Public Works of Pelotas and the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the Catholic University of Pelotas.

Thus, two school buildings in Pelotas, in Rio Grande do Sul, built in 1935 and 1942 (Jornal Diário Popular, 1935), were studied. One was run as a private educational institution with a boarding school system, and the other as a public school. Their choice was because both used *Art Deco* and were built quickly. This work builds on previous studies on standard *Art Deco* schools in Rio Grande do Sul (Cabral, 2020; Cabral, Cordeiro & Oliveira, 2020; Cabral & Oliveira, 2018), but with a different focus.

Ginásio Santa Margarida (1935)

In 1934, in a rented residence at 172 Rua Santa Cruz, Ginásio Santa Margarida, an Anglican and private educational institution, started classes with 44 students. The school intended to transmit Christian teachings related to public and domestic life affairs, following moral values and investing in pedagogical innovations. The school served as a boarding and day-student school for early childhood and elementary education, teaching culinary arts, embroidery, modern languages, singing, and gymnastics in addition to conventional subjects (Bica, 2006).

During the Vargas government (1930-1945), Ginásio Santa Margarida sought to promote a nationalist education, reinforced by practices such as singing the national anthem, displaying the national

² The municipality of Pelotas is located in the extreme south of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and is the fourth most populous city in the state.



flag, and participating in Independence week, in addition to geography and history classes focused on building a patriotic feeling. The school also underwent nationalization inspections, which verified compliance with the nationalist requirements established by Decree 72/2 of April 8th, 1938.

The institution's new building, which began construction in 1935 and was inaugurated in 1936, was built by engineer Affonso Goetze Jr. and designed by the architect Arthur Beach Ward Jr. Ward also idealized the Young Men's Christian Association in Porto Alegre (Moura & Schlee, 2002). Its construction was intended to represent religious ideals through innovations and elements that represented progress (Bica, 2006).

The relationship between the policies of the Vargas government and the religious education proposed by the school is evidenced in the speech of a Reverend in June 1936, quoted by Bica (2006, p. 58): "Glorious flag! Go and tell the city of Pelotas, to this land of honor and civility, that Colégio Santa Margarida is open and that it is a temple where Christ is loved [...]". This relationship is also manifested in adopting the New School method since, during the new building's inauguration, the methods of the progressive, active, and socializing school were mentioned.

The school's structure was based on foreign schooling, including the French, Dutch, and German, and had the capacity for 45 female boarders and 100 day pupils (J. D. P, 1935). The building, located on a corner plot in the center of Pelotas, facing 1274 Anchieta Street, had its rooms spread over four floors (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ginásio Santa Margarida, 1936.

Source: <https://wp.ufpel.edu.br/asphe25anos/home/print-8/>. Accessed in 2024.



Figure 2. Escola Normal Assis Brasil, 1960. Source: Almanac do bicentenário de Pelotas, v. 3, 2014. Accessed in 2024.

The first floor had spaces for the library, teachers' room, kitchen, pantry, dining hall, cloakroom, bathrooms, and two large halls. The second floor had five classrooms, rooms for science, music, languages, the secretary, a waiting room, and restrooms. On the third floor were the dormitories of the students and teachers, bathrooms, and two classrooms. The infirmary was in the central space on the fourth floor (J. D. P, 1935). In 2005, the building ceased to be used as a school and currently belongs to the Catholic University of Pelotas.

Instituto de Educação Assis Brasil (1942)

In 1929, the Escola Complementar de Pelotas, a public educational institution, began its activities in the municipality. In 1942, the new building was inaugurated, designed to serve 750 students, in an event attended by the Secretary of the Interior, Osvaldo Aranha, and the President of the State Government, Getúlio Vargas, with 90 students initially enrolled. At that time, the building was considered innovative and grandiose, a source of pride for the population. Student demand grew over the years; after twelve years, the school already had 105 teachers to serve 1,523 students.

I. E. E. Assis Brasil's building is part of a set of standard projects devised during the Vargas government in the 1930s. In addition to meeting the needs of the new pedagogical program, these Art Deco schools served, through subjective elements, as tools for transmitting social-political ideals. In addition to the subjects and civic moments, the terraces and banners,



as well as the size and architecture of the school building, represented progress and legitimized the intentions of sanitation, nationalization, and modernity (Cabral, 2020). According to a student who attended the school between 1938 and 1940:

“At that time, the symbols of the motherland were very respected, and we were encouraged to do this at school. Every Saturday, we read the Prayer to the Flag by Olavo Bilac. A student would read, and then we would sing the National Anthem. Standing, and with great respect” (Amaral y Amaral, 2007, p.34).

This standard project, developed by the engineer João Baptista Pianca, an employee of the Secretariat of Works of Rio Grande do Sul, was adapted to serve between 200 and 750 students and was replicated in several cities in the state. The three-floor building, executed by Haessler and Woebecke, is located on a corner plot in the city center, with its main entrance at 296 Antônio dos Anjos Street (Figure 2).

On the first floor were the kindergarten, some primary school classrooms, the director’s administrative rooms, the concierge’s office, the auditorium, the reading room, the changing room, and bathrooms. The spaces for the science rooms, primary school, changing rooms, and bathrooms were on the second floor. On the third floor were areas intended for teacher training, classrooms, the museum, locker rooms, and bathrooms.

The two buildings were set on corner lots, with a setback from the building alignment. At Ginásio Santa Margaria this setback is frontal, while

Figure 3. Location of Ginásio Santa Margarida and the I. E. E. Assis Brasil, Pelotas/RS. Source: Google Maps, adapted by the authors. Accessed in 2023.

DISCUSSION

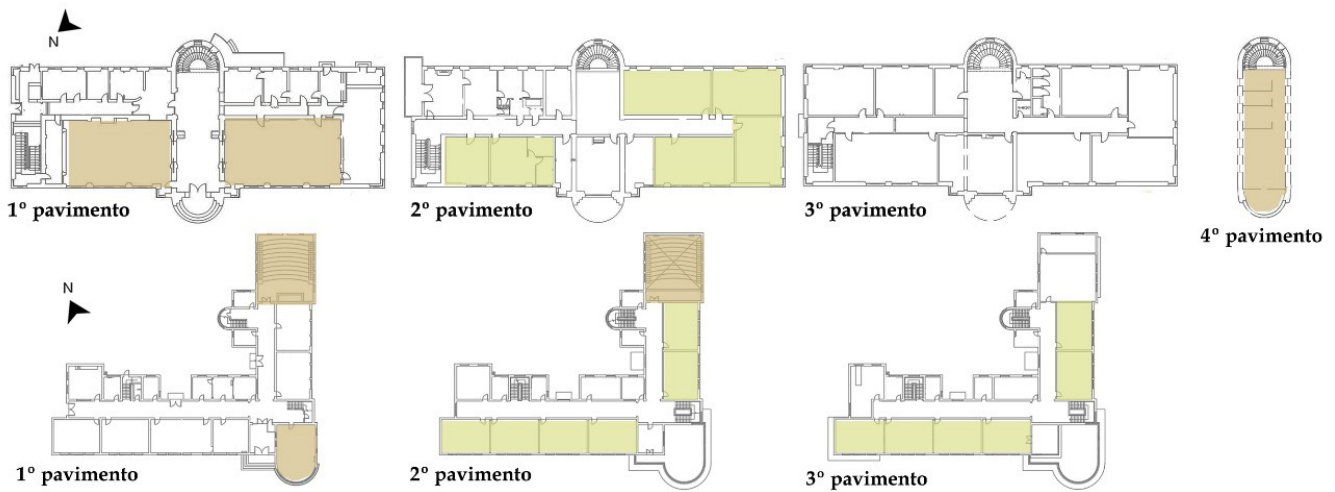


Figure 4. Halls, classrooms, and infirmary of Ginásio Santa Margarida and the library, auditorium, and classrooms of I. E. E. Assis Brasil. Source: UCPEL, 5th CROP, adapted by the authors. Accessed in 2023.

in I.E.E. Assis Brasil, the distance from the sidewalk is greater and is on the front and side of the building (Figure 3). The remoteness of the lot's boundaries made arranging frames facing external areas on these facades possible, improving the rooms' lighting and ventilation. In addition, the distance from the front of the building and its alignment creates a transition space between inside and outside, generating a pathway of contemplation for users.

It is seen that both schools used front and side setbacks to emphasize the building's facade. In the case of Ginásio Santa Margarida, the frontal setback, combined with other elements, highlights the main entrance. In I.E.E. Assis Brasil, the same setback was applied on two sides of the built volume. This orientation may be related to the layout adopted in each building, one in I and one in L, so that in the first, the only main facade is highlighted and, in the second, the corner.

In the analysis of the two institutions' floor plans, it can be seen that the most important spaces face the front of the building. In Ginásio Santa Margarida, the halls, some classrooms, and the infirmary were raised while I. E. E. Assis Brasil prioritized areas of the library, auditorium, and classrooms. It should also be noted that the curved volumes, which protrude from the rest of the building, are used in Ginásio Santa Margarida by the infirmary and in I.E.E. Assis Brasil by the library (Figure 4). Their positioning in the floor plan may be related to the circulation routes or the emphasis given to each room.

The horizontal circulation in Ginásio Santa Margarida, especially on the first floor, is in the form of a cross consisting of two intersecting lines. On the remaining floors, these lines disappear, turning into a T. Vertical circulation is provided by two staircases: one curved, located in the center of the volume, and the other U-shaped, positioned on the side of the block. In I. E. E. Assis Brasil, the horizontal circulation is L-shaped, configuring an internal courtyard. The vertical circulation is

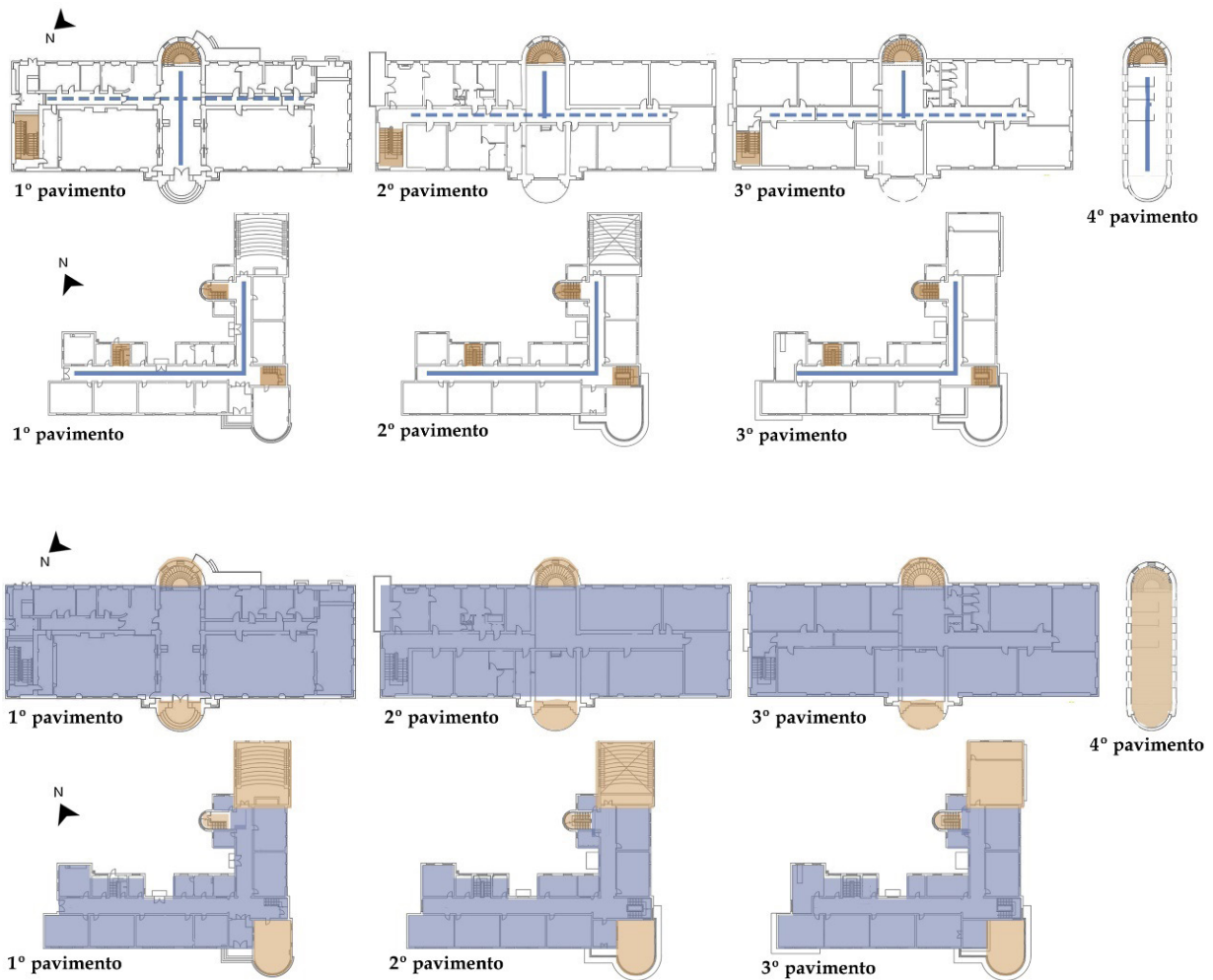


Figure 5. Horizontal and vertical circulations of Ginásio Santa Margarida and I. E. E. Assis Brasil. Source: UCPEL, 5th CROP, adapted by the authors. Accessed in 2023.



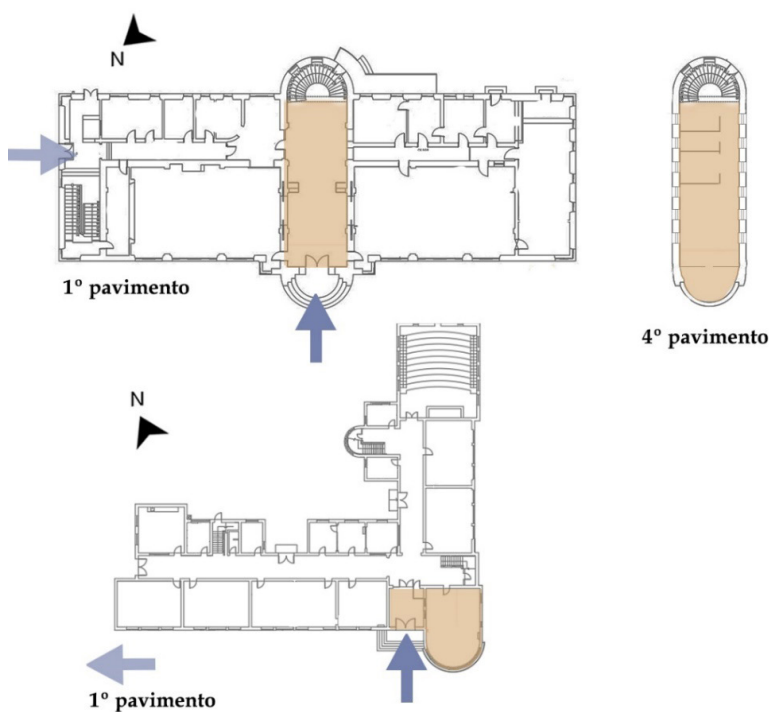
Figure 6. Floor plans and emphasized elements of Ginásio Santa Margarida and I.E. E. Assis Brasil. Source: UCPEL, 5th CROP, adapted by the authors, 2023. Accessed in 2023.

Figure 7. Volume of the infirmary and staircase of Ginásio Santa Margarida, and the volume of the library and staircase of I. E. E. Assis Brasil. Source: Prepared by the authors, 2023.

through three staircases arranged at the ends and a corner of the L, one of which is curved (Figure 5).

The organization of the rooms in Ginásio Santa Margarida considered the limits of the building's rectangular shape, as the block is rigid,

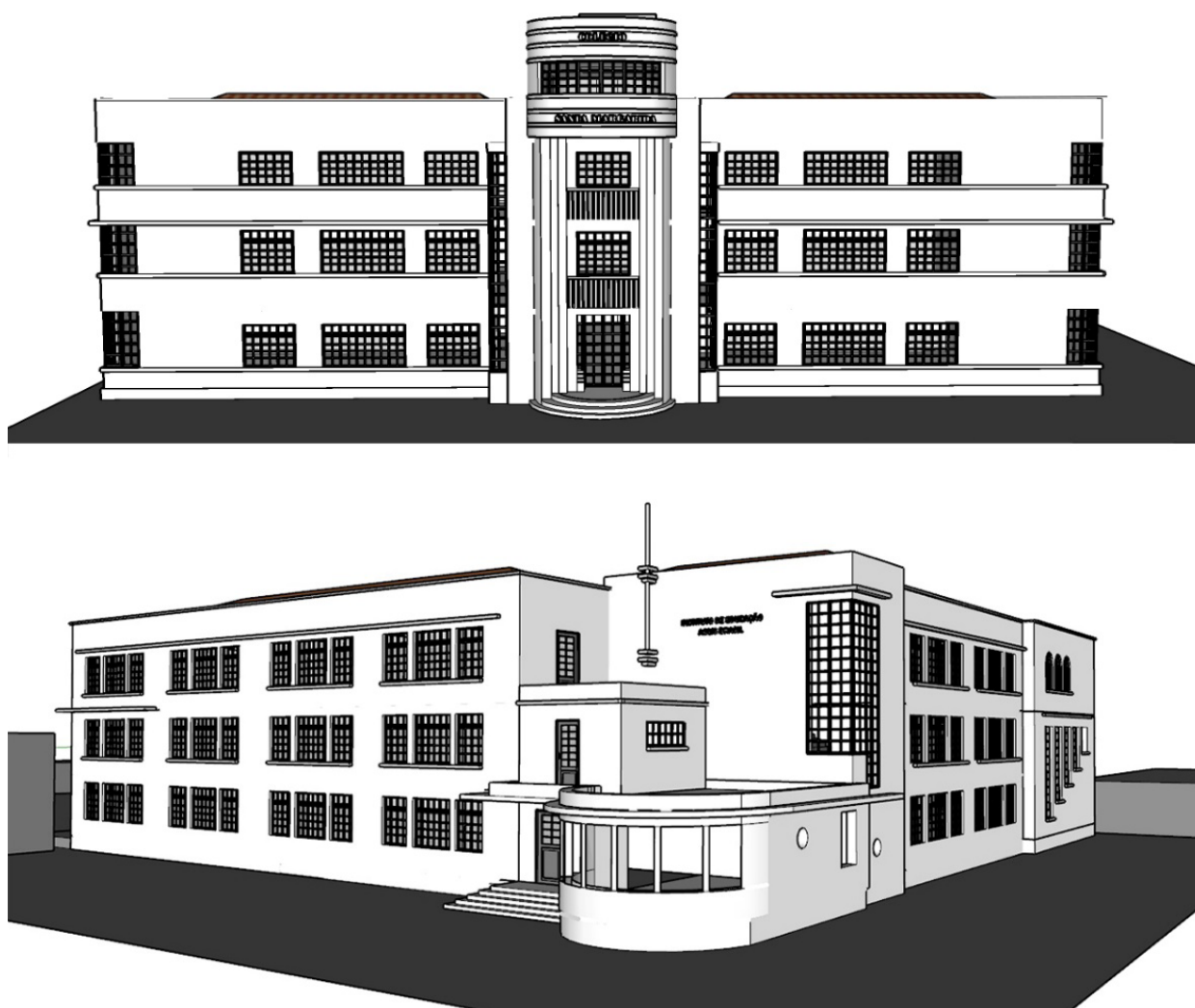
Figure 8. The entrance, entrance hall, and infirmary of Ginásio Santa Margarida and the entrance, entrance hall, and library of I.E.E. Assis Brasil. Source: UCPEL, 5th CROP, adapted by the authors. Accessed in 2023.



symmetrical, and contained. It is noted that the areas fit the rectangle, except for a single protruding element, where the infirmary and the staircase are located. In I. E. E. Assis Brasil, on the other hand, the layout has different characteristics. It is marked by a set of small blocks that differentiate and show themselves as independent from one another. In this way, several elements were incorporated along the L-shape without forming a continuous and single block and with some extrapolated points to emphasize, such as the library, the auditorium, and the staircase (Figure 6 and Figure 7). The architecture, through positioning and differentiation of form and volume, reflects the innovations of the educational programs of the time.

The main entrance to Ginásio Santa Margarida is on Padre Anchieta Street, where a large hall leads to a staircase, allowing circulation between the four floors. On the side of the school, on Dom Pedro II Street, is a smaller side passage for employees. In I.E.E. Assis Brasil, the main access is on Antônio dos Anjos Street. The entrance hall, located in the corner of the building, provides two alternatives: horizontal circulation or access to a staircase. On the same street, on the side of the plot, there is a secondary access to the institution's internal courtyard.

The entrance hall, library, and infirmary have innovations from the teaching program devised in the 1930s, with these spaces focused on social, intellectual, and health aspects. Both schools emphasized these rooms. In Ginásio Santa Margarida, the infirmary is located on the top floor, in the center of the building, standing out for its shape and advancement to the built volume. In I. E. E. Assis Brasil, the library, located on the first floor next



to the main access, has a curved shape, which extrapolates the body of the building (Figure 8).

The rigidity and symmetry in the floor plan of Ginásio Santa Margarida are also reflected in its facade, which comprises a mirrored central axis. Regarding *Art Deco*, the facade features elements such as platbands, horizontal and vertical friezes, vertical windows, balconies, curved forms, boxed lettering, and finishes with metal pipes. On the facade of I. E. E. Assis Brasil, a play of volumes and heights, is observed, emphasizing the corner of the lot and the construction. *Art Deco* elements include friezes, balconies with tubular metal guardrails, marquees, curved shapes, vertical windows, and circular frames (Figure 9).

The two schools have their rooms distributed on three floors, except for the small central volume of Ginásio Santa Margarida. Here, the social and service spaces were organized on the first floor, the teaching areas on the second floor, and the boarding dormitories on the third floor. This

Figure 9. Facade of Ginásio Santa Margarida and I. E. E. Assis Brasil. Source: Prepared by the authors, 2023.

organization seems to follow a hierarchy of uses, where the internal ones would remain more sheltered on the top two floors. In I.E.E. Assis Brasil, a day pupil institution, the service, administrative and public use areas were arranged on the first floor, while the classrooms and laboratories were distributed on the upper floors.

It can be said that the buildings have several similarities, such as the layout on corner lots, the presence of frontal setbacks, the use of curved volumes in prominent rooms near the main access, and a staircase with a curved volume that rises above the rest of the construction. Both organize the service spaces at the back of the building, have prominent elements on the main facades, enhance the entrance hall, have elevated access, and mark the base of the building. However, they also have notable differences, such as the emphasis in the center (Ginásio Santa Margarida) or the corner of the building (I. E. E. Assis Brasil), the organization of service spaces, and the distinction between symmetry and order in a contained volume, in contrast to asymmetry and the play of irregular blocks, with varying shapes and sizes.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the gap of seven years between the buildings and the fundamental differences between the institutions—one a religious private school with boarding and the other a secular public school with a day pupil system—, both sought to follow the sanitary, nationalist, and modernist guidelines proposed for the new school buildings in the 1930s. Although these guidelines have not been consolidated exclusively by architecture, it is evident that the same architectural language has been applied to fulfill different purposes.

The sanitary issues were addressed through the I or L typologies, including medical and dental rooms and gyms, and the enhancement of lighting and ventilation materialized in the strategic positioning and expansion of the number of frames. The nationalist demands were applied in the pedagogical program, including subjects and civic moments, creating spaces for raising the national flag, and adopting *Art Deco* architecture. Modernity and progress, in turn, can be observed in the ensemble formed by implementing the new pedagogical program, in the imposing size of the buildings, and in using *Art Deco*-style architecture.

It is seen that the projects of the two school institutions present a clear opposition. The building of Ginásio Santa Margarida has an I-shaped symmetrical and contained typology, while that of I. E. E. Assis Brasil has an L-shaped typology with asymmetric characteristics and a play of volumes. These differences seem to be associated with the particularities of each school: Ginásio Santa Margarida, which has a conservative, Christian, and domestic education, adopts a more rigid and formal architecture. I. E. E. Assis Brasil, although it seeks a conservative education, disregards religious and economic aspects, using dynamic elements in the building's volumetry, reflecting a more modern and flexible approach.

The rooms highlighted by the application of curved shapes – the infirmary at Ginásio Santa Margarida and the library at I. E. E. Assis Brasil – are located on the main facade of the buildings, projecting from the body of the building. The infirmary, located on the fourth floor and in the center of Ginásio Santa Margarida, rises, increasing the height of the building and symbolically approaching the divine. In contrast, the library of I. E. E. Assis Brasil, located on the first floor and at the corner of the building, stands out when signaling access to this space.

In both cases analyzed, the form praises progress and modernity, whether with the state or religion. It is concluded that although architectural language is linked to the building's materialization, its interpretation depends on the sociocultural context where the work is inserted. It appears that *Art Deco* architecture, regardless of the educational institution's character, was applied in school buildings to represent the progress promoted by the new policies of the time. In this way, the complex formed between architectural language, pedagogical methodology, and policies of patriotism and nationalization consolidates and materializes this discourse.

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