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THE FURNITURE AND WOODWORKING INDUSTRIES IN COSTA RICA<sup>1/</sup>

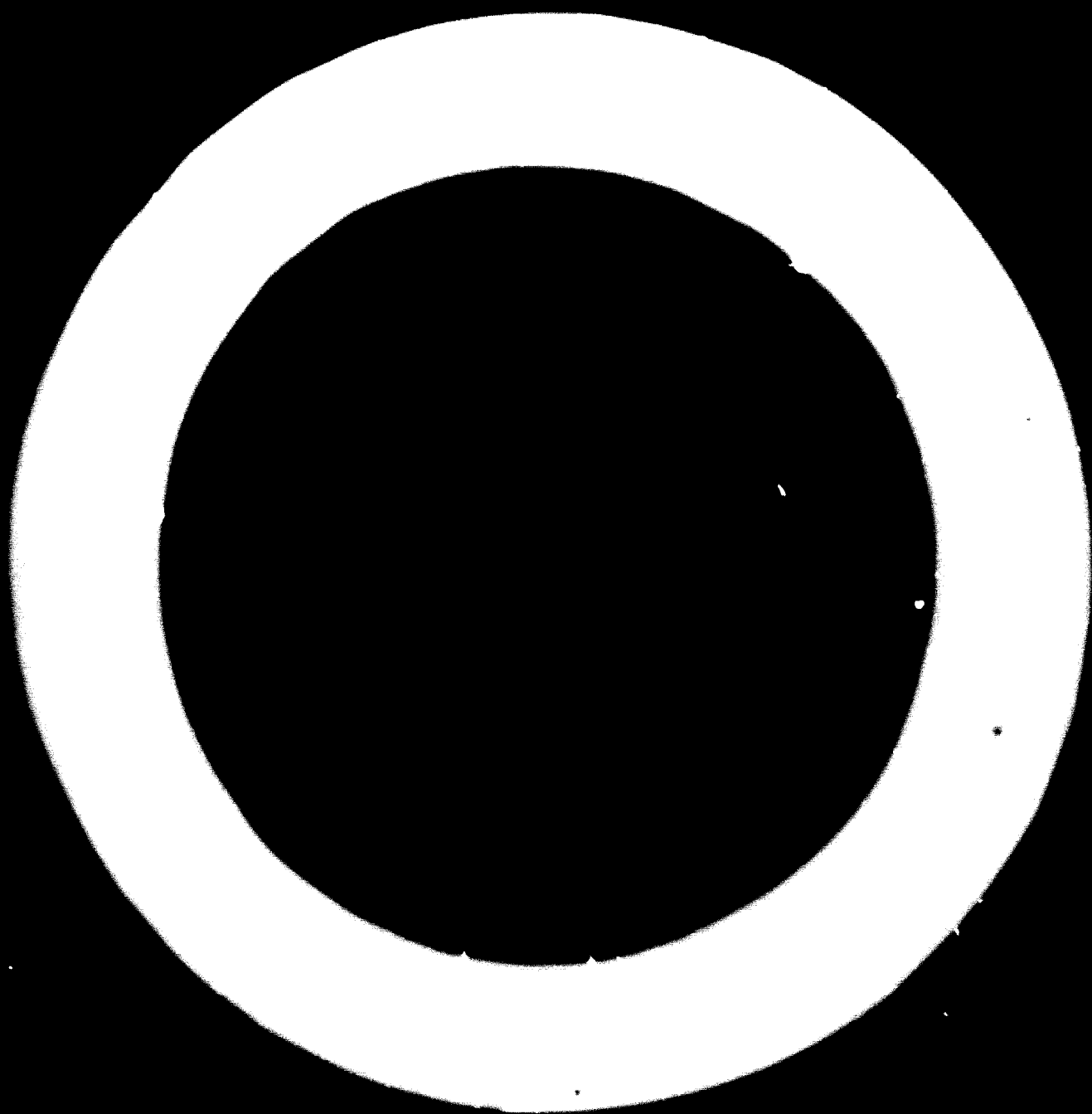
Country Paper

by

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Costa Rica, one of the republics of Central America, covers an area of 50,900 square kilometers with a population of approximately 1,800,000 inhabitants.

Three volcanic ranges of different altitudes cross the territory of Costa Rica, endowing it with a variety of climates in spite of its tropical location. The warm lowlands of the Caribbean coast, with their high rainfall, are excellent for banana and cocoa crops, while the cooler highlands are mainly planted with coffee.

A large part of the total area of the country is covered by forests which represent important wood resources. Nevertheless, because of the rapid and irrational exploitation of forests complete exhaustion of natural forest reserves may occur within the next 15 years.

In order to avoid the disappearance of wood resources, several reforestation programmes have been established using fast-growing commercial varieties which could replace those species now being destroyed.

In Costa Rica forest products are manufactured in 207 sawmills located all across the country; most of them have inadequate equipment and other physical facilities, and most of their personnel are not highly skilled technically: therefore productivity is low.

## II. FOREST RESERVES AND COMMERCIAL WOOD SPECIES

### a) Forest reserves

Almost 50% of the total territory of Costa Rica, which means 25,000 square kilometers, is covered by forests; nevertheless the natural forest under exploitation does not exceed 5,000 square kilometers (500,000 hectares).

The main forest territories now being exploited are: Tortuguero, San Carlos, and Peninsula de Osa. Guanacaste province, formerly an important wood producer, has notably diminished its reserves. The region north-east of the Talamanca range, perhaps the country's biggest, is almost inaccessible.

In all these areas we find a mixed forest, showing many different species (more than 150) more of which are, as yet, commercially unknown.

The forest reserves administered by the national government, according to a report by the Ministry of Agriculture, are those of Rio Macho, Cabo Blanco and Volcán Arenal, with a total area of approximately 1,500 square kilometers.

At present a project is under study to establish two more national forest reserves, one near the city of Grecia, towards the slopes of Poás Volcano, and the other within the Talamanca range, toward the Panama border.

b) Commercial species

The following list shows the kind of woods most used in the furniture and woodworking industries in Costa Rica.

<u>Common name</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Species</u>
Bálsamo	Leguminosae	Miroxilon Balsamum
Caoba	Meliaceae	Swietenia
Caobilla	Meliaceae	Guarea
Cedro amargo	Meliaceae	Cedrela Mexicana
Cedro macho	Meliaceae	Carapa Guianensis
Cedro Pacifico	Meliaceae	Cedrela Mexicana
Cenzaro	Leguminosae	Pithecolobium saman
Cristóbal	Leguminosae	Platymiscium pinnatum

It is important also to point out the kinds of woods mainly used by the woodcrafts industry (souvenirs, toys, etc.)

<u>Common name</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Species</u>
Café	Coffea	Coffea arabica
Ciprecillo	Taxaceae	Podocarpus
Cocobola	Leguminosae	Dalbergia retusa
Jadl	Betulaceae	Alnus acuminata
Nazareno	Leguminosae	Peltogyre purpurea
Ronron	Anacardiaceae	Astronium graveolens

### III. THE NATIONAL FURNITURE AND WOODWORKING INDUSTRY

The distribution of plants dedicated to furniture, woodwork and related activities (upholstery, crafts, plywood production) follows the distribution of population within the different provinces of the country.

The following table shows the number of such plants distributed by provinces and by number of workers employed; only plants with five or more workers have been taken into account.

<u>Province</u>	<u>Number of factories</u>	<u>Number of workers</u>
SAN JOSE'	55	1278
ALAJUELA	18	132
CARTAGO	15	148
HEREDIA	23	192
GUANACASTE	<u>2</u>	<u>34</u>
TOTAL	<u>113</u>	<u>1784</u>

The provinces of PUNTARENAS and LIMON are not included in the table because their furniture and woodworking plants have less than five workers each.

### IV. PERSPECTIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The products of the furniture and woodworking industry of Costa Rica are not very important among its exports; the export of wood

products within the 1967 - 1971 period amounted to approximately 0.1% of the country's total exports.

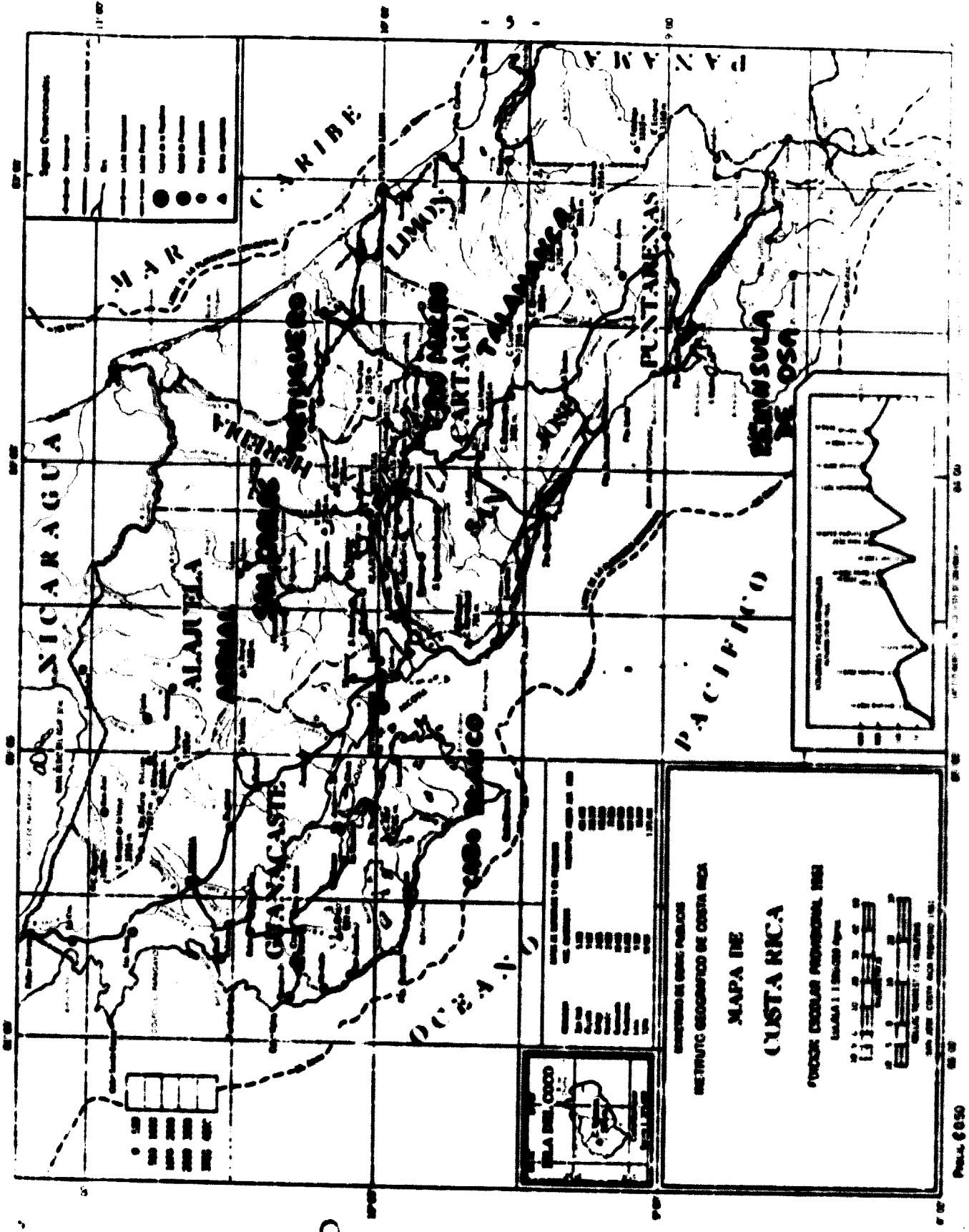
Nevertheless, the future of the furniture and woodworking industries is very promising because of the general boom in construction together with the progressive increase of per capita income.

The present deficit of housing in Costa Rica is about 140,000 units, and within the next ten years 250,000 new units will be needed. This means that within this period, the demand for wood by the national furniture industry will greatly increase.

In recent years the production and consumption of plywood has shown a constant increase; the use of plywood by the furniture industry is very important. The present export of plywood to the markets of Central America is U.S. \$ 2,500,000 a year. If forest reserves continue to be exploited at the present rate, plywood production will very soon be able to supply the national market only.

At present some local production plants have started to export furniture to Central America and the United States.

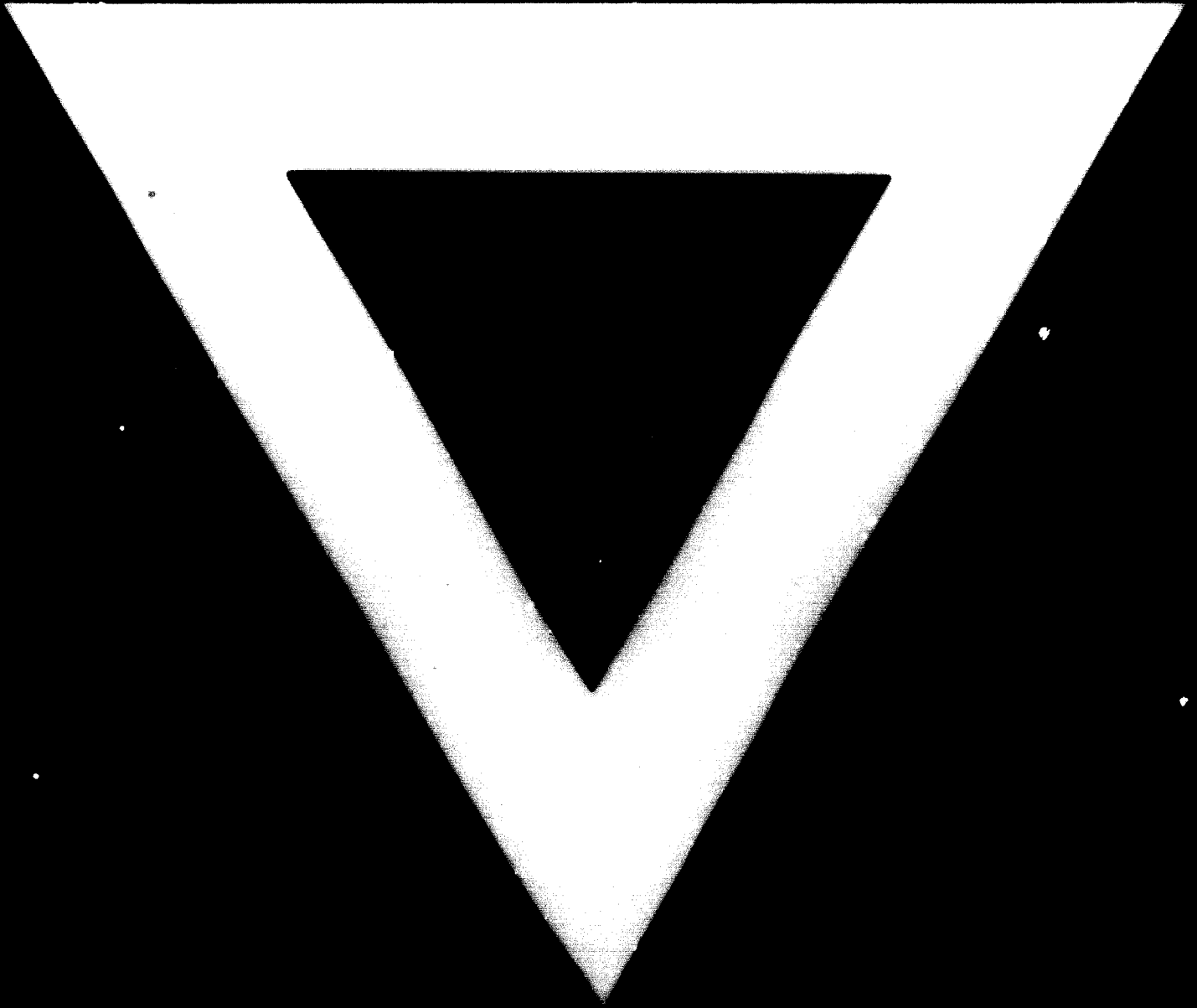




ESCALA DE ALTURAS EN METROS  
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**MAPA DE COSTA RICA**  
 FUENTE: ESCALA PROVINCIAL 1965  
 ESCALA 1:500,000  
 HOJA: 11-1  
 SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA, REPÚBLICA DE COSTA RICA





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