

A critical historical analysis of the evolution of Brasília

and the role of the South Cultural Sector (SCS) as a public cultural space in the civic center

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ABSTRACT

This material investigates how modernist urbanism was applied in the creation of Brasília, considering its political and symbolic aspects, and how it influenced the configuration of public spaces. In addition to exploring their evolution based on an analysis that focuses specifically on the South Cultural Sector (SCS), a central area originally conceived by Lúcio Costa to be a cultural park integrated into the modernist urban fabric of the city. The SCS is an area that clearly reflects the ideals of modernist planning and also the issues that have arisen throughout history due to social, political, and functional transformations.

The research examines the fundamental principles of modernist urbanism, architectural and symbolic intentions, their translation into the Brasília project and, in particular, into the guidelines of the Pilot Plan and the Southern Cultural Sector based on the heritage restrictions resulting from Brasília's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In addition, this thesis offers a critical historical analysis of how space, memory, and function interact in the public sphere of Brasília, reflecting on the contrasts between the utopian proposal of the planners and the reality experienced today, marked by challenges of use, conservation, and integration of these spaces into everyday urban life.

The study draws on works by leading contemporary urban planning authors such as Bruno Latour, David Harvey, Jane Jacobs, and Christoph Brumann to investigate issues related to spatial appropriation, symbolic reinterpretation, and heritage management. Through a combination of historical research, documentary analysis, and cartography, the study maps the transformations in the use of buildings, preservation strategies, and civic and cultural manifestations that have redefined the SCS in recent decades.

This thesis seeks to contribute to a theoretical basis that allows us to understand the relevance of modernist projects, their practical applicability, and their influence on urban dynamics and public spaces. In addition, it discusses the right to reinterpret and inhabit symbolic spaces in a more inclusive, participatory manner that is aligned with contemporary demands. This work also considers the tensions between heritage conservation and urban renewal. By articulating heritage, social practice, and urban design, the work contributes to the debate on the reinvention of modernist spaces in the context of contemporary cities undergoing transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Brasília, Brazil's current capital, is a unique city in the global urban landscape. Planned from the outset as a modern capital, it represents one of the most ambitious urban planning experiments of the 20th century. Before its foundation, Brazil had already had other seats of government, first Salvador and later Rio de Janeiro, always reflecting changes in the country's political, economic, and territorial dynamics. However, it was only in 1956, during the administration of Juscelino Kubitschek, that the decision was made to build a new capital in the interior of the country. This decision was in line with the ideals of interiorization of development, territorial integration, and modernization of the state, expressed in the presidential slogan “fifty years in five.”

The creation of Brasília from scratch allowed for the application of a radically new urban model, based on the principles of modernist urbanism and the guidelines of the Athens Charter (1933). (Image 1) Designed by Lúcio Costa, the city was conceived to materialize a new spatial and symbolic order for Brazil, bringing concepts of functionality, monumentality, and democracy. This combination of technical rationality and social utopia made Brasília not only an administrative center, but also an object of constant study in disciplines such as architecture, urbanism, sociology, and cultural heritage.

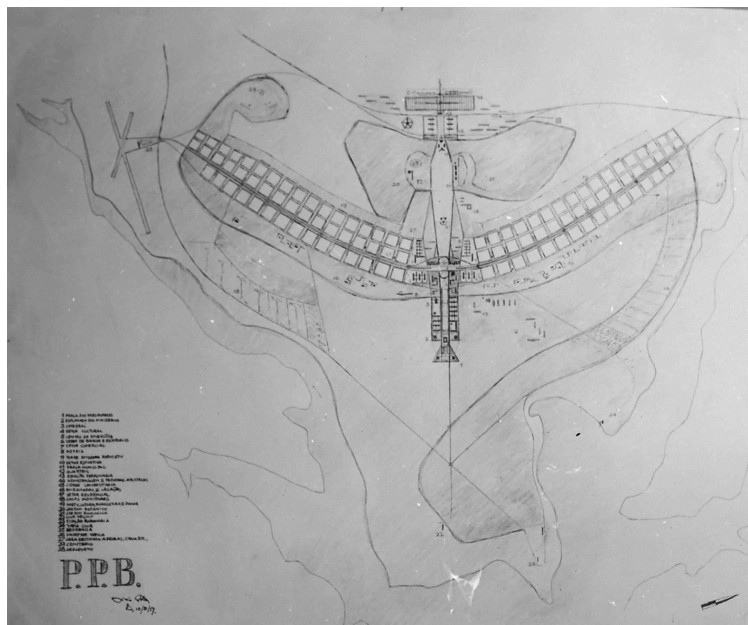


Image 1 - Exhibition of the pilot plan of Brasília - Drawing by Lúcio Costa for the Pilot Plan report - Image from the National Archives

Within this logic, the city's public spaces were designed as structuring elements of civic life. Among these spaces, the South Cultural Sector (SCS) stands out, conceived as a

hub of culture, contemplation, and urban integration, located at the intersection of the monumental, road, and gregarious axes of the Pilot Plan. Despite its geographical and symbolic centrality, the SCS is today a space marked by contradictions: on the one hand, it houses buildings of great architectural and institutional value; on the other, it suffers from the fragmentation of urban flows, partial uses, and discontinuous appropriations.

Studying the Southern Cultural Sector is therefore relevant for several reasons. First, because it synthesizes the ideals and weaknesses of the modernist project in Brasília. Second, because it is a territory where fundamental issues such as heritage preservation, urban redevelopment, and social appropriation of public space intersect. And third, because it remains an unfinished promise of cultural centrality, whose reactivation could contribute to redefining the role of public spaces in the center of the federal capital.

Public spaces play a fundamental role in urban configuration, functioning as places for social interaction, leisure, and cultural expression (BERTOLUCI, 2019). In the context of modernist urbanism, they were often designed with a focus on monumentality and functionalist rationality, as is the case in Brasília. However, contemporary urban practice highlights the need to reevaluate these spaces in light of social dynamics and the human scale, seeking to redefine them and integrate them more effectively into the daily lives of the population. This challenge is well exemplified by the South Cultural Sector (SCS).



Image 2 - Monumental scale with the southern cultural sector in the lower right corner - Image by Joana França

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this work stems from an interest in understanding how modernist urbanism acted, and still acts, in shaping public spaces, considering its symbolic and political aspects and the experience on a human scale. The research focuses on the Southern Cultural Sector (SCS), the central area of the Pilot Plan of Brasília conceived by Lúcio Costa as a cultural park linking institutional monumentality and everyday life. Although the current layout of the sector still bears a strong resemblance to the original plan, its materialization has undergone different phases, programmatic transformations, and deviations from the initial intentions.

In this sense, this work seeks to constitute itself as a critical analysis of the trajectory of the SCS, from its conception in the context of modernist utopia to its contemporary condition, investigating the physical, symbolic, and functional changes that mark this space. The Sector is understood here as an emblematic territory of negotiations between urban planning and social appropriation, and as a mirror of the contradictions of the modernist city project in the face of the complexity of the current metropolis.



Image 3 - View of the southern cultural sector connected to the bus platform - Image by Joana França

In addition, the research seeks to understand how to deal with modern heritage in a living city undergoing constant transformation, recognizing that the listing of Brasília imposes specific challenges on urban management. The work also aims to discuss the limits, but above all the possible flexibilities within the morphological rigidity of modernist urbanism, showing how public spaces, even those designed under strict formal guidelines, can be reinterpreted through contemporary social uses, political manifestations, and cultural practices.

Finally, the thesis also aims to analyze how the ideals of international modernism were interpreted in the Brazilian context, with an emphasis on the experience of Brasília as a unique expression of this movement. Thus, although this discussion is not the main focus, it will be addressed throughout the analysis as a backdrop for understanding the contradictions, continuities, and transformations of modernist urbanism in Brazil.

JUSTIFICATION

In developing this work, I draw on some personal experiences that I seek to discuss and resolve throughout. The South Cultural Sector presents itself, within the context of Brasília, as a sector responsible for bringing reflection and appreciation of culture within a central and listed area. But it carries with it a paradox: despite its privileged location and its conception as a cultural park, the sector has long been neglected, with fragmented uses and a history of underutilization. Encountering this space on a daily basis, as an architecture student and city dweller, I was led to reflect on how modernist urbanism, in seeking to rationally organize public space, also conditions the social, political, and symbolic behavior of the city.



Image 4 - Daily life in the southern cultural sector - Image by Vitor Czik

This research seeks to understand the trajectory of a planned, modern, and listed public space, and how it unfolds over time. Brasília, conceived as the ultimate symbol of architectural and urban modernism in Brazil, was designed to express an ideal of the future, progress, and state rationality. However, the real city, alive and in constant transformation, challenges these premises and reveals an urban complexity that goes beyond what was outlined on paper. The thesis, therefore, proposes a critical and at

the same time constructive view: to understand the limits of the utopian modernist project, without disregarding its potential.



Image 5 - Comparison of the monumentality of buildings with pedestrians in the southern cultural sector -

Image by Neto

In this sense, the research seeks to raise questions such as: why was the Southern Cultural Sector, even though located in the heart of the capital, not fully developed according to the original intentions? How did planning decisions relate to the political context of the time? And, above all, what lessons can be learned from the way this space is being appropriated today?

More than just pointing out weaknesses, this thesis also aims to reveal how public spaces in Brasília have been redefined by everyday life. Brasília, inherited as a symbol of modernism, not only represents the negative aspects of a utopian project, but also shows the possibilities of a vibrant social life, even within the limits of functionalist urbanism. Today, Brasília is an active metropolis that has escaped the rigid radar of modernism and begun to articulate its own urban dynamic, full of unexpected uses, symbolic disputes, and collective appropriations.

Thus, this work aims to contribute to a critical reflection on the role of modernist urbanism in shaping public spaces, especially when these spaces are recognized as heritage sites and, at the same time, remain a territory of negotiation between past and present, planning and reality, ideal and experience.

METHOD

With the aim of analyzing the relationship between public space, architecture, human scale, and symbolic value in the context of modernist urbanism, this research is structured around three thematic axes, which complement each other and progressively deepen toward the object of study: the Southern Cultural Sector of Brasília.

The first axis focuses on the study of public spaces from the perspective of modernist urbanism, discussing their relevance in urban design and the principles that guided their conception. In addition to addressing the fundamentals of modernist urbanism and its development in Latin America, with special attention to the Brazilian case.

Based on an analysis of the guidelines of the Athens Charter, this axis explores how modernism was interpreted and adapted in Brazil, culminating in the proposal for Brasília. In this context, Lúcio Costa's Pilot Plan is presented as a synthesis of modernist principles adapted to the national reality, combining tradition and innovation, monumentality and everyday life. The symbolic role of the new capital as a political, architectural, and urban project is discussed here, as well as its insertion in the international debate on 20th-century modernism.

The second axis focuses specifically on Brasília as an experiment in urban planning on a national scale, analyzing its four urban scales (monumental, bucolic, gregarious, and residential) and its status as a World Heritage Site. This analysis is enriched by the use of images and diagrams, which help to relate the project's theory to the spatial configuration of the city.

The capital is discussed as an urban artifact that carries both the utopian ideals of modernism and the challenges of a contemporary metropolis. Based on this, the tensions between heritage preservation and the needs of urban transformation are investigated, with an emphasis on the actions of agencies such as IPHAN and regulatory instruments such as PPCUB. The relationship between political decision-making, urban form, and the limits of the modernist model in dealing with the social complexity of the city is also discussed.

The third axis investigates the Southern Cultural Sector and its more concrete dimension, focusing on the architectural scale, examining its development over time and the spatial and symbolic transformations it has undergone. This axis also investigates how the buildings in the sector were designed and how they have been reinterpreted through new uses, symbolic attributions, and everyday social practices, revealing a layer of urban memory in constant negotiation.

The SCS is analyzed as a space that, although it retains structural elements of the original plan, has undergone processes of reinterpretation and appropriation that reveal its conflicts, potentialities, and limitations as a listed public space. Changes in use, cultural occupations, the flexibility of buildings, and social manifestations that have taken place in the sector are examined, in addition to the most recent preservation and redevelopment policies.

Thus, the research adopts a path that starts from a broader approach, focused on the fundamentals of modernist urbanism and the genesis of Brasília, and gradually advances toward a more specific scale, culminating in the analysis of the buildings and local dynamics of the South Cultural Sector. Therefore, it is qualitative research based on documentary analysis. Among the main sources are the urban plans of Brasília, IPHAN guidelines and regulations, the document *Brasília Revisitada* by Lúcio Costa, as well as national and international academic bibliography on modernist urbanism and the evolution of the federal capital project.

Materials produced by leading historians and scholars in the field of urbanism will also be used, such as Bruno Latour, David Harvey, Jane Jacobs, James Holston, Christoph Brumann, and Brazilian authors such as Frederico de Holanda and Gabriela Tenório, whose contributions help to build a critical theoretical basis on the themes of modernity, heritage, urban appropriation, and public space.

1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

1.1 PUBLIC SPACES AND URBAN CENTRALITY

This section will discuss the main concepts related to public space and its symbolic, social, and political function in the city. Drawing on authors such as Henri Lefebvre, Jane Jacobs, Jan Gehl, and Paulo César Gomes, public space will be understood as a place of encounter, dispute, and coexistence, a structuring element of urban relations and the exercise of citizenship. The notion of “symbolic centrality” and the role of central public spaces as anchors of collective memory and stages for social demonstrations will be addressed. David Harvey's concept of “right to the city” will also be introduced here, connecting urban space with its political dimension and the social appropriation of territory.

The notion of public space occupies a central place in 20th-century urban theories, being conceived not only as a physical space, but also as a symbolic, political, and social field. For Henri Lefebvre, urban space is not merely a functional support for the city, but a social production that reflects and reproduces power relations. In *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre states that “space is a social and political product, the result of the interaction between everyday practices, representations, and built forms.” Within this logic, public spaces become fundamental arenas for collective expression and the struggle for the right to the city, a concept he himself coined.

Jane Jacobs, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), reinforces the importance of lively public spaces that are integrated into the urban fabric. For her, “safe streets, active sidewalks, and the meeting of different social groups are indispensable elements for urban vitality.” Jacobs criticizes modernist urban planning for creating large urban voids and functional separation between residential, commercial, and institutional zones, a logic that often weakens centrality and reduces the social potential of public spaces. This criticism directly dialogues with the experience of Brasília and sectors such as SCS, where monumental scale and segregated use compromise the continuity and spontaneity of urban life.

In the field of contemporary practice, Jan Gehl proposes an approach centered on human beings and sensory experiences of space. In *Cities for People* (2010), he emphasizes that public spaces should be designed “based on the body in motion, eye level, length of stay, and the feeling of safety and comfort.” Gehl proposes that urban

centrality is not measured solely by geographical location, but by the capacity of the space to be experienced and appropriated on a daily basis, something essential for assessing the vitality of the SCS and its transformation into an accessible cultural hub.

Paulo César da Costa Gomes, when discussing the notion of public space, argues that these spaces “are not neutral,” but carry meanings, symbols, and collective memories. For Gomes, urban centrality is also linked to symbolic relevance and not just to topography or use. In the context of Brasília, this interpretation is essential to understanding how central sectors such as the SCS carry representative functions, even when not fully occupied or experienced as planned.

From a political and economic perspective, David Harvey analyzes public space as part of urban disputes and the logic of capital. In *Spaces of Hope* (2000), he argues that “central spaces in cities are often targets of processes of exclusion, gentrification, or controlled aestheticization,” which strains the relationship between heritage and popular appropriation. This approach is particularly relevant in heritage areas such as the SCS, where monumentality and institutional guardianship can clash with everyday urban and popular practices.

The discussion on urban centrality is also deeply influenced by early 20th-century urban models, such as Clarence Perry's Neighborhood Unit proposal (1929), which sought to organize urban space based on self-sufficient units with schools, squares, and services within walking distance. Although functional, this proposal also led to the compartmentalization of urban space, a criticism later taken up by Jacobs and Lefebvre. In parallel, Leonardo Zuccaro Marchi's text *The Heart of the City* (1955) revisits this debate from the perspective of the relationship between public space and urban density, arguing that the city center should be a place of encounters, conflicts, and diversity. These are ideas that help us reflect on the potential and limitations of the SCS as the symbolic and cultural heart of Brasília.

Thus, when articulating these different approaches, it becomes clear that urban centrality does not depend solely on geography or architectural design, but rather on the capacity of public space to embrace social diversity, coexistence, and collective symbolism. In the case of the South Cultural Sector, this centrality is ambiguous: designed as a cultural and symbolic hub, but marked by periods of emptiness and fragmented appropriations, it embodies the contradictions of urban modernism in Brazil and the tensions between design and use.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM) began to rethink the rigid principles of functionalist modernism. Until then, public spaces were mostly designed in a monumental and isolated manner,

following the logic of the Charter of Athens (1933), which prioritized functional zoning. However, internal criticism of the movement led to a new appreciation of everyday urban life. In the last CIAMs, especially CIAM VIII (1951, Hoddesdon) and CIAM IX (1953, Aix-en-Provence), the discussion on public spaces shifted to an interest in “core areas,” or lively city centers, that could accommodate spontaneous encounters, social interaction, and a diversity of uses. In this new paradigm, monumentality came to be interpreted not only as a symbolic expression of power, but as a potential element of urban identity and cohesion, provided it was integrated on a human scale.

In this revisionist context, the work of Josep Lluís Sert, a Catalan architect and one of the most influential members of CIAM, stands out. During his time at Harvard as director of the Urban Design program (1953–1969), Sert promoted a more sensitive approach to historical urban morphology and the importance of public space as an articulating element. At the famous Harvard Conference on Urban Design in 1956, he emphasized the role of the architect as a mediator between urban form, social function, and historical legacy. In his words: “The urban designer must see the city not only as a technical object but as a stage for public life.”

This idea was put into practice in the Havana Master Plan (1955–58), where Sert proposed enhancing historic squares and avenues, combining colonial monumentality with new urban facilities in a proposal for symbolic and spatial continuity. These ideas strongly echo in the design of Brasília, which, although contemporary with the critique of modernism, chooses to reinforce the monumental ideal as an expression of national modernity, while at the same time silencing, in part, the complexity of everyday urban life.

To understand how modernist urbanism shapes public spaces, it is first necessary to understand the complexity of these spaces in the contemporary urban context. Public space is not just an urban void between buildings, but rather a political, symbolic, and relational territory. According to Ascher (2001), “public space is, by definition, the place of social interaction, encounter, and negotiation of differences, while at the same time being the stage for conflict and convergence” (p. 67). This definition broadens the classic notion of public space as a square or street and inserts it as a central mediator of social and cultural dynamics.

In this sense, authors such as David Harvey reinforce public space as an arena for collective transformation. “The right to the city is not just an individual right to access urban resources; it is a collective right to transform the city and, consequently, ourselves” (Harvey, 2008, p. 23). Amid contemporary trends toward fragmentation and privatization of urban space, this critical perspective points to the need to revalue public

spaces as places of democratic coexistence, cultural resistance, and collective identity building.

Paulo César da Costa Gomes (2002) argues that public space is structured by three essential elements: the simultaneous presence of bodies, the sharing of a common language, and the coexistence of different people. These elements are fundamental in urban contexts marked by socio-spatial segregation, as in the case of Brasília, where the modernist configuration sought to articulate monumentality and coexistence. However, this articulation has not always been effective in practice. As Milton Santos (1997) reminds us, the materiality of urban space (furniture, pavements, buildings) shapes and limits the forms of use and appropriation. In other words, the physical structure of space can either invite social participation or inhibit it, especially when it imposes itself in a monumental and disproportionate way on the human scale.

Thus, the interpretation of public spaces must consider not only their functional and formal aspects, but also their symbolic and experiential aspects, as proposed by Henri Lefebvre (1974), who suggests that space is always socially produced and laden with ideology. Thus, in the analysis of modernist cities such as Brasília, it is essential to reflect on how urban design shapes everyday practices and social relations, while also carrying political and symbolic intentions. This reflection will be deepened in conjunction with the proposals of the CIAMs, with an emphasis on later debates on urban centrality, and with the ideas of thinkers such as Jane Jacobs and Jan Gehl, who advocate for a more organic city, sensitive to diversity and the scale of the human body.

1.2 MODERNIST URBAN PLANNING: PRINCIPLES, CRITICISMS, AND CONTINUITIES

This section introduces the fundamentals of modernist urbanism, its principles of functionality, separation of uses, monumentality, and spatial rationalization, based on documents such as the Athens Charter (1933) and the writings of Le Corbusier (*Urbanisme*, 1925). It also addresses the criticisms that emerged in the 1950s, with emphasis on authors such as Jane Jacobs and the debates of CIAM X, which questioned the effectiveness of the functionalist model in promoting urban life, diversity, and social interaction. Modernist urbanism was not only an architectural movement, but also a political and ideological project of the 20th century, which aimed to shape society through the built environment.

Modernist urbanism emerged as a response to the disorder and unsanitary conditions of 19th-century industrial cities. Based on ideals of progress, rationality, hygiene, and

efficiency, this urban paradigm proposed organizing urban space in a scientific and technical manner. As Benévolo (1967) states, the central principles of modernist urbanism rest on functional sectorization, with a clear separation between areas of housing, work, leisure, and circulation.

As mentioned in the previous topic, CIAM, founded in 1928 by Le Corbusier, Hannes Meyer, Sigfried Giedion, and others, organized ten international congresses until 1959, promoting an internationalist and functional urban model. During CIAM IV, held in 1933, the central theme was “The Functional City,” and it was then that the formulation of the Athens Charter began, which was officially published in 1943 by Le Corbusier. As Mumford (2000) observes, “the Athens Charter was the most systematic attempt of the 20th century to transform the city into a rational and functional organism,” guided by health, efficiency, and formal clarity.

This letter became a theoretical milestone in modernist urban planning, strongly influencing urban projects in the 20th century. The text advocated collective housing surrounded by green areas, the removal of buildings from streets, and priority for rational transportation. The letter stated, for example, that “green spaces are as necessary as light and fresh air,” and that “housing must be isolated from heavy traffic.” Le Corbusier had already anticipated these principles in *Urbanisme* (1925), when he declared that “each function and each individual must occupy its proper place” (p. 56), consolidating the idea of the city as a functional organism.

These principles were applied in several paradigmatic projects of the 20th century, such as Chandigarh (India), the Plan Voisin (Paris), the theoretical Ville Radieuse, and Brasília, in Brazil. These are examples of “model cities” created from scratch or profoundly redesigned to express the values of modernity. Although initially seen as utopian, many of these projects were later criticized for their formal rigidity, their indifference to everyday life, and their difficulty in accommodating social diversity.

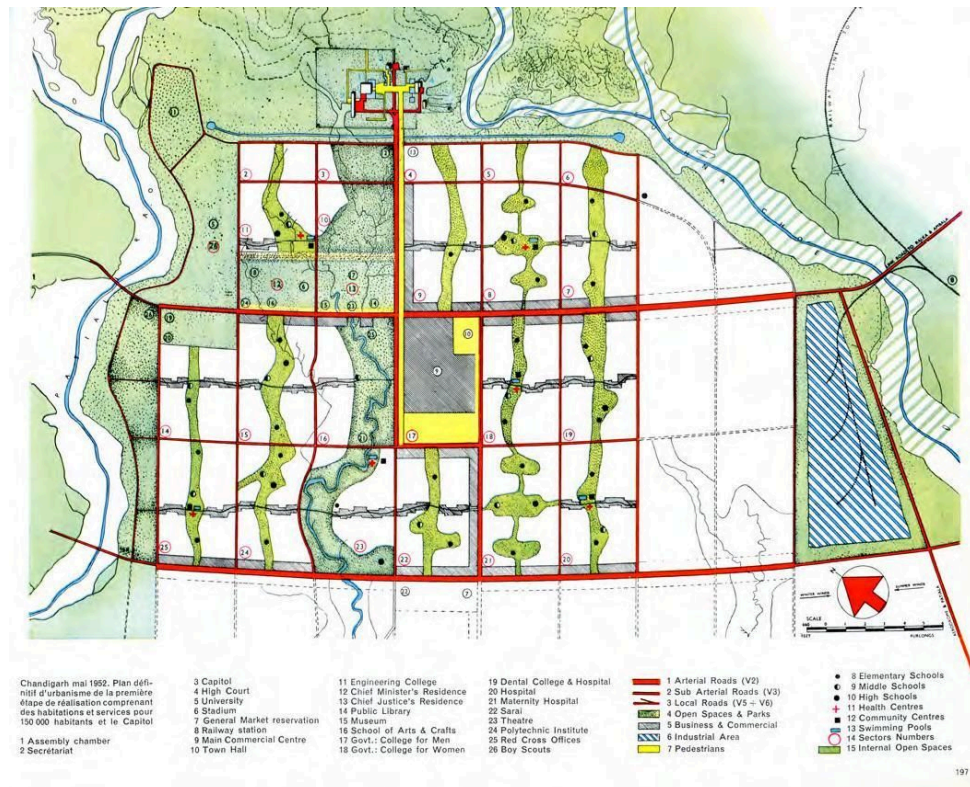


Image 6 - Chandigarh plan by Le Corbusier. 1952

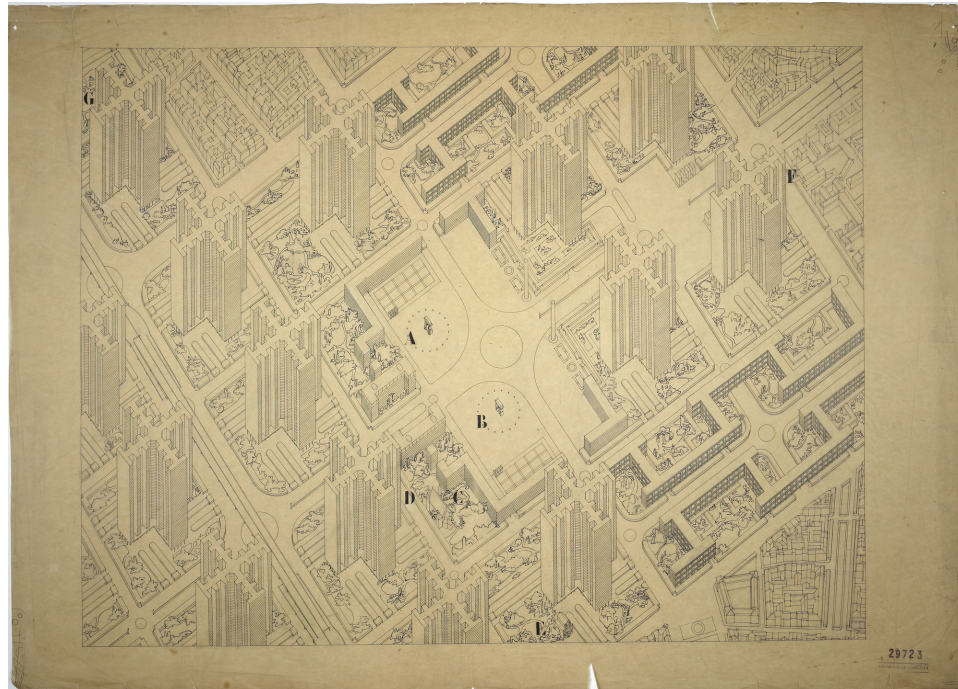


Image 7 - Le Corbusier Plan Voisin for Paris. 1925

CIAM X, held in Otterlo in 1959, marked a decisive turning point in the modern movement. During this congress, Team 10, a group formed by architects such as Aldo

van Eyck, Alison and Peter Smithson, Giacomo Quaroni, and Georges Candilis, openly challenged the dogmas of the Athens Charter. For them, the city could not be reduced to a functional machine, nor its inhabitants treated as numbers in abstract schemes. They claimed that the charter disregarded urban social life, local historical and cultural contexts, and had an excessively functionalist and rigid approach. Team 10 proposed, instead, an approach that valued the human scale, the complexity of everyday life, and the social dimension of architecture.

In its manifestos and projects, Team 10 defended the notion of “clusters” instead of watertight zones, emphasizing spatial continuity, formal diversity, and the cultural roots of urban forms. According to Alison and Peter Smithson (1961), “the city is a place for people to meet, not just to circulate.” This critique ushered in a transition between high modernism and the questions that later influenced postmodernism, challenging functionalist foundations and opening space for new paradigms in urban planning.

Paradoxically, it was in that same year, when CIAM ended its activities amid internal disputes, that Brasília was already being built in the Central Plateau, still deeply rooted in the principles of modernism. This historical coincidence reveals a tension characteristic of the Brazilian capital: while internationally the modernist model was undergoing revision, Brazil was betting on monumental urban utopia as a symbol of its developmentalist and national project.

1.3 INTERNATIONAL MODERNISM AND ITS DEVELOPMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA

This subsection will address the relationship between European modernism and its adaptation in the Latin American context, with a focus on Brazil. Based on the MoMA exhibition on Latin American architecture and authors such as Gaia Piccarolo, we will discuss how modernism was not only imported, but reinterpreted based on vernacular traditions and local conditions. In Brazil, this critical operation is manifested in figures such as Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, who integrated elements of colonial architecture and tropical landscaping (Burle Marx) into the modern vocabulary.

As mentioned earlier, architectural modernism emerged as a response to the challenges of industrial urbanization and soon spread to other continents, including Latin America. Driven by the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM), this movement spread the idea of functional, rational architecture focused on transforming society. However, its arrival in Latin America was not marked by a faithful replica of this model. As highlighted in the exhibition “Latin America in Construction:

Architecture 1955–1980” promoted by MoMA in 2015, Latin America developed its own interpretation of modernism, anchored in its cultural, social, and climatic specificities. The exhibition revealed how Latin American architects, including Brazilians, managed to incorporate modernist precepts into local traditions and national identity, creating a unique architectural language marked by a hybridism between the new and the traditional.

The previous topic addressed the reality that international modernism was experiencing in the late 1950s, highlighting the last CIAM meeting while high modernism was undergoing a transition to what would later become postmodernism. At the same time, Brasília was already being conceived and planned. However, the plan for Brasília predates this turning point by a few years. Although aligned with the functional and formal principles of the modern movement, such as urban sectorization, the use of reinforced concrete, and volumetric simplification, Brazilian architectural modernism sought to articulate these fundamentals with elements of local culture, landscape, and tradition. Thus, Brazilian modernism is built on the tension between the international and the national.

Lúcio Costa and Niemeyer, two of the most influential architects of Brazilian modernism, were part of broad intellectual and professional networks, which included international architecture conferences, exhibitions, and debates, fundamental spaces for the formulation and consolidation of their ideas during the period when Brasília was being conceived. Oscar Niemeyer, for example, participated in the Pan-American Congress of Architects held in Bogotá in 1947, an event that brought together modernist architects from all over Latin America and contributed to strengthening a regional vision of modernism, centered on the social role of architecture. The Brazil Builds exhibition, held at MoMA in New York in 1943, played a decisive role in the international projection of Brazilian modernism. Curated by Lúcio Costa, the exhibition presented important modernist works, including projects by Niemeyer, such as the Ministry of Education and Health (MES), consolidating both as representatives of modern Brazilian architecture. This international visibility anticipated many of the principles that would later be applied in the design of Brasília.

In 1957, Lúcio Costa won the competition for the urban plan of the new Brazilian capital with a proposal that, although based on modern principles, brought its own interpretation, linked to the national context. He proposed a city based on Corbusian principles, such as functional axes, zoning, and monumental public spaces, but incorporated vernacular elements such as pilotis, brise-soleil, loggias, and the use of vegetation integrated into the architecture. Even while adhering to the international style, he brought with him a tradition anchored in the search for “anonymous” Brazilian

architecture, which was the result of expeditions and studies he conducted in cities in the interior of Brazil. Thus, Lúcio Costa was decisive in the formulation of a national architectural identity.

As an intellectual committed to heritage preservation, Costa traveled throughout Brazil's interior, recording Portuguese-Brazilian colonial architecture through sketches and notes. In *Registro de uma Vivência* (1995), he recounts his enchantment with the anonymous and traditional architecture of cities such as Diamantina, perceiving in it “an authentic and unpretentious way of doing things” that should be preserved and reinterpreted in the present. This quest strongly influenced his theoretical and practical work, establishing bridges between the colonial past and the proposals of modern urbanism. As Holston (1989) points out, Brasília is “both a model of universal modernism and an expression of Brazilian national identity.” The search for national identity was represented in the arts, in Burle Marx's landscaping, in Portinari's murals, and in Oscar Niemeyer's fluid forms. This synthesis between the modern and the traditional gave Brasília a prominent role in the history of world urbanism. The city represents an effort to break with the colonial past and assert a new national identity through space.

Based on his interpretation of modern urbanism, Lúcio Costa's Pilot Plan is structured around four urban scales: monumental, residential, gregarious, and bucolic. The monumental scale expresses the symbolic representation of power; the residential scale consists of superblocks; the gregarious scale organizes spaces for social interaction and commerce; and the bucolic scale connects the whole with the landscape. The interpretation of Brasília as a unique experiment in the construction of public space is explored in depth by Martina Landsberger, who observes how the monumentality and urban composition proposed by Costa articulate form, function, and symbolism. For her, “Architectural monumentality is not just a formal fact, but takes on a civil and collective value, aiming to build the identity of a modern society” (Landsberger, 2014). The monumentality of Brasília is thus more than a stylistic gesture: it is an instrument for building national identity.

In his studies, Landsberger emphasizes that the urban structure of the Brazilian capital is anchored in the valorization of emptiness and the separation between buildings as a new form of centrality and representation. “The city is not articulated through the density of its buildings, but through rarefaction, through significant voids” (Landsberger, 2014). In this logic, public space becomes not only a physical element, but a symbolic stage for institutional life, where power, collectivity, and the national imagination are projected.

Brasília, therefore, remains a synthesis of 20th-century modernist utopias: an attempt to build, through urban space, a modern, orderly, and progressive society. Although its intentions have been strained by Brazilian social and urban reality, it remains a living laboratory for reflection on the limits and possibilities of the modern project. The city thus becomes a synthesis of modernist aspirations and the desire for Brazilian cultural affirmation, demonstrating how modernism, when transplanted to Latin America, was not simply imported, but reinterpreted and adapted to local conditions.

1.4 BRASÍLIA AS A MODERNIST EXPERIMENT



Image 8 - Location diagram made by the author

Brasília represents one of the most ambitious experiments in modern urbanism of the 20th century. More than just an urban project, it represents a symbolic and political operation of national significance. Conceived as the capital of a Brazil that aspired to modernity, its design was shaped by the principles of international modernist urbanism, with spatial rationality, functional sectorization, monumentality, and an emphasis on collective housing, and linked to the desire to integrate the national territory, decentralize power, and accelerate development. Built from scratch in the central part of the country, Brasília became the spatial materialization of the modernization project

adopted by the government of Juscelino Kubitschek in the context of the Target Plan (1956–1961).

The Target Plan, the president's government program that guided his actions, had a motto of “Fifty years in five,” expressing the ambition to accelerate Brazil's economic development at an intensified pace, condensing half a century of progress into just one five-year presidential term. The Target Plan was divided into 31 targets, with target 31, considered the most symbolic and ambitious, being the construction of Brasília, the new federal capital, in the Central Plateau, seen as a symbol of modernization, interiorization, and national integration. Brasília, designed and built in record time, became the icon of the Target Plan and of the modern Brazil dreamed of by JK.



Image 9 - Juscelino Kubitschek visiting the submarine Humaitá. 28 Aug. 1957 - Image by National Archive/National Agency

Juscelino Kubitschek conceived the new capital as a strategic part of his project for the country. In *Porque Construí Brasília* (Why I Built Brasília), he states that “the construction of Brasília was not a simple gesture of personal will, but a necessity for the State, linked to the ideal of integrating the territory and promoting progress” (Kubitschek, 1975, p. 89). For JK, Brasília symbolized the overcoming of the colonial past and the advance towards a new era of development and national unity: “The change of capital represented the start of a new and promising Brazil, affirming its vocation as a continental power” (p. 91). Thus, the city not only complied with a constitutional provision, but also became the structural axis of a comprehensive modernization project, connecting physical space and national symbolism.

Before the construction of Brasília, the axis of national development was heavily concentrated on the coast. In order to populate and develop the interior of the country, Kubitschek decided to force the displacement of this axis.

"Instead of the coast – which had already achieved a certain level of progress – the Central Plateau would be populated. The population center, created in that remote region, would spread like an oil slick, causing the entire interior to open its eyes to the country's grand future. Thus, Brazilians could take possession of their immense territory. And the change of capital would be the vehicle. The instrument. The factor that would trigger a new cycle of exploration" (Kubitschek, 1975, p. 7).

There is also a strong intention to bring modernity to the country by presenting the new capital as the center of a "modern Brazil," capable of overcoming underdevelopment. As stated in the book *Why I Built Brasília*, "Brasília would be more than a new capital: it would be the physical representation of the developmental leap we intended to implement" (Kubitschek, 1975, p. 46). In addition, the Central Plateau region was chosen because it had favorable topographical conditions, was far from international borders, and facilitated control of the national territory.

Brasília's proposal stands out for taking modernist ideals to their ultimate conclusion, consolidating a conception of the city based on defined scales, clear zoning, and monumentality that articulates form, power, and representation. The choice of this model of urban design came as an official language of progress and modernization chosen by the President. Inspired by the debates of CIAM and the precepts of the Athens Charter (1933), the city was conceived as a functional and efficient organism, whose urban form should induce new, more civilized, collective, and organized ways of life. As Le Corbusier (1925) explains, "each function and each individual must occupy its proper place." This separation reflects not only the influence of the Athens Charter, but also the desire to use urbanism as a pedagogical and civilizing tool where urban form shapes a new, modern, rational, and orderly way of life.

Modernism was applied in Brasília, bringing several similarities with Corbusian modernism. Both adopted urban sectorization, clean forms, apparent structures, the rational use of materials, the valorization of collective housing and green space, and the use of monumentality, referring to the notion of the city as an expression of power and order. But Brasília brings its Brazilianness on a symbolic scale, in the use of empty space, in the reinterpreted elements of colonial architecture (loggia, brise-soleil, pilotis as balconies, bucolic gardens). While modernism saw the city as a machine for living, Costa saw it as a cultural space, a symbolic artifact, and a stage for forming national identity.

However, the rationality present in the project encountered its own limitations. Over the decades, the modernist experiment in Brasília was strained by the complexity of the metropolis that grew up around it. Rigid zoning, the predominance of the automobile, spatial fragmentation, and low urban density ended up producing distances and inequalities, compromising part of the expected vitality. Lúcio Costa himself recognized these limitations in *Brasília Revisitada* (1987), proposing “better than exclusive zoning, predominant zoning,” advocating a certain flexibility in the plan in the face of the emerging urban reality. As Holston (1989) also points out, functional segregation created isolated and disconnected zones, contradicting the objectives of urban integration. At the same time, satellite cities expanded with their own dynamics, revealing a real city very different from the idealized city. As James Holston (1989) analyzes, the Brasília project “embodies modernist utopias,” but also reveals their contradictions in attempting to impose a new social order via urban design.

Furthermore, the influence of Brazilian modernism inaugurated a design approach marked by monumentality and the valorization of architectural symbols. This emphasis resulted in rigid, geometric forms, often compared to Platonic solids, which disregarded the human scale. Buildings become imposing but inaccessible, with camouflaged entrances and facades that do not establish a dialogue with the user. As Jan Gehl (2013) observes, “good urban architecture should invite interaction, offering legibility and a scale close to the human body,” something that is lost in excessively monumental contexts. In addition, urban planning has prioritized the logic of the automobile, contributing to the formation of a pedestrian-unfriendly city, with large voids, long distances, and public spaces devoid of their everyday function.

Even so, Brasília remains a powerful symbol. It was eventually listed by IPHAN (the federal agency responsible for preserving cultural heritage in Brazil) in 1992 and is recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The city is now protected by instruments such as the Brasília Urban Complex Preservation Plan (PPCUB), developed by SEDUH-DF (the agency responsible for planning, coordinating, executing, and overseeing urban and housing policy) and guided by IPHAN guidelines. As highlighted by the PPCUB (2020) itself, the plan seeks to “reconcile the contemporary needs of the metropolis with the values enshrined in the original project, ensuring the preservation of its formal and symbolic attributes.” This tension between preservation and transformation has accompanied the city's recent history.

Despite its listing, Brasília has demonstrated its capacity for reinterpretation. Its large public spaces, originally designed as the setting for official civic life, have been appropriated by the population for cultural events, popular fairs, protests, and celebrations. Brasília, inherited as a symbol of modernism, does not only bring

complicated and negative aspects; it also shows what is possible to do to have a social life in these spaces. A contemporary reading of the city reveals that its monumentality and empty spaces, far from being merely problems, also offer potential for new forms of sociability and urban living.

Reflecting retrospectively on the construction of Brasília, JK concludes: “The new capital will be, for future generations, the enduring symbol of our faith in Brazil, our belief in its destiny, and the courage to realize it” (Kubitschek, 1975, p. 134). Brasília should therefore be understood as a field of tension between the ideal and the lived experience, between the prescriptive urbanism of the 20th century and the plural city of the 21st century. Its value lies not only in its innovative form, but also in the way it forces us to think critically about the legacies of modernism and the possibilities for its reinvention in the present.

2. THE CONCEPT OF BRASÍLIA AND THE SOUTHERN CULTURAL SECTOR

2.1 BRASÍLIA



Image 10 - Satellite image of Brasília made with Google Earth

This chapter aims to situate and create a knowledge base about the territorial context in which Brasília is located and its symbolic and political role. The construction of Brasília

as a modern capital represented, in this context, much more than a geographical change in the seat of power. It was an attempt to “found the future,” to create a new symbol of progress, equality, and order for the country, moving away from colonial urban models and closer to the universal ideals of modernism. Being a modern capital meant integrating architecture, urbanism, technology, and politics in a symbolic gesture of national renewal.

The creation of the new capital is part of a movement in which Brazilian modernism seeks to break with previous foreign architectural styles, especially eclecticism and classicism, while adhering to the principles of international modernism. However, this adherence is not passive: there is a deliberate effort to incorporate symbolic and vernacular elements of Brazilian culture, seeking to build a unique architectural identity. In this context, Brasília was designed using new construction technologies, such as reinforced concrete, but it is also marked by references to traditional architecture, such as brise-soleil, pilotis, cobogós, and integration with the tropical landscape. It is a synthesis between the new and the old, made possible by a state that, in sponsoring this project, sought to affirm Brazil as a modern, progressive nation of continental grandeur.

Brasília is Brazil's third capital and is located in the central-western region. Since the Constitution of 1891, there had been plans to move the seat of the federal government to the interior of Brazil as a strategy for territorial integration (Holston, 1989, p.16). By naming the city Brasília, the intention was to express the construction of a modern, autonomous, and unifying homeland, a city designed “by Brazil and for Brazil.” The choice of the name Brasília was not just a play on words, but an essential part of the symbolic project of creating a new capital for the country. The idea of naming the future capital after the country itself reinforced the national identity and representative character of the new city. In Portuguese, the suffix “-ia” is common in city names, giving the idea of a place, a homeland, or territory. This choice also marked a break with the colonial past, represented by Rio de Janeiro, and projected the capital as a symbol of republican modernity and the promise of national development.

The location of Brasília was strategically defined in the interior of Brazilian territory, more precisely in the Central Plateau, the central region of the country (the Brazilian continental shelf) within the state of Goiás (currently in the Federal District). This decision was based on a series of political, economic, and symbolic motivations. From a geopolitical point of view, moving the capital inland aimed to decentralize power from the coast and integrate less developed areas of the country, promoting a more balanced distribution of population and resources. In addition, Brasília's central geographical position facilitated communication with all regions of the national territory,

reinforcing the city's role as a political and administrative hub. This location was also chosen based on 19th-century studies, such as those by the Cruls Mission (1892), which already indicated the region as ideal for hosting a future federal capital. The delimitation of the territory became known as the “Cruls Quadrilateral,” a symbolic and geographical basis for the subsequent definition of the Federal District.

“The Brazilian Central Plateau Exploration Commission was tasked with surveying the area designated for the future capital. The mission was composed of doctors, geologists, botanists, and engineers, and conducted surveys on the climate, geology, flora, fauna, topography, and natural resources. The demarcated territory became known as the Cruls Quadrangle.” (Cruls Mission, 1894 Report)

“In 1892, the Cruls Mission, formed by a group of specialists—doctors, geologists, botanists, and engineers—traveled across the Central Plateau and demarcated an area of 14,400 km² to host the future capital. This territory became known as the Cruls Quadrangle.” (IPHAN (2008). Brasília Landmark Designation Booklet. Brasília: National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage.)

Thus, Brasília was designed not only as a new seat of government, but as a symbol of territorial unity and modernization in Brazil. The proposal to move the capital inland would populate the interior of the country, stimulating the development of underutilized resources in the region and generating economic growth hubs on the country's borders. These premises were in line with President Juscelino Kubitschek's main goal of developing and modernizing the country's infrastructure, leading to the creation of the new capital as one of the key points of Kubitschek's presidential plan. Kubitschek described the construction of Brasília as “symbolic of our efforts to provide the nation with a foundation on which to build the future” (apud Epstein, 1973, 31). The intention to build the new city consolidated the developmentalist ideology and expressed the quest for modernization through its modernist design. In 1956, the transfer of the capital to Brasília was announced, and the inauguration of the city was scheduled for April 21, 1960.

Brasília was built from scratch, becoming the only large modernist city entirely built from a theoretical project in the 20th century. It was born as the materialization of a modernist utopia: the construction of a rational, functional, and egalitarian city, capable of reflecting the ideals of a modern and progressive Brazil. It was strongly influenced by modernist principles of city planning, assimilating concepts such as “garden city” and “neighborhood unity,” based on the Charter of Athens (1933) and the works of Le Corbusier (Leitão, 2009, 120-121). Lúcio Costa's urbanism proposed the clear and efficient separation of urban functions (living, traveling, working, and recreation). More

than that, the city was designed as a symbol of the new republican era, where the built environment shapes a more just, organized, and integrated society.

In an attempt at national renewal, Lúcio Costa designed Brasília as the culmination of a “Brazilian way of building cities,” which he had been pursuing since the 1930s. He declared his intention to create a modern city with a Brazilian soul, reflecting values and forms derived from the Portuguese colonial tradition and the landscape of the cerrado. He saw the project as a synthesis between international modernism and national vernacular. In the original document sent to the competition jury, Costa already revealed his intention to produce a city with a simple, symbolic form deeply rooted in national culture. In addition, he spoke of not starting from technical schemes, but from a plastic and intuitive, almost artistic gesture, very different from pure functionalist rigidity. This connects Brasília to the playful, symbolic, and poetic tradition of Brazilian architecture.

“I did not design Brasília as an urban planner, but as an architect and, above all, as a Brazilian architect, rooted in the soil and spirit of the land.” (Registro de uma Vivência, 1995, p. 226)

“I sought only to give expressive and artistic form to modern urbanism, adapting it to the Brazilian spirit, the landscape of the Plateau, and the monumental scale required by the new capital.” (Pilot Plan Report, 1957)

However, the realization of this utopia was marred by profound social contradictions. The construction of Brasília mobilized thousands of workers from different parts of the country, the so-called *candangos*, who were responsible for the materialization of the modernist project but who, paradoxically, were not included in the official urban plans. While the ideal city projected equality and order, the *candangos* were relegated to the margins of the Pilot Plan, occupying the outskirts and informal settlements, which highlighted the distance between modernist discourse and Brazilian social reality. Even so, the utopia that underpins Brasília continues to guide debates on planning, citizenship, and public space, making the city a privileged field for reflection on the role of urbanism in the construction of possible futures, including from the experiences and demands of those who built it with their own hands.

In addition, Brasília was recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1987, becoming the only modern city of the 20th century to receive such a title before even completing 30 years of existence. This international recognition, coupled with national listing by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN), gives the city a unique status in terms of the protection of its urban layout, architecture, and symbolic values. As a heritage site, Brasília cannot be understood merely as a collection of

monumental buildings, but as an integrated urban project, where the empty spaces, scales, axes, and vegetation have as much heritage value as the buildings themselves. This status imposes specific restrictions and guidelines for interventions, requiring public authorities and professionals involved to respect the modernist principles defined by Lúcio Costa, such as functional sectorization, symbolic monumentality, and landscape integration.

2.2 LÚCIO COSTA'S COMPETITION AND PILOT PLAN

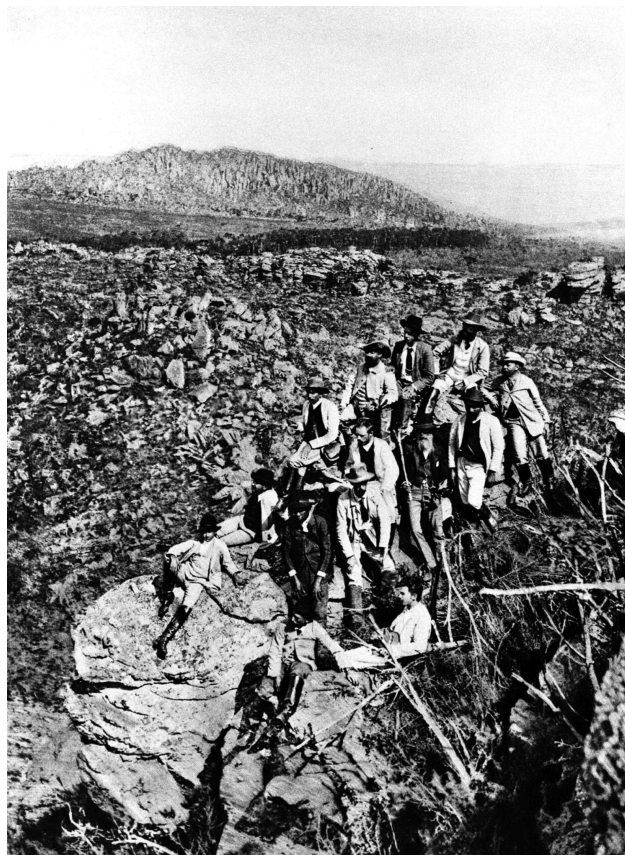


Image 11 - Cruls Commissions - Public Archives of the Federal District

The idea of transferring Brazil's capital to the interior dates back to the Inconfidência Mineira period in 1798. However, this aspiration gained momentum with the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889 and was formalized by the Constitution of 1891, which provided for the reservation of a territory in the Central Plateau to house the country's future administrative capital. To this end, an Exploratory Commission, known as the Cruls Mission, was created, composed of doctors, geologists, and botanists. The team conducted a detailed survey of the region's topography, climate, geology, flora, fauna, and natural resources, defining an area that became known as the Cruls

Quadrangle, the first version of the famous “quadradozinho” (little square), as the residents of Brasília often call the city map.



Image 12 - Cruls Quadrangle - Image by Partial Report of 1893

The idea only began to materialize in 1955, during the administration of Juscelino Kubitschek, who incorporated the construction of the new capital as one of the goals of his ambitious development plan. The topic mobilized the national architectural community. A commission of architects, including Oscar Niemeyer, proposed guidelines for a national public competition, including the requirement for a public notice and a jury with international representatives such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and others. In 1956, under the JK administration, the Companhia Urbanizadora da Nova Capital (NOVACAP) was created, responsible for the implementation of the project, design, and construction of Brasília. Oscar Niemeyer was appointed head of the Department of Architecture and was responsible for organizing the competition for the urban plan of the new city, as well as the design of the main public buildings.

The choice of Niemeyer for this role was also strategic. As Goulart (1957, p. 20) recalls, “it is indisputable that certain political considerations were primarily responsible for the presidential choice falling on Niemeyer: the most famous Brazilian architect, a dynamic and modern man.” His fame derives largely from the Pampulha Complex project, developed in Belo Horizonte in the 1940s at the invitation of then-mayor Juscelino Kubitschek. This project, a landmark of Brazilian modernism, inaugurated the collaboration between Niemeyer, landscape architect Burle Marx, and artists such as Portinari and Ceschiatti. However, after disagreements and criticism of the selection process for the urban plan, Niemeyer resigned from his position as vice president of NOVACAP.

In September 1956, the federal government published in the Official Gazette the basic conditions for submitting preliminary designs to the National Competition for the Pilot Plan for the New Capital. Twenty-six proposals were submitted by architects and urban planners, ranging from the detailed proposal by the M. M. M. Roberto firm, about which William Holford, one of the judges, commented: “I have never seen, anywhere in the world, such a comprehensive and complete master plan for a new capital on vacant land” (Holford, 1957, p. 397), to the proposal by Lúcio Costa, a rudimentary conceptual design, without technical drawings, models, or construction details, which, with an urban layout in the shape of a cross, or an airplane, as it became popularly known, synthesized the principles of modernist urbanism with a symbolic and functional proposal for the capital.

Given the need to inaugurate the new capital within JK's term of office, time became a determining factor, putting pressure on the competition schedule. This contributed to the choice of Lúcio Costa's design, whose proposal stood out for its clarity and conceptual strength. Although graphically simple, with only a perspective sketch and a descriptive memorial, the plan was praised for its logical organization and for effectively resolving the layout of the capital's administrative buildings. As highlighted by *Módulo* magazine (1957, pp. 13–16), “Pilot Plan No. 22 – Lúcio Costa: criticism regarding the very specific location, but the only one that allows for the organization of an Administrative Capital of Brazil. It was judged to be simple, yet clear and organized.”

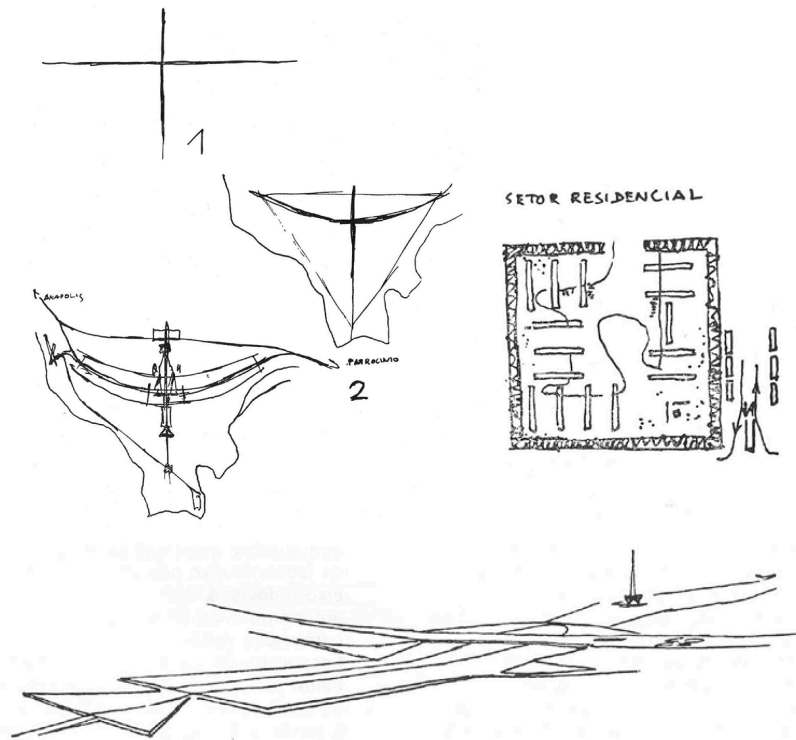


Image 13 - Lucio Costa, competition sketches for the Master Plan of Brasília, 1957. These sketches present the three essential elements of the plan: the crossing of two highway axes that shape the city, the neighborhood unit, the monumental axis, and the platform in the intersection of the axis.

Imbued with the ideals of a progressive and modern society, Lúcio Costa's plan was chosen by five of the six judges as the winning proposal. Despite the extreme lack of detail, his proposal offered the “confidence and unity necessary to guide the growth of a capital city” (Epstein, 1973, p. 49). He and architect Oscar Niemeyer shared the modernist ideal of creating a planned city that would meet the needs of all its inhabitants, regardless of social class.

In addition to the quality of the proposal, Costa's recognition as a respected intellectual and his role at the head of the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service (SPHAN) reinforced his credibility with the commission. His plan not only incorporates the fundamentals of modernism, but reinterprets them in light of a national architectural tradition. The selection of his project thus marked the beginning of Brasília as a unique experiment in modernist urban planning, driven by political, technical, and symbolic ideals. Brasília, designed by Lúcio Costa in 1957, was conceived around two main axes: the Monumental Axis and the Road-Residential Axis, arranged in a cross, one of which is curved to adapt to the local topography. This cross-shaped layout would be the basis for the functional organization of the city, integrating areas for housing, leisure, and work.

The Pilot Plan was based on the idea that a modern city should be clear, organized, and planned based on the separation of urban functions. To this end, Costa created a structure based on urban scales, each with a specific role in the lives of citizens: the monumental scale, the residential scale, the bucolic scale, and the gregarious scale. Monumentality is achieved not through built volumes, but through large empty spaces and the manipulation of perspectives. The Gregarious scale, located at the intersection between the Road-Residential and Monumental axes, houses the road platform and the urban center, designed for larger buildings and the articulation of flows, promoting interaction and intense circulation. The bucolic scale permeates the entire city, with special emphasis on the gardens of the superblocks. Finally, the residential scale consists of a continuous sequence of large blocks along the road-residential axis, surrounded by densely wooded belts. (Costa, 2008, p. 30).

At the intersection of the axes, Costa designed the road platform, creating a square that would connect the commercial, cultural, and banking sectors, linked by the Entertainment Sector. This concept aimed to create a central hub of urban convergence, which would combine monumentality and functionality. As an administrative city, the plan emphasizes the “public hub of administrative and civic functions,” positioned along the Monumental Axis and crowned, at one end, by the Three Powers Square.

Within this logic, the city was designed to offer different levels of social involvement over time. Lúcio Costa proposed a rhythmic organization of urban life: local commerce and the blocks between them served the immediate daily needs (everyday life); parks and leisure areas would be intended for the weekend (weekly); and museums, theaters, and cultural events, such as those planned for the South Cultural Sector, represent activities of greater symbolic density and less frequency (biweekly or occasional). This division reveals an attempt to structure urban space not only functionally, but also in terms of civic rituality, that is, the way inhabitants relate to space over time.

2.3 BRASÍLIA AS HERITAGE

With each new administration, the Federal District Government has undergone administrative restructuring involving the elimination, alteration, and creation of institutions, especially in the sector responsible for urban policy and historical preservation.

The protection of Brasília has been a concern of the Brazilian State since its establishment as the country's new capital in 1960. To this end, the law that defined the administrative structure of the Federal District (Law No. 751, dated April 13, 1960, known as the Santiago Dantas Law) determined in its Article 38 that any “change to the Pilot Plan governing the urbanization of Brasília” would require prior authorization from the National Congress. In 1960, the technical center of the Department of National Historical and Artistic Heritage (Iphan) was created in Brasília. This center was directed by architect Alcides da Rocha Miranda and was responsible for the entire Midwest region. It is the main body responsible for regulating and supervising interventions in the Urban Complex of Brasília (CUB). The first major public debate on the development and preservation of Brasília took place in August 1974, at the 1st Seminar on Urban Problems in Brasília, promoted by the Senate of the Republic, through the Federal District Commission. This event was attended by Lúcio Costa, who in his lecture pointed out the aspects he considered important for urban development and the preservation of the city's design, aspects that would be reiterated thirteen years later, in 1987, in the document Brasília Revisited.

The government initiative to address the protection of Brasília in an institutionalized and systematic manner began in 1981 with the Working Group for the Preservation of the Historical and Cultural Heritage of Brasília (GT/Brasília). It was active until mid-1988, and its studies were fundamental in supporting the inscription of Brasília on the World Heritage List, serving as the basis for the preparation of the technical dossier for its candidacy. It was then that the Federal District Government, at the end of 1987, enacted Decree No. 10,829/1987, which established the criteria for the preservation of the urban complex of Brasília. This document was later edited to comply with the legal requirements for Brasília's candidacy for the World Heritage List. The authorship of this document is the responsibility of professionals linked to Lucio Costa and associated with Sphan/Pró Memória, the same group that three years later would regulate federal listing.

In December 1987, Brasília was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, becoming the only modern city of the 20th century to receive this title before reaching 30 years of age, as well as being the first contemporary artifact to receive this title. The proposal to

include Brasília on the World Heritage List was based on the recognition of the originality and clarity of Lúcio Costa's urban design; the importance of Oscar Niemeyer's architectural work; the integration between architecture, urbanism, and natural landscape; and the representation of modernist ideals in urban space. The recognition of Brasília as a World Heritage Site not only reinforces its symbolic and urbanistic value, but also imposes a series of legal and regulatory obligations for its preservation.

“Brasília is a unique achievement of modern architecture and urbanism, the result of a conscious and monumental intervention on an urban scale.” — UNESCO, 1987

To be included in the World Heritage List, sites must have outstanding universal value and meet at least one of the ten selection criteria. Brasília is considered an emblematic example of the application of the principles of the Athens Charter (1933), such as functional zoning, the separation of vehicle and pedestrian traffic, the enhancement of symbolic monumentality, and the presence of generous green areas. The current capital of Brazil meets two criteria on the basis of which it was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, which are as follows:

Criterion (i): A masterpiece of human creative genius;

“Brasília is a landmark in the history of urban planning. The city brought together innovative urban design by Lúcio Costa and modernist architecture by Oscar Niemeyer to create a completely new city, conceived from scratch as the capital of Brazil.” (UNESCO, World Heritage Center, 1987)

Criterion (iv): An outstanding example of a type of architectural and urban ensemble representative of a significant period in human history.

“Brasília is an outstanding example of 20th-century modernist urbanism applied on a grand scale, expressing a unique interpretation of the principles set out in the Athens Charter.” (UNESCO, 1987)

The inclusion of Brasília as a World Heritage Site established clear guidelines for protection and management to formally protect this outstanding example of 20th-century modernist urbanism. These guidelines appear in the official nomination and evaluation documents (UNESCO, WHC/87). and among the direct limitations is that any modification to protected urban spaces such as buildings, roads, axes, landscapes, and street furniture requires prior approval from IPHAN, and that changes affecting the original layout, urban scales, density, or land use may be vetoed.

By being included in UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites, Brasília once again stood out. The first city to be elevated to this status in its entirety, understood as that resulting from Lucio Costa's original plan, Brasília established itself as an exemplary monument of the modern movement for its urban layout and architecture. The plan itself and its public buildings, designed with strong symbolism and inserted in the context of artistic renewal, gave the city the virtue of achieving, through pure "aesthetic radicalism" associated with "political mythology," an identity that cities only obtain through long historical and cultural sedimentation.

UNESCO's decision is an important recognition of the significance of Brasília's urban complex for world history. However, it is only an honorary and symbolic distinction, with no interference in its management, as this is the responsibility of the Brazilian government. UNESCO is responsible for monitoring the conservation of authenticity and integrity by observing the criteria for inscription to assess whether or not this title should be maintained. Eventually, it may even participate or contribute financially to a specific intervention project.

In addition to international recognition, it also has national heritage status. The historical significance of Brasília, its importance to the formation of national identity, and the uniqueness of its urban design led the Federal District Government to designate it as a heritage site. The federal listing of Brasília by IPHAN was approved on March 13, 1990, through the registration of the CUB in the Historical Register and in the Archaeological, Ethnographic, and Landscape Register. This listing recognizes not only the individual buildings, but above all the original urban layout by Lúcio Costa, with its four scales (monumental, residential, gregarious, and bucolic), in addition to the planned open spaces, visual axes, and integrated landscaping, that is, the city as an integrated urban project of exceptional value.

Based on all this recognition and guidelines, the Urban Complex of Brasília is the listed core and covers the Pilot Plan, including the Monumental and Highway Axes; urban scales created by Lúcio Costa; representative sectors and public buildings, such as the Esplanade of Ministries, the Three Powers Square, cultural sectors, among others; the relationship between urban voids, gardens, and architecture. The protection is broader than the isolated building: it considers urban morphology, landscaping, visual axes, structuring voids, and the symbolic function of space. The listed area is approximately 112.25 km².

"The Urban Complex of Brasília is a cultural asset of exceptional value to the history of Brazilian culture, representing the synthesis of urbanism and modern architecture in the country." IPHAN

“Art. 2 The maintenance of the Pilot Plan of Brasília will be ensured by the preservation of the essential characteristics of four distinct scales that translate the urban design of the city: the monumental, the residential, the gregarious, and the bucolic.” (Ordinance No. 314, of October 8, 1992 - IPHAN)

Since the federal listing, IPHAN has published several documents that consolidate guidelines for protecting the urban layout, the scales designed by Lúcio Costa, and the visual integrity of the city. In addition, the Brasília Urban Complex Preservation Plan (PPCUB), proposed as a local territorial planning instrument, aims to operationalize the principles of the listing through updated urban regulations. The PPCUB defines protection categories, construction parameters, permitted uses, and criteria for the insertion of new elements into the CUB, and is fundamental to any discussion of requalification or modification. Even with delays and controversies surrounding its approval, the PPCUB is a central document for understanding the city's heritage management strategies. Along with these regulations, IPHAN publications, such as the Brasília Listing Primer and reports submitted to UNESCO, reinforce Brazil's institutional commitment to maintaining the capital's exceptional values, articulating physical conservation, symbolic use, and social dynamics.

Following the guidelines established by IPHAN and, locally, by PPCUB directly affects how public spaces are intervened in, in terms of preserving their original uses and functionalist urban structure. This generates a debate between preservation and updating spaces in light of contemporary needs. Heritage status also has significant implications in the symbolic and social spheres, directly affecting tourism, collective memory, heritage education, and the right to the city, strengthening the city's emblematic character as a modernist and democratic capital. However, preservation imposed by laws and regulations should not imply freezing the city, but rather promoting its critical reinterpretation. Maintaining Brasília as a living heritage requires that its spaces be appropriated, reinterpreted, and activated by its inhabitants.

The Organic Law of the Federal District (LODF/1993), considering the status of Brasília as the federal capital and a World Heritage Site, defines its maintenance as one of the principles of urban development policy (art. 314). The specific legislation for the protection of Brasília (Decree No. 10,829/1987 of the Federal District Government and Ordinance No. 314/1992 of IPHAN) is based on respect for its urban design, in accordance with the Report on the Pilot Plan for Brasília, which is one of its annexes. However, it is well known that cities are, par excellence, spaces of disputes and conflicts. In this sense, it is understood that spatial transformations are inherent to any urban phenomenon, as they are formed by the intrinsic dynamism and vitality of human relations, which, in turn, are determined by a perennial and constantly changing

historical movement. Thus, preservation work cannot be carried out outside the process of urban space production. Therefore, it is understandable that preservationist action in Brasília, despite all these legal instruments, faces the same difficulties, weaknesses, and challenges as other historic centers in the country.

In 1993, UNESCO conducted its first monitoring mission, led by Colombian architect Germán Samper Gnecco. The report prepared by this professional acknowledges that Lucio Costa's plan and Oscar Niemeyer's works have been preserved. However, it points to the need for government action to reconcile the preservation of the city with its development. His concern was that rapid population growth would compromise the preservation of the listed area. In this regard, he makes a series of recommendations, which were also ignored.

At the end of 2001, due to concerns expressed by the World Heritage Committee bureau about possible changes to the urban character of Brasília, a new monitoring mission was carried out by UNESCO. In fact, this mission confirmed the information provided by the Brazilian government to the bureau in an extensive technical report prepared by IPHAN and delivered to UNESCO in early 2001. The results of this mission were formalized in the report *The State of Conservation of the World Heritage Site of Brasília, Brazil* (UNESCO, 2001), which assessed the problems related to the preservation of Brasília and made a series of technical and operational recommendations to address them. This document, while acknowledging the difficulty of applying the concept of authenticity and integrity in a dynamic and developing urban structure such as Brasília, recognized that the city retained the attributes that justified its distinction as a World Heritage Site. It also discussed the social, urban, and economic reality in which the city is inserted, highlighting its inevitable pressure on the structure of the protected area, a fact that will inevitably produce changes in the urban landscape.

However, Brazil must regularly report to UNESCO on the state of conservation of Brasília, and if threats to its heritage value are detected (such as verticalization, decharacterization of sectors, or real estate pressure), the property may be included on the List of World Heritage in Danger. To prevent this from happening, the heritage management of Brasília must protect not only individual buildings, but also the articulated set of elements that make up Lúcio Costa's original urban layout, the four urban scales, the iconic buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer, the visual and landscape axes, and, finally, the symbolic dimension of Brasília as the modern capital of Brazil must also be protected, representing the republican and democratic ideals of the 20th century, requiring attention to its political, cultural, and historical function in the national and international imagination. Therefore, it is a city of recognized value, an icon

of modern urbanism, and designated as a national and world heritage site. A monument city brings many contradictions, inaccuracies, and difficulties in everyday life, with the management and preservation of the urban complex.

2.4 THE SCS IN THE ORIGINAL PLAN



Image 14 - Location of the Southern Cultural Sector in the monumental context - Satellite image made with google earth and changes made by the author

The Esplanada dos Ministérios (Ministry Esplanade) in Brasília is the most representative feature of the city's urban planning and architecture. This site was designed to be the civic center of the city and carries great significance due to its monumentality. The Esplanade is organized around the monumental axis that connects the Bus Station to the Three Powers Square, and along its length are the Palaces of Justice and Itamaraty, the ministerial blocks, the cathedral, and the North and South Cultural Sectors. Decades after the capital's inauguration, the South Cultural Sector (SCS) remains an incomplete section of the Esplanade, reflecting both the ambitions of Lúcio Costa's modernist project and the historical difficulties of its implementation.

From the initial plan, Costa assigned culture a leading role within the political project of transforming society, strategically situating the SCS between the monumental and gregarious scales, articulated with the Road Platform. This location was conceived as a symbolic and functional link between institutional power and the daily lives of citizens. In terms of scale, the SCS participates in three of them: monumental, due to its proximity

to buildings of power; bucolic, as it was conceived as a park; and gregarious, as it houses facilities open to the community.

The Pilot Plan Report (1957) predicted that cultural sectors would be “treated like a park,” intended for museums, libraries, planetariums, and opera houses, composing the “civic heart” of the city. However, only two facilities were built in the first decades: the Tea House, built in 1963 as the headquarters of the Touring Club of Brazil (now reopened with a new public function), and the National Theater (1960–1981). These buildings played a connecting role between the unevenness of the Road Platform and the monumental plan of the Esplanade, but the absence of the other facilities left large areas empty and underutilized.

In Brasília 57-85: from the pilot plan to the Pilot Plan, it was already noted that “the Cultural Sectors, with the exception of the Theater, remain empty to this day,” highlighting the failure to comply with the original guidelines. In Brasília Revisited, Costa laments the absence of trees, which compromises the bucolic character of the sector, reaffirming its function as an urban park.

This process was marked by a number of factors. The crisis of the State in the 1980s, associated with the decline of Fordism and economic difficulties, reduced the capacity for public financing of large projects, creating a kind of architectural lethargy. As a result, areas already demarcated for cultural use remained unimplemented, accentuating urban voids on a monumental scale, which in itself reinforces the contemplative bias.

An important milestone for the preservation of the sector was the publication of IPHAN Ordinance No. 314/1992, which delimited the listed areas and specified the permitted uses, reaffirming the public and cultural vocation of the space:

"Art. 3 - VII. The areas between the Esplanada dos Ministérios and the Plataforma Rodoviária to the south and north of the central reservation, which constitute the South and North Cultural Sectors, are intended for public buildings of a cultural nature." (IPHAN, 1992)

The resumption of cultural debate after the political opening of 1984 led to the creation of the Ministry of Culture, which delegated Oscar Niemeyer responsibility for the Cultural Complex of the Republic. Starting in the 2000s, the project resulted in the Honestino Guimarães National Museum and the Leonel Brizola National Library, creating a large cultural plaza in the SCS. Even so, the fragmentation and multiplicity of programs proposed over the years, from museums to multipurpose arenas, highlight the conceptual uncertainties that hindered the full consolidation of the sector.

Thus, the SCS expresses the dualities of the modernist project: monumental and bucolic, gregarious and contemplative, central and empty. As Lúcio Costa stated, Brasília should be “monumental, but also comfortable, efficient, welcoming, and intimate; sprawling and concise; bucolic and urban; lyrical and functional” (Costa, 1957). The South Cultural Sector synthesizes this tension between modernist utopia and contemporary demands for urban appropriation, remaining a space in dispute between the memory of the project and the uses of the living city.

3. TRAJECTORY, TRANSFORMATIONS, AND REQUALIFICATION OF THE SOUTHERN CULTURAL SECTOR

The previous chapter discussed Lúcio Costa's original intentions for the Southern Cultural Sector (SCS), revealing its role as a space for articulation between culture, contemplation, and monumentality. Although the sector's execution was only partial, its transformations over time occurred within a context of heritage protection, preserving its fundamental elements and modernist urban layout.

However, even with the preservation and respect for the main physical landmarks of the pilot plan, the SCS began to incorporate new meanings based on its contemporary uses. Its heritage status did not prevent the space from being reinterpreted, hosting cultural events, political demonstrations, and various appropriations. This raises a central question: how did a space conceived with such symbolic and controlled values become the stage for such varied social expressions?

At the same time, the original intention to promote cultural centrality in the heart of the capital already indicated a predisposition for encounter, collective use, and community appropriation. Thus, this chapter proposes a critical reading of the South Cultural Sector in its historical trajectory, in its symbolic reconfigurations, and in the challenges and possibilities for its requalification. The analysis seeks to understand how this preserved space can, precisely because of its openness and centrality, continue to be lived, re-signified, and shared by the city.

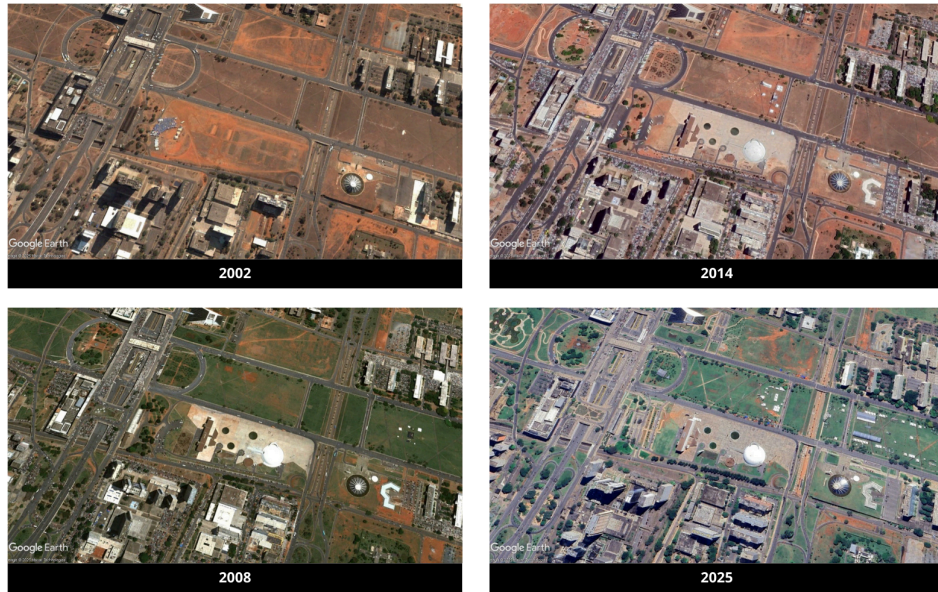


Image 15 - Time-line with satellite images made with google earth and changes made by the author

3.1 HISTORY, PHASES, AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE SCS

The Southern Cultural Sector (SCS), designed by Lúcio Costa in 1957, was described in the Pilot Plan Report by Lúcio as an area that should be “treated as a park to better accommodate museums, libraries, planetariums, academies, institutes, etc.” The proposal envisaged that the SCS would be integrated into the city through its direct connection to the road network, linking it to everyday urban life through symbolic elements such as a “possible tea house” and an “Opera House.” In addition, Lúcio Costa placed the Cultural Sector in continuity with the Monumental Axis, giving it a strategic role within the modernist plan for the new capital, with Culture occupying a leading role in the construction of a modern and intellectualized society. The sector should represent, at the same time, the monumental spirit of power and the public accessibility of cultural life.



Image 16 - Article from the Brasília newspaper about the publication of the pilot plan report and the cut in the explanation of the southern cultural sector project - Correio Braziliense (DF) Year 1960\Edição 00001

Despite these visionary intentions, the sector developed slowly and in a fragmented manner. When Brasília was inaugurated in 1960, only two buildings had been constructed in the Cultural Sectors: the National Theater and the Touring Club of Brazil building, both designed by Oscar Niemeyer. The "tea house" mentioned by Costa ended up being built in the latter, but without effectively fulfilling its coordinating role. For decades, the area remained virtually empty, without the planned tree planting or the implementation of the planned cultural institutions. Budget constraints and the federal government's priorities at the time, focused on the consolidation of administrative buildings, left the sector in the background.



Brasília é a cidade do "vai ter": vai ter setor de diversões sul e norte; setor comercial de um lado e de outro da Rodoviária; vai ter 28 supermercados; oito clubes de Unidade de Vizinhança em cada Asa; trinta e duas superquadras ao longo de todo o Eixo Rodoviário; vai ter **setor cultural**, um...
junto ao Teatro Nacional ou do lado da Catedral e vai ter bosques. A cidade só tem três anos e muita coisa está pra fazer, muitas coisas que formarão o conjunto urbano, só estão esperando a sua vez para aparecer no panorama da cidade. Mas o bosque já está surgindo.

Image 17 - Article from a Brasília newspaper about urban development promises (including the cultural sector) that were never made - Correio Braziliense (DF) Year 1963\Edição 00971

It was only in the 1980s and 1990s that more concrete attempts to activate the SCS emerged. Documents such as "Brasília 57-85: from the pilot plan to the Pilot Plan" and "Brasília Revisited" reinforced the need to consolidate the sector as a public cultural space. However, even with Costa's support, progress was limited. The urban planner himself lamented the absence of vegetation, pointing out that the cultural sectors were still "devoid of vegetation," contrary to the ideal of being "treated like a park." During this period, some temporary occupations, such as Gran Circo Lar, used the urban voids in the sector as stages for popular cultural experimentation. Later, part of this land was allocated for the construction of the Museum of the Republic, the Leonel Brizola National Library, and a restaurant.



Image 18 - Article from the Brasília newspaper about Gran Circo Lar in which an event was unsuccessful -
Correio Braziliense (DF) Year 1985\Edição 08272

The Southern Cultural Sector (SCS), as an integral part of the Urban Complex of Brasília, was protected by federal listing in 1987 by IPHAN and subsequently included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1988. These designations recognized the urban, symbolic, and architectural importance of Lúcio Costa's Pilot Plan and established strict guidelines for physical and functional interventions in the central sectors of the city. IPHAN Ordinance No. 314/1992 defines that cultural sectors should be used for public buildings of a cultural nature, reinforcing the idea of a modern institutional park in the heart of the capital. Therefore, it should respect the preferential use for public institutions of a cultural nature, the planned bucolic landscape (dense tree cover, open areas), and the symbolic monumentality of buildings such as the National Theater, the National Library, and the Museum of the Republic.

At the turn of the millennium, SCS continued to face structural difficulties. Even with the existence of large facilities such as the National Theater, the Museum, and the Library, the area was marked by long periods of underutilization. Problems with connectivity to the surrounding area, a lack of urban furniture, and a scarcity of shade contributed to keeping the public away. The vegetation originally planned was never fully implemented, and paved areas and parking lots ended up predominating over the expected lawns and gardens. The Touring Club, although positioned as a key element in connecting the SCS with the highway platform, remained closed and unused for many years, symbolizing the stagnation of the sector.

In the 2000s, the situation worsened due to lack of maintenance, underutilization of spaces, and disconnection from the surrounding area. Only recently, in 2020, initiatives such as the “Adopt a Square” program, coordinated by the Federal District Government, have sought to revitalize the sector. Through a partnership with the Social Service for Industry (Sesi), a project was developed to renovate the former Touring Club building, transforming it into Sesi Lab, a space dedicated to science, art, and innovation. Although the project included urban furniture, bike lanes, and new trees, the space is still far from matching the ideal of a densely wooded cultural park envisioned by Lúcio Costa. More worrying is the increase in areas designated for parking, which reinforces the road-oriented and fragmented character of the sector.

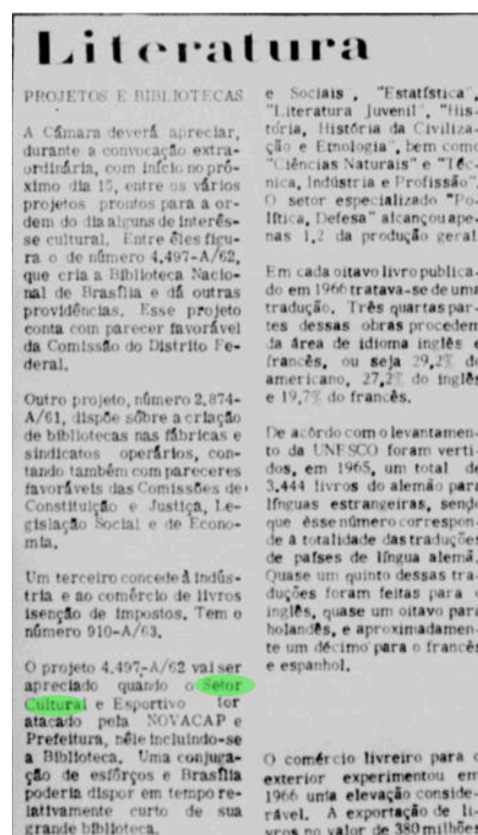


Image 19 - Article from a Brasilia newspaper about the sector and the National Library project - Correio Braziliense (DF) Year 1968/Edição 02473

Thus, even though the buildings and urban structure of the Southern Cultural Sector have been physically preserved, the original functions envisioned by Costa have been largely distorted or never realized. The original project included cultural buildings and a densely wooded area, when in reality much of it was taken over by the National Museum and the Library, and the building that was supposed to be the tea house was abandoned and the area was completely concreted over with little greenery and lots of

parking. The Library was one of the last monuments designed because it was not a priority for Juscelino, who believed that buildings directly related to the functioning of the State should be consolidated first.

We can see, then, that the initial enthusiasm was not enough to bring the ideas to fruition, as some projects designed for the SCS had a number of conceptual and morphological differences. However, since its conception, the SCS has undergone transformations that impact not only the physical integrity of the space, but also its use and symbolic meaning. Although the main buildings, such as the National Theater, the National Library, and the Museum of the Republic, were conceived as modern monuments of cultural representation, their current uses do not always correspond to the original intentions. The Touring Club, conceived as a “tea house” that would symbolically link the Bus Station with the sector, was underused for decades and only recently reintegrated into the cultural landscape through SESI Lab, a private institution with cultural and educational activities, which raises debates about the flexibility of heritage uses.

Despite the permanence of the physical structure, buildings, axes, and lawns, the meanings attributed to the buildings and the SCS as a whole have been changing. What was once a symbol of modernist state rationality is now also a space for protest, spontaneous leisure, civic tourism, and community appropriation. In this sense, heritage preservation should not be understood solely as physical conservation, but as a field of continuous negotiation between memory, use, perception, and identity.

It should also be noted that, unlike institutional works, the implementation of facilities in the cultural sectors was not a priority during the city's construction period. Even so, over time, the South Cultural Sector has consolidated itself as a space for symbolic and political expression, hosting events that go far beyond its original architectural function. The space has gone from a planned institutional hub to a territory of symbolic disputes, where modernist heritage is reinterpreted by the daily actions of the population.



Image 20 - The 2nd edition of the project celebrates the workers of Candango with shows at the National Museum of the Republic - photo by Thaís Mallon / Isabel Gandolfo

Since the 1990s, the sector has been the scene of student protests, art festivals, cultural events, and various public demonstrations, reflecting its role as a strategic territory for gathering and visibility. Its location between the Plano Piloto Bus Station and the National Congress makes it especially relevant for acts that seek social projection and civic impact. An important milestone in this process was the demonstrations in June 2013, when the sector hosted massive acts that integrated Brasília into the national wave of protests for improvements in public services, greater political representation, and social justice.

In addition to political protests, the SCS has also hosted various civic events and religious celebrations over time, demonstrating its openness to multiple forms of social

mobilization. Outdoor masses, vigils, ecumenical meetings, and public gatherings reinforce the multifaceted character of the sector as a space for coexistence and mobilization.



Image 21 - Demonstration on the esplanade of ministries in Brasília against the government of President Dilm
(Photo: Jorge Wilham / Agência O Globo)

At the same time, spontaneous or organized artistic interventions have also marked the history of SCS, such as Gran Circo Lar, alternative fairs, musical performances, open-air exhibitions, and other cultural formats that redefine its use. These episodes reveal the latent potential of the sector as a stage for symbolic production and as a public space capable of hosting both protest and celebration, uniting art, politics, and collectivity in the heart of the federal capital.

These events reveal the symbolic resilience of the sector, even in the face of daily underutilization. Although the buildings and morphology have not undergone significant physical transformations, the social and political use of the space has reinforced its importance in the collective memory of the city. In this sense, the SCS has become a space for disputes, celebrations, and plural narratives, a living heritage in constant reinterpretation.

In addition to being a space that has already hosted various cultural events and manifestations, this sector has also undergone appropriations that were not foreseen in the original plan. The presence of private institutions, such as SESI Lab, marks a shift in

the guideline of exclusively housing public cultural institutions. This flexibility has allowed for the emergence of new practices of use, especially related to science, innovation, and education. Furthermore, the presence of informal activities, street artists, cyclists, temporary fairs, and vulnerable users demonstrates that, despite its rigid configuration, the sector has been reinterpreted and occupied spontaneously. This shows how spontaneous appropriation reveals both the limits of modernist utopia and the resilience of public spaces in generating meaning over time. These appropriations demonstrate both the symbolic power of space and the limits of its urban functionality. What was once envisioned as an orderly cultural park has become a hybrid landscape where the formal and informal coexist, offering a more dynamic and realistic portrait of the city.



Image 22 - Latinidades Festival occupying the southern cultural sector - photo by Valter Campanato/Agência Brasil

However, the SCS did not remain restricted to the meaning attributed to it by the original project. As Holston (1989) argues, the modernist city is not confined to the plan, but is constantly strained by social practices that reconfigure space. This dynamic is particularly visible in the sector, where, despite the restrictions imposed by its status as a heritage site protected by IPHAN (1992; 2008), the population has found ways to redefine the space, transforming it into a stage for political demonstrations, cultural events, and collective gatherings. Thus, the sector began to incorporate uses that were not foreseen in its design, but which reveal the vitality of public space in contemporary times.

In this process, the morphology of the sector plays a central role. As Bartalini (2000) observes, free public spaces are fundamental in the production of urban centrality, as they favor the concentration of people and the multiplicity of uses. The SCS, with its large open areas, originally designed to reinforce monumentality, offers implicit conditions for these spaces to be reinterpreted as places for social and cultural events. In this way, architecture and urbanism, conceived as rigid structures of state representation, become supports for collective life, expanding the repertoire of uses and meanings attributed to the sector.

Gehl (2013) argues that the most successful urban spaces are those that allow for different layers of appropriation, articulating planning and everyday life. In this sense, SCSul transcends its function as an institutional and monumental space to consolidate itself as a hybrid territory, in which official culture and spontaneous expressions of the population coexist. This coexistence reveals a productive paradox: a space designed to represent state order and control becomes one of the most fertile settings for practices of contestation, celebration, and cultural creation.

This phenomenon can also be read in a way that understands the monumentality of Brasília not only as an aesthetic gesture, but as a shared value, constantly reinterpreted by users. The SCS, while preserving its original monumentality, opens itself up to a diversity of social uses, demonstrating that the planned form does not eliminate the power of appropriation. On the contrary, the scale and openness of the sector make it even more conducive to occupation and reinterpretation.

In this way, SCS demonstrates that heritage status does not constitute an obstacle to social appropriation, but rather creates a symbolic basis on which new meanings are produced. As Santos (1997) states, urban space results from the interaction between technique, time, and emotion, which explains why modernist monumentalism is constantly updated by social practices. In the case of the sector, this updating occurs mainly through popular appropriation, which redefines the space as a place for meeting, political expression, and cultural production.

Therefore, rather than being merely the materialization of the modernist utopia of Brasília (Kubitschek, 1975; Holston, 1989), the SCS presents itself as a living space, where heritage and urban life engage in a permanent dialogue. It is in this process of re-signification, which articulates monumentality, memory, and social appropriation, that the contemporary strength of the sector lies, reaffirming its relevance not only as part of Costa's original project, but as a culturally active and socially plural territory.

3.2 DIAGNOSIS AND URBAN CHALLENGES

The Cultural Sector of Brasília consists of the embankment between the Esplanada dos Ministérios and the Plano Piloto Central Station. The area is divided into three parts: the central lawn, the North Cultural Sector, and the South Cultural Sector. The South Cultural Sector covers an area of approximately 140,000 square meters. The sector is surrounded by the S2 East road and the South Banking and South Municipalities Sectors. On the S2 East road, there is a difference in level that surrounds the side with a retaining wall, making direct access to the land difficult from the South Banking and Municipalities Sectors. On the west side, there are large boundaries created by the drop in the Highway Platform, but access to the South Cultural Sector is possible via the connection between both sectors and the Touring Club building and via external stairs. The only part that has a direct connection to the surrounding area is the edges connected to the central lawn and part of the far east side of the land connected to the South Municipalities Sector.

Designed with monumentality and civic vocation in its modernist layout, the SCS faces obvious difficulties of appropriation on a pedestrian scale. The absence of everyday uses in the surrounding area, coupled with the lack of urban furniture that encourages people to stay and the presence of physical barriers, such as expressways and road ditches, hinders human access and spontaneous experience of the space. This reality contrasts directly with the modernist ideal of a “city for all,” revealing the limits of urbanism focused more on symbolic representation than on everyday experience.

This space, which was supposed to be treated as a park to improve the environment of buildings, has over the decades revealed the structural and social weaknesses of modernist urbanism, despite the conceptual clarity and symbolic strength of the Pilot Plan. The excessive emphasis on functional sectorization, where each use is isolated from the others, has hindered the creation of vibrant, mixed, and spontaneous urban spaces. In addition, the prioritization of cars over pedestrians fragmented the urban experience and reduced walkability, especially in the connections between sectors.

Furthermore, the proposal for a rhythmic civic life (daily, weekly, biweekly) did not materialize as expected. Many of the spaces intended for culture, such as the South Cultural Sector itself, remained underutilized or incomplete for decades. The absence of mixed uses and housing in the surrounding area compromises the area's continued vitality. The distance between the plan's designers and the actual dynamics of space

use has produced a city that is formally modern but socially exclusionary, as critics such as James Holston point out.



Image 23 - Photo of access to the Cultural Sector via the connecting road to the South Municipalities Sectors showing the difficulty of accessing it - Photo by Camila F.

The tension between ideal and reality is clearly evident in the SCS: conceived as a democratic space for cultural production and contemplation, it was supposed to symbolize the appreciation of culture, science, and intellectual life in the heart of the capital. However, over the decades, the sector has seen its promise of cultural centrality fade away. The fragmentation of the space, the absence of continuous uses, and the difficulty of social appropriation reveal a process of distancing between the project and citizens. Today, large areas remain underutilized or poorly used. The lack of basic infrastructure, such as shade, benches, restrooms, and adequate lighting, reinforces the feeling of abandonment. Insecurity, especially at night, contributes to further distancing the population.

The spatial diagnosis points to a sector disconnected from its immediate surroundings, with few points of integration with neighboring sectors. Pedestrian circulation is limited, urban flows are poorly utilized, and environmental comfort is almost nonexistent. Modernist monumentality, although still visible, no longer imposes the same symbolic force. As James Holston observes, Brasília has become a city of isolated enclaves, and the SCS exemplifies this fragmentation: a space between the monumental and the everyday, whose appropriations are sporadic and incomplete. Despite being strategically located between the main axes of the Pilot Plan, the SCS remains

disconnected from the human scale. Its large empty spaces and the lack of mixed uses in the surrounding area compromise the creation of genuine urban vitality.

Jane Jacobs' critique of the modernist city is particularly relevant in this context. By defending the importance of diversity of uses and the continuous presence of people to ensure safety and dynamism in the streets, Jacobs exposes the fragility of the rigid sectorization of the Pilot Plan. By privileging exclusively cultural and formal functions, the SCS ended up distancing everyday coexistence and reducing its relevance as an active public space.

Even so, the South Cultural Sector has enormous potential to reconnect with the other central sectors of the city. Qualifying it implies not only restoring its physical structures, but also integrating it symbolically and functionally into the urban fabric of Brasília. Creating real conditions for its daily appropriation with diversity of uses, accessibility, infrastructure, and environmental comfort is essential for the sector to once again act as a link between the monumental and the everyday, restoring its original vocation as a space for meeting, culture, and belonging.

3.3 SYMBOLIC BUILDINGS AND CHANGES IN USE

The buildings in the Southern Cultural Sector are a prime example of the modernist utopia that guided the design of Brasília, combining monumentality, culture, and public space. However, over time, urban reality has significantly altered their functions, their presence in the landscape, and their role in the daily life of the city. Although physically preserved in many cases, these buildings have undergone a symbolic emptying or have been appropriated in ways that distance them from the original proposal of being centers of culture, education, and coexistence.

Designed as public facilities and included in the listed complex of Brasília, these buildings carry not only architectural value, but also historical and social significance. They are an essential part of the capital's urban narrative, but have undergone processes of transformation that have affected both their use and their conservation and symbolic relevance. These changes reflect tensions between the modernist ideal and the real dynamics of the city, marked by discontinuity in public policies, abandonment, and concerns that are not always compatible with their initial purposes.

Thus, the buildings of the South Cultural Sector symbolize not only the ambition to integrate culture and urban space, but also the contemporary challenges of keeping this proposal alive. The fragmentation of the surroundings, the obsolescence of uses,

and the absence of coordinated management highlight the urgent need for requalifications that are not limited to material preservation. It is necessary to rescue the symbolic value and civic function of these spaces in order to insert them in a meaningful way into the cultural and social life of Brasília.



Image 24 - 3D image made with google earth and changes made by the author

3.3.1 NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE REPUBLIC



Image 25 - Honestino Guimarães National Museum, by Gonzalo Viramonte

The National Museum of the Republic (MuN), located in Brasília, is one of the most emblematic buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer and represents not only the consolidation of a space for culture and visual arts in the federal capital, but also the unfolding of decades of projects, debates, and proposals that culminated in its definitive form.

Since the Pilot Plan Report, prepared by Lúcio Costa in 1957, there had been an intention for the new capital to have a cultural sector capable of symbolizing the centrality of art and knowledge in public life. Among the planned institutions was the creation of a museum that would be part of the South Cultural Sector, next to the National Library. The proposal reinforced the modernist vision of Brasília as a planned city, designed not only to house administrative and political functions, but also to become a cultural hub and center for the dissemination of the arts.

However, the museum would only become a reality almost half a century later. Opened on December 15, 2006, the building was incorporated into the Cultural Complex of the Republic, together with the National Library of Brasília. Lúcio Costa's urban design had already been recognized by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (Iphan) and UNESCO in 1987 as a World Heritage Site. The National Museum itself, in turn, received federal listing by Ordinance No. 55, of June 6, 2017, and registration in the Federal District's Livro de Tombo, reaffirming its symbolic and heritage character.

The architectural form chosen by Niemeyer for the MuN is a semi-sphere in reinforced concrete painted white, 76 meters in diameter and 26 meters high. This formal gesture

reflects the monumentality characteristic of his work and, at the same time, dialogues with the scale of the Esplanada dos Ministérios. The building is organized into three floors and a mezzanine: the basement houses technical areas; the ground floor houses auditoriums and administrative sectors; and the first floor and mezzanine are dedicated to exhibition spaces. This simple but functional internal structure reveals the intention to create a flexible space, capable of hosting temporary exhibitions and cultural activities of different formats.

The monumentality of the MuN refers to a double reference. On the one hand, Niemeyer was inspired by the principles of Le Corbusier, master of modern architecture, who used ramps and inclined planes as fundamental elements of the so-called *promenade architecturale*, a strategy for guiding the gaze and the body through architectural space. This influence is noticeable in the use of sculptural ramps that connect the museum's floors and in the enhancement of the terraces, designed as viewpoints facing the Esplanade and the horizon of Brasília. On the other hand, Niemeyer also sought a reference in Antiquity, evoking the solemnity of Egyptian monumentality. The museum's hemispherical shape, with its immediate visual impact, refers to archaic symbols of power and permanence, reinterpreted in a modernist key.

Over the decades leading up to its final construction, the museum underwent a series of designs and reformulations. In 1959, architects Otávio Sérgio de Moraes and Flávio de Aquino presented a proposal for the so-called Brasília Art Museum, consisting of two small-scale pavilions for exhibitions. The idea was to reduce costs and focus efforts on acquiring works, as well as making the space a pleasant place for rest and leisure. However, this project was not carried out.

In the 1970s, during Niemeyer's exile, a more ambitious proposal emerged: a complex of three natural history museums, named the Museum of the Earth, the Museum of the Sea, and the Museum of the Cosmos. These buildings featured bold structural solutions, with a single central support and cable-stayed floors, revisiting concepts that Niemeyer had previously explored in the Expo 72 exhibition pavilion. In 1983, he presented a revised version of this complex, differentiating the buildings not by type, but by size. The largest would have three floors and the smaller ones only one. A fourth building was even sketched, possibly intended for the Museum of Mines and Energy. However, none of these proposals went ahead.

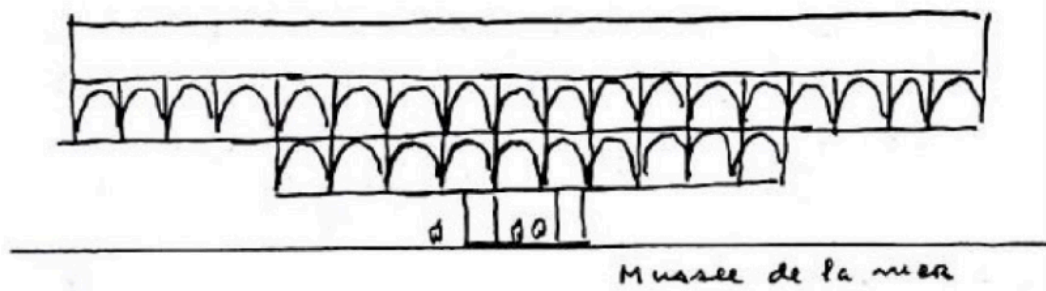


Image 26 - Sketch of the Museum of the Sea by Oscar Niemeyer

In the 1980s, Niemeyer produced new studies. In 1986, he presented a circular proposal for the Brasília Museum of Arts, with an open floor plan and complete enclosure of the exhibition rooms. This project incorporated the idea of a terrace, allowing visitors to contemplate the landscape of the Central Plateau. At the end of the decade, between 1988 and 1990, changes were made, including the introduction of sculptural ramps as access elements. In 1992, Niemeyer presented a solution with straight lines and even bolder structural spans, but the high cost made its construction unfeasible. In 1994, he revisited the idea of domes in the design for the Museum of Man and the Universe, which only took shape in 1999 in a final design: a single closed dome, which would give rise to the National Museum of the Republic.

These comings and goings demonstrate not only Niemeyer's persistence in creating a monumental museum for Brasília, but also the flexibility of his architectural language, capable of reinventing itself at different moments in history. The final result, inaugurated in 2006, condenses this creative journey and reaffirms the architect's leading role on the Brazilian and international scene.

MuN, as an institution, is managed by the Federal District Secretariat of Culture and Creative Economy and is a public, non-profit organization. Its mission is to promote the visual arts in an accessible way, engaging with different audiences and encouraging curiosity, visual sensitivity, and knowledge production. The museum's activities include the formation and preservation of its collection, safeguarding and research actions, educational initiatives, and cultural events. Despite this, the use of the building does not always correspond to its initially envisioned potential. Although recognized as an architectural and urban landmark, MuN still faces the challenge of fully consolidating itself as a national cultural center of reference.

Its relevance, however, is undeniable. In addition to the temporary exhibitions it hosts, the museum has become a symbol of Brasília's modernist aesthetic, an icon of Niemeyer's work, and a space for affirming Brazilian cultural identity. MuN synthesizes the dialogue between modernity and tradition, between technical rationality and artistic expression, between monumentality and openness to the public. Thus, it remains a testament to the cultural project that accompanied the founding of Brasília and a space in constant reinterpretation, open to contemporary transformations and demands.

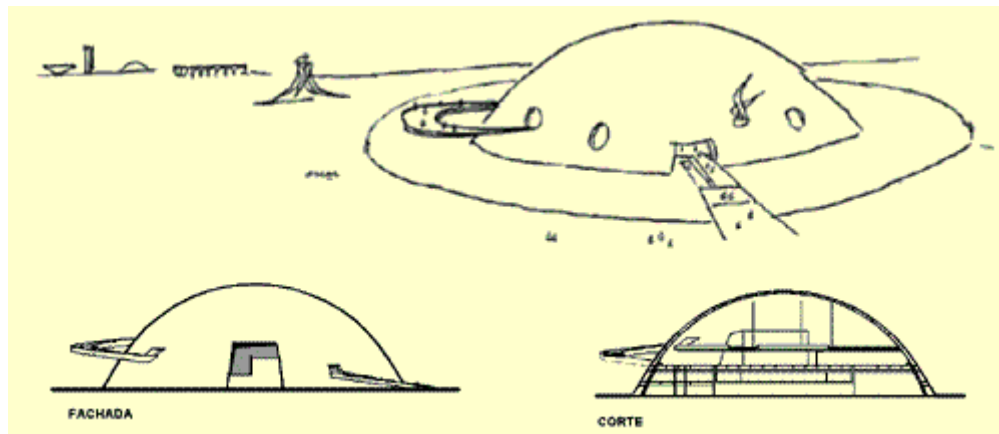


Image 27 - Sketch of the National Museum of Brasília, by Oscar Niemeyer

3.3.2 NATIONAL LIBRARY



Image 28 - National Library Leonel Brizola. Photo via Wikipedia, user Daderot, license CC0

The National Library of Brasília, currently known as the Leonel de Moura Brizola National Library, was conceived since the city's foundation as a center for memory and research, a symbol of knowledge and public culture. From the earliest studies for the Cultural Sector, Lúcio Costa had already envisioned the inclusion of a library of national importance amid the trees of the cultural park, alongside other prestigious institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Maison de France, and the Casa dos Estados Unidos.

Throughout the history of Brasília, however, the realization of this cultural facility was marked by successive projects and reformulations. At least ten different proposals were registered between the 1960s and 1990s, varying both in formal terms and in operating strategies. The first study was commissioned to architect Nauro Esteves shortly after the inauguration of the capital. His proposal called for the library to be built in the South Sector, alongside the other cultural institutions designed to make up the complex.

However, the possible hiring of Le Corbusier for the project led to the suspension of its execution.

The following projects were entrusted to Oscar Niemeyer. In 1962, by decree of then Prime Minister Tancredo Neves, it was determined that duplicates of the National Library of Rio de Janeiro would be transferred to Brasília, strengthening the idea of building a new central library. Even so, it was not until 1969, while living in Paris, that Niemeyer resumed the project, in collaboration with Nauro Esteves, developing a detailed proposal. In 1973, he presented another version, this time associated with the Earth and Energy Museum project, which included a small reading room and underground storage facilities.

In the 1980s, Niemeyer presented new studies for a library and public archive, adopting a truncated pyramid shape with an internal courtyard for the archive, while the library took on a long, single-story form. In the 1990s, hired by the Ministry of Culture, he developed a proposal with a vaulted concrete shell and large side glass panels, bringing the interior closer to the external square and reflecting his most recent phase. However, studies in 1991 and 1992 returned to proposing linear, single-story buildings with very few openings and a similar functional configuration. In 1999, Niemeyer returned to the pyramid trunk sketch, but the final development resulted in an architectural design consisting of an elevated bar on stilts, associated with an irregular single-story volume.

This retrospective highlights both the variety and the internal logic that guided the proposals over four decades. Although at first glance they appear to be divergent solutions, a closer analysis reveals recurring elements: a concern with monumentality, the use of pure geometric forms, and an attempt to reconcile spaces for reading, archiving, and socializing. At the same time, there is a conceptual dissonance between the unexecuted projects and the building that was finally constructed. The National Library of Brasília, as inaugurated in 2006, fits into a typology that is quite characteristic of modern architecture and especially common in Brasília: the longitudinal block of a few floors suspended on stilts.

However, this solution ultimately resulted in a spatial distribution that diverges from previous proposals and their programmatic premises. The building, although symbolically powerful and faithful to the principles of open floor plans and universal use, faces practical difficulties in meeting the specific demands of a large library, such as accessibility, climate control, and functional organization of the collections.

The trajectory of the National Library of Brasília is also related to the broader process of consolidation of the Cultural Sector. During the 1980s and 1990s, initiatives such as the

document Brasília Revisitada and projects such as Gran Circo Lar experimented with forms of cultural occupation for the area, but it was only in the early 2000s that the region received permanent facilities, such as the National Library itself and the Museum of the Republic.

Today, the Leonel Brizola National Library remains in use, but its occupancy is still considered underutilized. Although it is open to the public and maintains regular activities, it faces maintenance difficulties, limitations in cultural programming, and access problems, which reduce its impact on the cultural life of the city. Despite these challenges, its architectural and symbolic relevance remains evident: it is a building designed to be a central space for knowledge, research, and cultural dissemination, reaffirming Brasília's role as the country's cultural hub.

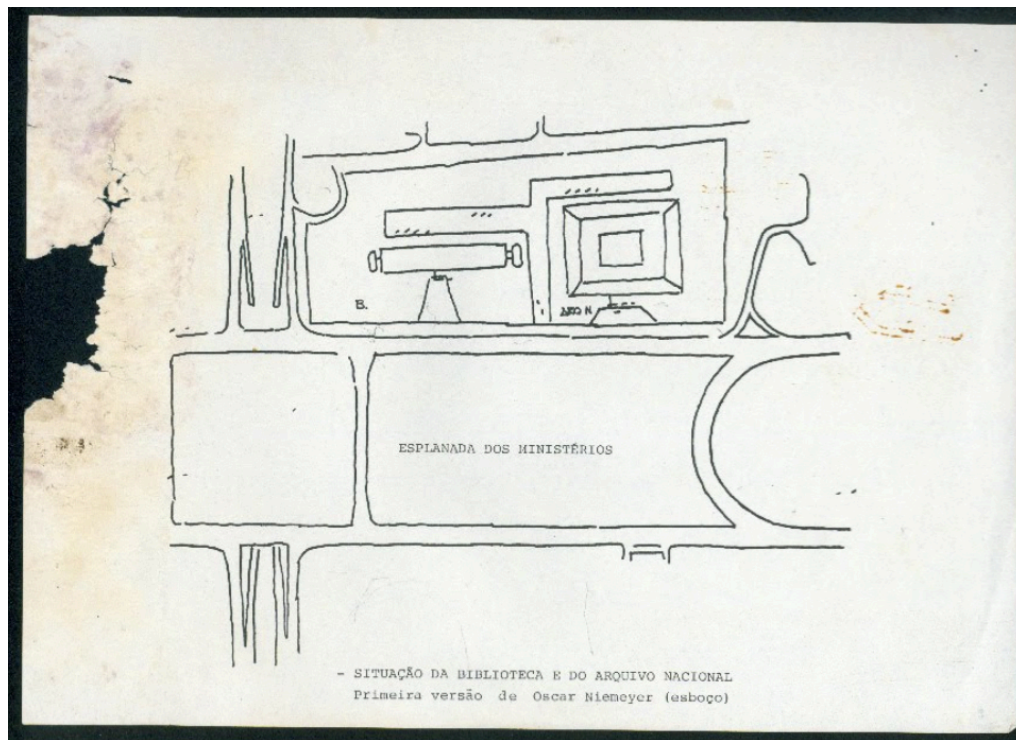


Image 29 - Sketch by Oscar Niemeyer of the National Library and Archives (1980)

3.3.3 TOURING CLUB (TEA HOUSE)



Image 30 - Photographic record of the Touring Club Brasil near its inauguration (Public Archive DF)

The building that formerly housed the Touring Club, now Sesi Lab, is one of the most emblematic points in the transformation of the Southern Cultural Sector. Its history reveals both the original intentions of Lúcio Costa's Pilot Plan and the difficulties in implementing and updating the architectural and cultural content of the capital over the decades.

In the initial conception of the Pilot Plan Report (1957), Costa envisioned two strategic facilities in the transition section between the Road Platform and the Esplanade of Ministries: an opera house (which became the National Theater) and a “possible tea house” or pavilion for collective use, which would serve as a meeting and leisure space next to the Cultural Sector. Both were intended to link the different levels of the city, overcoming the five-meter difference in elevation between the bus station and the Esplanade gardens, in order to connect the Entertainment and Cultural sectors, each with its own specific but complementary atmosphere (COSTA, 1957).

This “possible tea house” was reinterpreted by Oscar Niemeyer as the headquarters of the Touring Club of Brazil, inaugurated in 1967. The Touring Club, then a public institution linked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had been operating since 1934 as the official tourism agency, encouraging car travel and providing assistance to drivers on the road. The project, described by Niemeyer in an article in *Módulo* magazine (1962), sought to simultaneously address the program's needs and the topographical conditions: the building was designed on two levels, taking advantage of the natural unevenness of the terrain, which gave it transparency and fluidity, in addition to

reinforcing the symbolic integration between transportation, culture, and leisure (NIEMEYER, 1962).

However, the building's trajectory soon diverged from its original intentions. In 1964, even before its official inauguration, the lower floor was occupied by a temporary gas station, which operated until 2005. Successive renovations distorted elements of the initial design, including the closure of the pilotis, the insertion of internal partitions, and changes to the finishes. In the 1990s, the building was abandoned and used informally as a trading center by street vendors. In 1998, it even housed a market in the lower parking lot, which operated until 2002.

From 2005, when it was auctioned and acquired by Global Distribuidora de Combustíveis, the Touring entered a phase of uncertainty, while at the same time the debate about its heritage importance grew. In 2007, the building hosted the Casa Cor Brasília exhibition, an intervention that left irreversible marks on its structure. In the same year, the building was listed by IPHAN (Ordinance No. 314/1992), which ensured its preservation as part of the modernist urban complex. Shortly thereafter, it temporarily housed the services of a police agency.

After years of underuse, the building was incorporated into a new cycle of adaptive reuse. In 2020, through the Adopt a Square program, the Social Service for Industry (SESI) took over the area, redesigning the adjacent space and enabling the creation of SESI Lab, which opened in 2023. The new science, art, and technology center reinterpreted the cultural function envisioned by Costa, while reconfiguring its management under the logic of public-private partnership. The project included the installation of urban furniture, a forest, a bike path, and parking spaces, reinforcing the building's connection with the National Museum of the Republic and the National Library, partially completing the SCS's vocation as a cultural hub.

The case of the Touring Club reveals the tensions between the modernist project and the historical dynamics of Brasília. Originally conceived as a link between the monumentality of the Esplanade and the gregarious life of cultural spaces, the building was appropriated in various ways, as a gas station, market, administrative headquarters, exhibition space, until it reached its current function. This trajectory of uses highlights both the lethargy in the consolidation of cultural facilities in the center of the capital, marked by the economic crises of the 1980s and the retreat of the State as a major sponsor of architecture, and the capacity for contemporary reinterpretation of modernist heritage.

Today, as SESI Lab, the building symbolizes continuity and transformation: it maintains its cultural function, but within a hybrid model that combines public heritage, private

initiative, and new uses focused on science and technology. Its symbolic value lies precisely in this articulation between past and present, between the inaugural gesture of Lúcio Costa and Niemeyer and the practices of appropriation and reinterpretation of the 21st century.

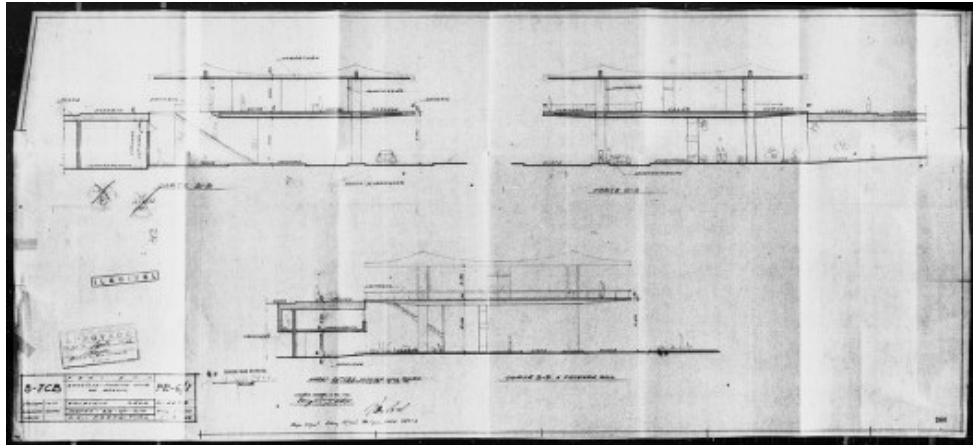


Image 31 - Touring building, original board, Brasília DF, architect Oscar Niemeyer - Image disclosure
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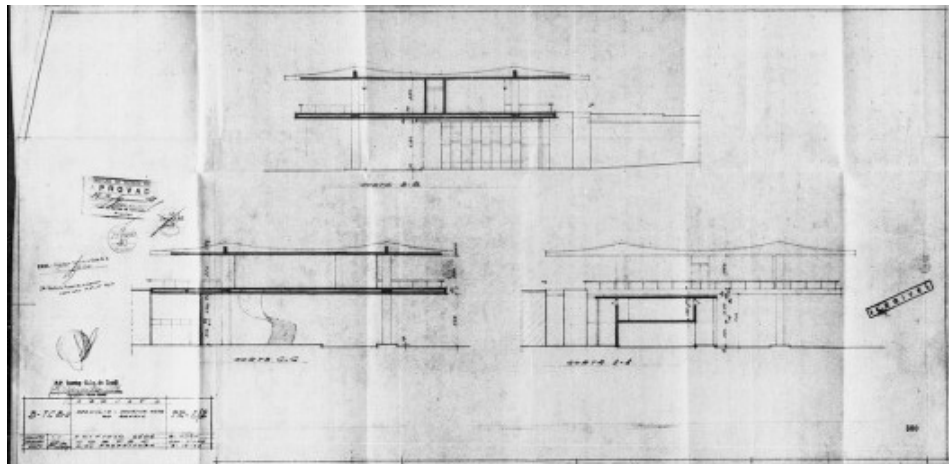


Image 32 - Touring building, original board, Brasília DF, architect Oscar Niemeyer - Image disclosure
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4. CONCLUSION

The script analyzed throughout this research showed how Brasília, conceived as the pinnacle of modernist urbanism, consolidated itself not only as a unique architectural and urbanistic object, but also as a territory of tensions, symbolic disputes, and continuous interpretations. Furthermore, it made clear that Lúcio Costa's utopian project in real life unfolded in many complex and social facets that were unexpected in this scholarly design. The South Cultural Sector (SCS), in particular, proved to be a privileged space for understanding the contradictions between the original modernist project and the urban life that was built around it.

By examining the historical formation of the sector, its moments of transformation, and the current challenges of preservation and requalification, it was found that the SCS condenses, on a smaller scale, the dilemmas faced by the capital itself: the difficulty of reconciling monumentality and everyday life, heritage and reinvention, formal rigidity and dynamic social practices. If, on the one hand, the sector carries the symbolic weight of being part of a complex listed and recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, on the other, it remains vulnerable to processes of fragmentation, disuse, and discontinuous appropriations that question its cultural and civic function.

Theoretical reflection based on authors such as Lefebvre, Jacobs, Gehl, Harvey, and Holston has allowed us to recognize that the notion of public space goes beyond physical design and constitutes a social, political, and symbolic arena. In this sense, the SCS study showed that empty spaces, monumentality, and even the apparent lack of vitality do not mean an absence of meaning, but rather an openness to plural uses, collective manifestations, and disputes over the right to the city. What was initially designed as a cultural park has, over the decades, become a stage for reinterpretations that reveal both the persistence of modernist ideas and the need to update them in light of the demands of contemporary society.

Another point that emerges from this analysis is the tension between heritage preservation and urban reinvention. Brasília's status as a listed city imposes limits on transformation, but also offers an opportunity to rethink how modern heritage can be actively experienced. The SCS illustrates that it is not just a matter of conserving forms and buildings, but of ensuring that such spaces remain socially relevant, accessible, and permeable to new cultural practices.

Thus, this thesis contributes to the debate on the relevance of modernist urbanism and its ability to engage with a constantly changing metropolis. By recognizing the contradictions between utopia and reality, design and experience, memory and use, the work points out that the vitality of the SCS, and of Brasília as a whole, depends less on the literal maintenance of a plan and more on the possibility of reinterpreting its spaces in light of inclusive, democratic, and contemporary practices.

As future perspectives, we highlight the need to deepen studies on mechanisms for shared management of urban heritage, to investigate more participatory forms of appropriation of the SCS, and to reflect on strategies that reconcile conservation and renovation. Rather than

ending a discussion, this research reinforces that the fate of Brasília and its central cultural spaces remains open, and that its true value lies in its ability to articulate past and future, utopia and experience, monumentality and everyday life.

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