

# **Planning, city image and metropolitan growth in Brasilia**

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**Lúcia Cony Cidade**

**Sérgio Jatobá**

Universidade de Brasilia, Brazil

This paper discusses the production of space in Brasilia, the national capital city of Brazil. The objective is to contribute for the analysis of the role of planning, ideology and city image in the production of metropolitan space. The perspective adopted assumes the following relations: social, economic and ideological context; public policies for territorial organization; and the perceived image and spatial practices towards the land and the environment. The basic assumption is that not only planning culture but also social perception, influence environmental quality in cities. City images, while collective experiences, have a decisive role in spatial practices. Furthermore, key actors may create city images to suit their interests.

The analysis focuses on the influence of territorial planning policies, not only in the continuous production of a segregated space, but also in the recent establishment of a chaotic metropolitan growth. Since the start in the nineteen fifties, the governmental discourse attributed to Brasilia the image of an ideal city. The modernist city plan not only expressed the progress period in which the country was to enter, but also served as a model. The conservative development that characterized the ensuing phases and influenced territorial management was determinant to produce a dual urban structure. The governmental discourse, however, continued to produce an image of a planned and equalitarian city.

The analysis suggests that the perception of a disruption between governmental discourse and effective action may have contributed for spatial practices that emphasize private over public interests. In Brasilia, the perception of a disjointed image seems to have influenced spatial practices, turning them away from planning directives. The main source utilized is a bibliographical research and references to different territorial plans for the city, considered representative of different periods through which the urbanization of Brasilia has evolved.

## 1 Introduction

Brasília became the Brazilian capital in a national context of conservative modernization, stamped by a strong developmental ideology. Planning not only outlined the material support for the city, but also contributed to define local culture, particularly the city image. Since the construction period in the nineteen fifties, governmental discourse attributed to Brasilia the image of an ideal city. However, the process of construction, consolidation and expansion of the capital showed not only a highly segregated space but also a high degree of uncontrolled growth. The complexities of the relations involved suggest the need to deepen the reflection. In tune, the objective of this communication is to contribute for the analysis of the role of planning, ideology and city image in the production of metropolitan space.

An ambitious modernist design for the main nucleus, called the Brasilia Pilot Plan, and incremental actions for the adjoining areas constituted the planning model first adopted. Implicit in modern urbanism was the expectation that urban design could contribute to change existing social practices and to promote an equalitarian space. In spite of these ambitions, since the construction of the new capital, governmental action produced a highly segregated urban structure. Critics of Brasilia have shown the wide distance between utopia and the real city (Bicca, 1985; Ferreira, 1985; Paviani, 1985; Holston, 1993; Nunes, 1997; Cidade and Souza, 2002; Cidade and Moraes, 2002; Peluso and Cidade, 2002; Cidade, 2003).

During the seventies, the government started a continuing process of territorial planning and sector analyses. Planning in the eighties and nineties was closer to a comprehensive view. Recent territorial processes involve not only the increase of segregation, but also an uncontrolled metropolitan expansion with serious environmental pressure. For researchers, planning action is often limited to minimize territorial and environmental impacts of urbanization (Penna, 2003; Araújo, 2003). In spite of wide social and spatial contrasts, governmental discourse continued to produce an image of a planned and equalitarian city (Cidade, 2003). The observed dynamics suggests that the perception of a contradiction between governmental discourse and policies in fact adopted may have contributed to conflicting socio-spatial practices.

The discussion leads to the following questions: What is the role of planning in the construction of the image of Brasilia as an ideal city? To what extent does territorial management contradict governmental planning discourse? To what extent does the perceived city image influence socio-spatial practices? With these references in mind, this reflection attempts to unveil specific aspects of the production of metropolitan space in Brasilia.

The analysis takes on from previous works (Cidade and Souza, 2002; Cidade and Moraes, 2002; and Cidade, 2003) and draws primarily on bibliographical research. The interpretative framework stresses relations among the following: a) the economic, social and ideological context in a national and regional scale; b) governmental action, which encompasses planning, territorial management and the image constructed by governmental discourse; and c) the results of the process, such as the perceived image and the socio-spatial practices of the population. The perspective adopted understands planning as a technical instrument of governmental decision making that is also subject to political criteria. It conceives territorial management as a set of practical actions that shape space and often involve power struggles. It defines socio-spatial practices as the relations between population and space.

The discussion includes brief theoretical notes that articulate the role of ideology, environmental image, and perception in the construction of collective behavior in cities. The text includes a critical analysis of the production of space in Brasilia, eliciting relations among planning, environmental image and socio-spatial practices in different periods and contexts. The framework adopted considers that the use of periods as an analytical tool enhances the

understanding of processes and relations (Santos, 1988; Cidade, 2001). In order to subsidize the understanding of relations between material and cultural processes, theoretical comments follow.

## **2 City image and material practices**

Recent analyses find insufficient and determinist the traditional critical approach, which considers material reproduction as the sole principle of urban dynamics. Harvey proposes a wider interpretation of the production of space that includes cultural aspects. The author relates the following categories: 1) material spatial practices, such as flows, transfers, and interactions that assure production and social reproduction; 2) representations of space, like signs, significations, codes and knowledge that allow understanding of material practices; and 3) spaces of representation, such as spatial discourses, utopian plans, imaginary landscapes, and symbolic spaces (Harvey, 1991, pp. 218-219).

While accepting the role of the economic sphere, Gottdiener also adopts an interpretative scheme that includes culture. The writer acknowledges the role of accumulation and of the State in the production and metropolitan space. In addition, the author finds urban culture, daily routine, communitarian life and ideology essential in the analysis of urban processes (Gottdiener, 1997, pp. 263-290).

A critic of different overviews of ideology, Thompson considers the analysis of communication crucial to understand symbolic forms in contemporary society. For the author, culture relates to a socio-historical world, structured as a field of meanings. The analysis of culture would thus deal with the meaningful constitution and social contextualization of symbolic forms (Thompson, 2000, pp. 165-166). The study of ideology would involve the relations between meaning, or significance, and power. For the author, ideology thus refers to ways of using meaning, or significance, to produce and reproduce asymmetrical power relations, the relations of domination. To study ideology it would therefore be necessary: a) to understand the construction and use of meaning by symbolic forms, such as speech, images and text; b) to analyze the contexts in which symbolic forms are articulated; and c) to understand if and how meaning is put at the service of power in a given context (Thompson, 1995, p. 16).

Urban researchers, like Ferrara, consider environmental perception to follow a value scale, in an emission and reception process dominated by an ideology (Ferrara, 1996: 63). For Bailly, the relation among image, action, and a new image can influence behavior; it can also benefit particular groups such as those that control the media (Bailly, 1979, 45-46). Others, like Ledrut, argue that perception affects group behavior. The constructed image may therefore be a vehicle for ideological content, which in turn may be accepted or not by receiving groups (Ledrut, 1973).

In line with the above, the following discussion encompasses three periods relative to the process of urbanization in the Brazilian Federal District: a- Planning, city image and socio-spatial practices in the implementation phase (1956-1969); b- Planning, city image and socio-spatial practices in the consolidation phase (1970-1985); and c- Planning, city image and socio-spatial practices in the expansion phase (1986-2003). In each, the text shows: social and economic context; planning, territorial management, and constructed image; and perceived image and socio-spatial practices.

### **3 Planning, city image and socio-spatial practices in the implementation phase (1956-1969)**

The period of implementation includes the Kubitschek term, from 1956 to 1961, and part of the military governments, initiated in 1964. Until then, the Brazilian economy drew heavily on agro-exports. Industrialization was restricted to the production of non-durable consumer goods. With the expansion to durable goods, the construction of roads and infrastructure, and the restructuring of production that followed, rural-urban migration and urbanization increased. High levels of social inequality, prevalent since colonial days, persisted.

In this period the development state, a variation of the welfare state, took hold in Brazil. Based on the assumption that development would take place in stages, developmental ideology also drew upon territorial integration. The government assumed and publicized the former view of national unity and changed it to national integration, territorial occupation, progress, and modernization.

The area chosen to house the new capital was in the Central-West region, amidst a savannah occupied by agrarian activities and sparse small towns. Since the foundation, in April 1960, the Brazilian president appointed the mayor of the Federal District. Territorial management, although following federal directives, could not totally neglect local popular support.

Although presented in a plain rendering, the winning project in the public competition for the new city, the Pilot Plan by the Brazilian architect Lúcio Costa, was complex in its modernist affiliations: functional division in sectors, wide avenues, and collective residential architecture. The city design, fit for a national capital, was to convey the image of power. Leaning heavily on the architecture of concrete and steel, modern urbanism models superbly matched the construction processes of mass production and mass consumption.

Underlining the culture of progress, there was also a discourse of social concern. Hall indicates that, based on worldviews without historical content, modernism cultivated the belief that design could change behavior. This influence would start at the scale of the family to reach society (Hall, 1995). For Holston, the original plan of Brasilia assumed, although in an ambiguous form, that urban design could contribute for social integration and for the reduction of inequality (Holston, 1993). Territorial management actions showed how deep these ambiguities were rooted.

The search for employment in the construction of the new city contributed for the attraction of masses of migrants. In order to shield the area of the Pilot Plan from slums, the government decided to build peripheral nuclei called satellite towns. For Hall, inspired in the garden cities model, the satellite towns would be self-sustainable, socially diverse, and only built after the population of the main nucleus reached a given scale (Hall, 1995, p. 109).

In Brasília, however, the satellite towns depended on the Pilot Plan for jobs and services and housed a low-income population. Contrary to the expectation of a population threshold, the government established the first satellite towns, the Núcleo Bandeirante in 1956/1957 and Taguatinga in 1958, before the capital inauguration. With population growth, the government established other satellite towns. In spite of progressively receiving infrastructure, the environmental quality in these areas was considerably lower than in the Pilot Plan.

Due to continuing flows of migrants, the yearly rate of population growth reached 14% in the nineteen sixties. In 1970, at the start of the following period and ten years after the foundation of the city, the Federal District had reached a population of 546,015, of which 96% were urban, in a territory of only 5,814 km<sup>2</sup> (GDF, 1999; GDF, 2000). The government however kept on with the image of the capital as a selective space.

Although a reflection of the dichotomies of peripheral capitalism, Brasília became a symbol of modern urbanism. In spite of the wide differences between the central nucleus and the periphery, in the beginning the image constructed for Brasilia corresponded to all of the Federal District (Kubitschek, 1975, pp. 51 and 175). Progressively, however, the publicized image of the capital changed to that of the Pilot Plan only, which kept the flavor of an ideal city. The perceived image, however, emphasized other views.

The image of Brasilia as a large development seems to have contributed for the attraction of masses of unemployed. The perceived image was that of a growing city offering jobs, at first in construction and afterwards in commercial and service activities. The socio-spatial practices of different groups seem to have reflected the contrasting images of the city.

In order to maintain the privileged environmental quality and the symbolic role of the capital, the production of space in the Pilot Plan was object of strict regulation. In the satellite towns, however, socio-spatial practices reproduced the dynamics of other Brazilian cities. While the government settled low-income population in the periphery, local developers started land invasion. According to Silveira, as soon as in 1956 there were occupations and parceling of public land (Silveira, 1999, p. 156). As early as in 1961, groups of migrants successfully organized to pressure the government to allow their permanence in the capital after dismissed from work.

In the implementation period, social change and inequality were at the root of migration to the new capital. Locally, a highly segregationist territorial management substituted for the modernist presumption of an equalitarian space, while keeping the symbolic form of an ideal city. The contrast between the high environmental quality in the Pilot Plan and the relative precariousness in the satellite towns contributed for a perceived image of inequality. The resulting socio-spatial practices suggest that, in face of the ambiguities of governmental action, different social groups tended to defend their urban interests.

#### **4 Planning, city image and socio-spatial practices in the consolidation phase (1970-1985)**

The period of consolidation unfolded under the military regime. One of the main governmental policies, economic restructuring, resulted in the emergence of manufacturing. In order to reduce inflation and deficits in the balance of payments, the government decided to promote exports and foreign investment. Social, economic and regional inequalities, however, remained.

Along the period, the developmental ideology remained strong yet with new connotations. The military governments explored the image of a "great Brazil" in order to value national achievements and extend them to the government. While opposition was refrained, territorial integration and planning were among important elements of the governmental discourse.

Urban economy in Brasilia continued to lean heavily upon public administration, the main employer and the main market for services. In 1970, service employment had reached 61.7%, increasing in 1980 to 69.4%. Construction, which declined after the first years, was the only other significant activity. While, in 1970, this branch employed 18.3% of the labor force, in 1980 it absorbed only 9.9% (Miragaya, 2000; GDF, 1999; GDF, 2003). In the eighties, the high average income of the population contributed to the strengthening of commerce and services, in spite of the growth of unemployment and informality.

The Pilot Plan continued as the main employment and services center. In the periphery, the satellite towns remained as dormitory cities for the lower income population. Some, such as Taguatinga, became alternative commercial, employment and population centers, growing due to high land prices in the Pilot Plan. While, in 1970, the population in the Pilot Plan represented

45.8% of the total, in 1980, this value had lowered to 22.2% (FIBGE, 1970; FIBGE, 1980). During this phase, the Brazilian presidents remained in charge of appointing the governors of the Federal District.

In this period, the government started to develop territorial organization plans. The 1977 territorial organization structural plan (PEOT 1977) aimed to define expansion areas, to distribute urban equipment, and to establish landscaping criteria (PAVIANI, 1985, p. 66). The directives privileged expansion along the favorable southwestern axis. Leaning heavily on sector criteria that emphasized water and sanitation as well as transportation as limits to expansion, the implementation of the PEOT 1977 found obstacles.

Governmental action was decisive in the consolidation of Brasilia as well as in urban expansion. Assuring the transference of the federal administration to the new capital, the government also provided public equipment in the satellite towns (Ferreira, 1985, p. 54). Differences between the Pilot Plan and the satellite towns, however, remained wide (Gonzales, 1985, pp. 84-88). The government also established slums eradication programs and created new satellite towns. Although modest, the conditions in the satellite towns were better than in the slums. The improvements helped attract new population. At the end of the period, in 1985, the population in the Federal District had reached 1.239.994 people (Ministério, 2000). The constructed image reflected the inception of planning as a process yet kept a lasting duality.

The high urban standards of the Pilot Plan contributed for the persisting image of Brasilia as an ideal city. A team of influential technicians developed efforts to implement a planning process, which resulted in the establishment of a planning culture in the Federal District. Opposite to the planning process was uncontrolled expansion on environmentally sensitive areas and invasion of public land. For many, the government was at least neglectful in the oversight of these processes. The dual positioning contributed for the fact that, in spite of the modernist origins of Brasilia and of the effort to establish a planning process, the image of a planned city was not completely established.

According to Bicca, Brasília was at the same time a "machine city" and a "slum monument" (Bicca, 1989, p. 132). Brazilian social context, plenty of cheap labor, produced the peripheral settlements, the large "planned slums" (Bicca, 1989, p. 128). The perceived image of Brasilia was, therefore, one of a city like others, full of social contradictions (Bicca, 1989, p. 123; Machado and Magalhães, 1989, pp. 197 e 205). Socio-spatial practices seem to have reflected this dynamics.

In this period, Ferreira notes, real state valorization in the Pilot Plan continued high due to public investment. Portions of the middle class moved to satellite towns, increasing land prices in these areas and causing low-income families to relocate outside the Federal District (Ferreira, 1999, p. 137). Until that period, the government had relative control on urban land uses. Since then, irregular occupations, such as land parceling for the middle classes substantially increased. Malagutti indicates that, in 1985, there were 150 illegal land developments for urban uses in rural areas (Malagutti, 1999, pp. 57-59).

In the consolidation period, planning and expansion directives kept their rationalist tradition. Conversely, territorial management reinforced inequalities and peripheral expansion. While governmental discourse kept the image of an ideal city, the perceived image was of a capital divided between the poor and the rich. The resulting socio-spatial practices contributed to reinforce interests of specific groups.

## **5 Planning, city image and socio-spatial practices in the expansion phase (1986-2003)**

With an analytical cut on 2003, this phase starts with the restoration of democratic order and reaches the Lula government. With brief exceptions, the economy has tended to slowing down or stagnation and to increasing public debt. Inflation was particularly high during the initial years of this phase. The opening up of the economy increased the secular social exclusion.

In the ideological spectrum, the neo-liberal perspective emerged. Among the recommendations followed were a sharp reduction of state participation in the economy and the adjustment of public accounts. These changes had serious consequences on the economy, particularly in increasing unemployment. In spite of high inequalities and high poverty, consumption ideology, cultivated by the articulation to the world market, kept growing.

At the local scale, the Pilot Plan became a Unesco world patrimony in 1987. Land prices in this area stayed high, while its relative and absolute population declined. In 1980, 1991, and 2000 the Pilot Plan share of the population in the Federal District declined respectively from 22.2%, to 14%, to only 4.6%. The peripheral cities continued their steady population growth. A new center, formed by the satellite towns of Taguatinga, Ceilândia and Samambaia, represented 41.9% of the total population in the Federal District in 1980, 46.9% in 1991, and 38.3% in 2000 (FIBGE, 1980; 1991; 2000). The 1988 national Constitution determined that the Federal District was to be a federated unit, with an elected governor and regular representatives at the federal and local levels. In tune with the new political status, planning and territorial management had to take into a more effective account the voting power of the satellite towns.

In this period, to face the serious urban problems in the capital, the government developed territorial organization plans. The new plans acquired a more comprehensive and participatory approach as well as an environmental preoccupation. According to Silveira, one of the main plans, the territorial organization director plan of 1992 (PDOT 1992) reinforced the tendency for peripheral expansion, besides proposing reinforcement of the existing southwestern growth. The revision of this plan, the PDOT 1997, while accepting the former plan main directives, recognized new tendencies of expansion in the northeastern axis, in its main part illegal land developments (Silveira, 1999, p. 160). Attempts to institute a participatory budget were limited to the Cristóvam Buarque term (1995-1998). In spite of planning efforts, uncontrolled urban and metropolitan expansion continued.

In the last decades, metropolitan territorial management not only maintained but also increased the high contrast between affluence and poverty. While migratory flows continued high, the satellite towns grew. Local populist governments multiplied peripheral settlements with minimal environmental standards. The issue of land property was resolved only in appearance. Legal land dispossession processes, started during the implementation phase, were never completed. As a result, invasions of public land and emergency popular settlements continue to pressure decision makers. According to the last census, the population in the Federal District reached in 2000 2,051,146 people (FIBGE, 2000). The constructed image unsuccessfully tried to conceal possible political advantages of answering popular demands.

While the government continues to cultivate a planning discourse, territorial management actions express a preoccupation in answering claims of a growing population, often against planned directives. Popular settlements, usually established in relatively precarious conditions, characterize a governmental image of populism and paternalism. The population is capable of perceiving the advantages of social organization and political pressure.

Pressed by the dual need to follow planning and to provide answers for the constituency, the government has adopted an ambivalent stand. In spite of governmental discourse, public policies showed unable or unwilling to control expansion. The perceived image has been of a

government that oversteps planning and emphasizes attention to specific interest groups. Governmental action thus subsidizes a perceived image at least of ambivalence. Socio-spatial practices reflect governmental strengths and weaknesses.

In spite of planning priorities and of the public property of a significant portion of urban land, it seems clear that private interests are able to define the direction of metropolitan growth. Malagutti shows that, in 1989, there were 170 illegal urban land developments in rural areas, a number raised in 1992 to 200 (Malagutti, 1999, pp. 57-59). Recent government estimates show 391 illegal land developments in 1999, with 97,715 plots, of which only 47,651 occupied. Estimated population in the same year was 218,152 people. With full occupancy, the potential population reaches 424,458 people (GDF, 1999).

Pressed by public opinion, the government has been trying to legalize the occupations. The issue involves not only making sure that illegal developers are punished but also that invaded public land is paid back. Besides, the families that live in these areas represent a significant voting constituency. Recent governmental action includes monitoring these developments as well as designing plans of territorial organization for the new suburbs. The legalizing policies include public auctions and hypotheses of direct sales to the families currently living in these areas.

The analysis shows that, in spite of planning, along the periods studied interest groups tried to create their own rules for territorial management. The government, on the other hand, unable to extend the regulation pattern of the Pilot Plan to all of the Federal District, fed the expectation that planning directives would be relaxed. The submission of the idealized city to Brazilian reality transformed the rationalist and determinist intentions of the original city plan in an agenda only partially fulfilled.

## **6 Conclusion**

The discussion searched to understand: the role of planning in the construction of the image of an ideal city in Brasilia; the extent of the correspondence between governmental discourse and territorial management actions; and the influence of the perceived image on socio-spatial practices.

The analysis shows that, since its birth, Brasilia intertwined its role as a national symbol to urban design and planning. On a broad scale, the city construction, at the end of the nineteen fifties, represented the entrance of Brazil in the development era, as a pole for the expanding market in the wide western frontier. On a local scale, the modernist project for the new capital was a strong component in the construction of the image of an ideal city. Planning processes established later on tried to keep a rationalist stand in spite of continuing pressures.

The discussion also indicates that territorial management actions often stepped away from governmental discourse. Indeed, the original plan carried the implicit assumption that spatial organization and technology, at the service of reason, would be able to promote a developed and fair society. Along the process, however, a disjunction between the utopian discourse and a practice based on social and political contradictions became clear. As a background, there was the social reality of a country slain by deep socio-spatial inequality. Local territorial management reproduced these contrasts as soon as the first threats to the Pilot Plan original plan appeared and carried them on until present days.

The analysis also suggests that the perceived image has a degree of influence on socio-spatial practices of the population. Indeed, in spite of highly selective territorial management practices, the government always constructed an equalitarian city image. The population, however, has been able to register the contradictions between the idealized discourse and a

segregated reality in the perceived image. In tune, spatial practices also oppose rationalism and planned space, which represent restrictions on city appropriation. Socio-spatial processes in the Brasilia metropolis, more and more individualistic or group specific, are typical of other cities in the peripheral world, planned or unplanned. What makes this dynamic particular is the conjunction of an idealized planning discourse with a reality opposite to these alleged beliefs.

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