

**Becoming Brasília: A Gregarious Capital City**  
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My senior honors thesis examined the evolution of vibrant civic life, including commerce, community-based organizations, and public spaces, in the monumental and often alienating modernist designs of Brazil's capital city, Brasília. This research would not have been possible without the generous support of the Grua/O'Connell Research Award, which funded one week of travel, interviews, and archival research in Brasília.

Brazilian President Juscelino Kubitschek oversaw the construction of Brasília from 1956 to 1960 to increase economic and population growth in Brazil's vast interior and to symbolize the country's modernity. During these few years, workers from all over the country came to Brazil's Central Plateau to help implement Lúcio Costa's urban plan and to erect Oscar Niemeyer's unique modernist buildings. Journalists, urbanists, architects, and residents criticized the young city's hostile and alienating atmosphere, vast and concrete government buildings, wide open spaces, emphasis on the automobile, and lack of street-life. Headlines such as "Not Quite Utopia," "Dream of Brasília Dying at 30," and "Brasília: A Soaring Sterile Bird" are just a few of many that circulated around the world in Brasília's early years and spread overtly negative perceptions of the young city. In recent decades, many authors have noted an expansion of Brasília's civic life. Titles of their articles, such as "Brasília: Life Beyond Utopia," "Beyond Brasília," and "Brasília after Brasília" suggest that the city's lively and urban qualities today are distinct from "Brasília," the city as Costa designed it or as it was inaugurated in 1960. To these authors, the recent expansion of civic life is representative of additions and improvements to Costa's "failed" monumental plan.

My thesis illustrates that parts of Costa's design, indeed, included the monumental government buildings and open spaces that were criticized over the years for their inhospitable environments. I also show, however, that Costa's monumental design innovatively included what he called the "gregarious." To Costa, gregarious meant "densely used urban space conducive to encounters" between people.<sup>1</sup> I argue that Brasília is only now becoming "Brasília," a version of the monumental and gregarious city Costa designed. Brasília was far from complete when it was inaugurated in 1960. I argue that initial negative reactions to Brasília were a result of Brasília's well-developed monumental qualities and unfinished gregarious spaces. I then trace the implementation and evolution of Brasília's gregarious aspects from 1960 to the present, the historical events that influenced them, and the increasingly positive critiques that accompanied them. For this research, I rely heavily on primary sources, including academic and journalistic critiques of Brasília, published around the world, and interviews conducted during my time in Brasília. As Costa's definition of gregarious was rather vague, Brasília's gregarious spaces today may not be exactly what Costa designed. However, I argue that they serve to create a version of the impressive, yet intimate capital city Costa imagined. Furthermore, the pride local residents have for their city's renowned monumental spaces and modernist architecture, and the growth of gregarious civic life throughout the city, indicate that Brasília may prove to be a model for a livable, gregarious, symbolic, and monumental capital city.

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<sup>1</sup> Lucio Costa, "Brasília Revisitada 1985/1987: Complementação, preservação, adensamento e expansão urbana," *Revista Brasileira de Arquitetura, Planejamento, Desenho Industrial, Construção*, 116.