

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 445

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Brasilia

Location : Federal District

State Party : Brazil

Date : December 31, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on condition that the Brazilian authorities adopt a legislation that would ensure the safeguarding of the urban creation of Costa and Niemeyer.

C) JUSTIFICATION

The 20th century principles of urbanism, as expressed in 1943 in the Athens Charter or in the 1946 Manière de penser l'urbanisme by Le Corbusier, have rarely been applied at the scale of capital cities. Only two noteworthy exceptions exist: Chandigarh, where Le Corbusier, commissioned by the Punjab government in 1950 to act as architectural adviser, worked for several years in collaboration with Pierre Jeanneret, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, and Brasilia, created ex nihilo at the centre of a 5814 km² federal district in 1956.

The idea of building a capital in the interior of Brazil is an old one, having been proposed on various occasions since the end of the 17th century. In 1922, at the time of the centennial celebrations commemorating Brazilian independence, the choice of the central western region as a site for the future capital was illustrated by the dedication of the "Foundation Stone" several kilometers northeast of the present location of Brasilia, near Planaltina.

Elected president of the Republic of Brazil in 1955, Juscelino Kubitschek made the creation of the capital city a symbol of his policy to upgrade the image of the entire country, to expand industry and to undertake major construction projects. In 1956, President Kubitschek appointed a commission to determine an exact location for the city and set up an executive body, the Novacap, to supervise and ensure the purchase of land and the execution of construction work. During the same year, Oscar Niemeyer was made director of the Department of Architecture and Urban Affairs, and Lucio Costa won the competition held for the plan of Brasilia.

This choice brought back together the members of a team that had already proven its worth. Between 1936 and 1943, Costa and Niemeyer had worked on the construction of the Ministry of Education and Culture in Rio de Janeiro, Le Corbusier having previously been consulted for this project. The definition of an urban ideal based on the separation of functions, the incorporation of vast natural spaces and a street plan whose wide traffic lanes broke with the tradition of narrower streets, was implicit in the theoretical training of Costa and Niemeyer. However, the practical development of their own style meant that the primary functionalism of the "International Style" would be rejected in favor of solutions better adapted to the Brazilian context. In this regard, it may be recalled that Niemeyer had built, in 1942-1944, at Kubitschek's request, the group at Pampulha, after having designed, in collaboration with Costa, the Brazilian pavillion at the New York World's Fair in 1939.

The "pilot plan" that Costa drew up for Brasilia was one of great expression power. As he himself described it, it was born of "the initial gesture of someone designating a place and taking possession of it: a cross formed by two bars intersecting at right angles". This figure was then adapted to the topography, and the natural slope of the ground; its orientation was improved by curving the arms of one of the crossbars. The layout for Brasilia calls to mind not so much a cross but a giant bird in flight towards the southeast. The curving north-south axis traces the layout of the wide transportation artery. Along it are the residential zones separated into superquadras, all nearly self-contained, each possessing its own commercial and leisure-time centres, green spaces, schools, churches and so forth. Six-storey buildings (quadras) on piles were built according to Le Corbusier's principles.

The perpendicular east-west axis, known as the Monumental Axis, links the administrative sections of the new city, which became the official capital in 1960. Oscar Niemeyer's most renowned edifices were built there. They are noteworthy in the purity of their forms and their obvious monumental character, the result of an intelligent balance between horizontal and vertical buildings, rectangular volumes and curved surfaces, and the raw, unfinished materials and polished exteriors of certain structures. Among the most beautiful buildings in the urban landscape of Brasilia may be cited around the Plaza of Three Powers, the Planalto Palace, or the Hall of Government, the Congress, with its twin skyscrapers flanked by the cupola of the Senate building and by the inverted one of the House of Representatives, and finally the Supreme Court. Other structures of an exceptional artistic quality are the esplanade of the Ministers, the Cathedral with its 16 concrete paraboloids 40 meters in height, the Pantheon of Juscelino Kubitschek, and the National Theatre.

Because of the enormity of the challenge, the extravagant scale

of the project, and the massive resources poured into it, the creation of Brasilia is unquestionably a major feat in the history of urbanism. In 1960, at the end of President Kubitschek's term of office, and especially since 1964, when a new policy was adopted and the original team of architects was disbanded, the new capital of Brazil encountered serious problems which, even today, have not been totally overcome. Kubitschek, Costa and Niemeyer planned for 500,000 to 700,000 inhabitants; satellite cities were to absorb any greater population. Brasilia currently has a privileged population of 300,000 people, and a large, often transitory, population distributed among the seven satellite cities, as well as in the poorer neighborhoods that were established to the detriment of the 1956-1957 project. In the absence of both a master plan and a code of urbanism, the standards defined by Costa and Niemeyer have been infringed upon in the greatest disarray. Higher structures in certain sectors, construction in open spaces, modifications in the road network, and other transgressions have gravely altered a monumental landscape initially of great quality.

Such degeneration and the threats that weigh on further development of Brasilia spurred Aloisio Magalhaes to create, in 1981, a working group for the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of Brasilia. This group has assembled an impressive amount of documentation and devoted much effort to finding prospective solutions. It has identified for protection the three zones that are proposed in the nomination of Brasilia to the World Heritage List:

- a total protection zone covering Lucio Costa's pilot plan;
- a buffer zone in which a predominance of green spaces would be ensured;
- a peripheral zone including the artificial lake and its banks, virtually covered with residential buildings. Protection in this area may be more flexible.

The working group also proposed the inscription of the older witnesses to the birth of Brasilia, that is, the cities and traditional habitations of the peripheral district (Planaltina, Brazlandia and eight former fazendas), as well as the workers' camps, which are evocative, but fragile, vestiges of the golden age of the construction of the capital (1957-1960).

ICOMOS, while expressing an opinion favorable in principle to the inclusion of Brasilia on the World Heritage List, considers that the property should be inscribed on condition that minimal guarantees of protection ensure the preservation of the urban creation of Costa and Niemeyer.

The adoption of Costa's pilot plan was to enter into its final phase in March 1987 and be submitted to relevant authorities during the course of the same year.

No specific date has been given insofar as the protective measures of buffer zones is concerned; the working group's wishes obviously do not constitute sufficient guarantee as to their implementation.

ICOMOS, October 1987