

Center and centralities in focus: A look at Gávea Centro and its centralities in the South Sector of Uberlândia-MG

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SUMMARY

The general objective of this article is to explore the urban dynamics and the different conceptions of center and centrality; The specific objectives are to address the emergence of new centralities and their dialectic in the continuous movement of space production in the city and to highlight centrality as a possibility for improving the quality of urban life. Given its character as a reflexive effort, it is methodologically supported by a bibliography review and a brief approach to the empirical reality of Uberlândia-MG. It does not have the purpose of exhausting the theoretical framework on the subject, but is more of a brief interpellation, an invitation to debate. The text is divided into three parts, in addition to the introduction. Initially, it addresses the conceptualization of city and urban, in order to highlight the constant change in the structure of cities, well understood in the following topic, which addresses the concepts of center and centrality. In the following part, possibilities inherent to centralities are suggested. The last topic, in turn, is discussed based on the theories presented the conjuncture of the Southern Sector of the city of Uberlândia-MG, where will be constituted the Gávea Center with its centralities: Villa Gávea, Park Gávea and Gávea Garden.

KEYWORDS: *New centralities planned. Integrated Center. Urban Dynamics. Urban Structure.*

1 INTRODUCTION

This text, which deals with the dynamics permeating the urban and the city, focuses on the center and urban centrality, understanding the center as a spatial form and centrality as an important process. Its evolution over time is related to the expansion/growth of the city and to decentralization. It is based on the principle that the city is the space of production, circulation and consumption, while centrality is its essence. From the social division of space, i.e. the spatialization of activities and social relations/practices inherent in everyday life, differentiations are created at both a social and spatial level. In other words, by agglomerating “different things”, symbols and signs, centrality creates differential (and not homogeneous) space, where contrasts, diversity and differences are visible (Lefebvre, 1999).

Still based on Lefebvre (1999), it is understood that centrality is expressed in dialectical movement, which is based on relationships that build and destroy, create or shatter the city, from the approximation of various forms/contents, consequently transforming the urban structure. The city center originates from concentration and centralization, and the dispute over its “centrality”, given its symbolic and material value, leads to its specialization, transfiguration and ageing, as in the case of the main city center, the maximum expression of intra-urban centrality.

On the other hand, announcing the different economic, social and cultural dynamics, new urban centralities emerge elsewhere, which can become the main center, since they concentrate, in a process of functional cohesion, in a given location, a range of different and interrelated activities and services, potentially accessible to different citizens and with significant impacts on dimensions such as: urban structure, social integration and quality of life.

In the current context of redefining spatial practices, new concepts of center and centrality in cities are gaining prominence, including planned centralities, based on the prestige of the place, encompassing recreational and symbolic activities and interactive centralities. According to these new concepts of center and centrality, the following were conceived for the South Sector of the city of Uberlândia (MG): Gávea Centro with its centralities: Villa Gávea, Park Gávea and Gávea Garden. These centralities were structured to be complementary and form

the “connectivity triad” and/or “interactivity triad”, based on planned intervention in an area of urban expansion, with centralities already established or not (Alia Empreendedores, 2023). In addition, according to Alia Empreendedores (2023), such centralities focus on urban kindness, that is, valuing local communities, seeking to meet specific demands according to the profile of residents and visitors, promoting positive interactions and favoring everyone.

When considering the design and implementation of such a proposal, including the possibility of fostering integration between spaces and social interaction, valuing local diversity, even though partially, hypotheses are put forward in this text. These may be possible-impossible in the future, based on movement, both temporal and spatial, and general and specific trends. In this sense, this article aims to explore urban dynamics and the different conceptions of center and centrality; to address the emergence of new centralities and their dialectic in the continuous movement of space production in the city and to highlight centrality as a possibility for improving the quality of urban life. Methodologically, it is based on a review of the literature and a brief approach to the empirical reality of Uberlândia-MG, a city located in the Triângulo Mineiro region, with 713,232 inhabitants (IBGE, 2022), the second most populous in the state, second only to the capital of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte.

2 CITIES IN MOTION: metamorphosis of urban space over time

To begin with, it is important to briefly clarify some concepts. With regard to the urban and the city, “the urban is often the abstract, the general, the external”. The city is the particular, the concrete, the internal, “it is at the same time a region and a place, because it is a totality, and its parts have a combined movement, according to its own law, which is the law of the urban organism, with which it confuses itself.” (Santos, 2004, p.34-35).

In relation to the urban, it should also be added that it is socially constructed, multifaceted and manifests itself as movement. According to Lefebvre (1999, p.157), it “cannot be defined either by sum or synthesis, or by their superimposition. In this sense, it is not a totality” and therefore does not allow itself to be apprehended. The city, on the other hand, seen as a totality, a dynamic open “system” and a singular social phenomenon (Scott, 2014 [2008]), with tensions and possibilities, constitutes, according to Souza (2005, p.192), a complex socio-spatial reality, where everything is centralized. Or again, in the words of Corrêa (1989), it is the stage and result of complex and contradictory actions, which derive from the dynamics of capital accumulation, the changing needs of reproducing the relations of production and the class conflicts that emerge from it.

In view of this, according to Santos (2004), among the histories of the urban, there would be the history of the activities that take place in the city and, among the histories of the city, there would be the history of centrality, which together would give us a specific theory, the construction of which requires the concepts/categories: space, time and movement. The apprehension of what space is considers the result of the indissoluble marriage between systems of objects (social instruments) and systems of actions (social practices), resulting in “spatial differentiation”. In relation to time, this can be divided into periods, i.e. “pieces of time subject to the same historical law, with the maintenance of structures”; and in an interrelated

way, movement consists of transformations. In this way, “the history of the city is the history of its continuous production” (Santos, 2004), which is influenced by material conditions, related to the social structures and ideological content of a given society.

The city and its internal organization, according to Scott (2014 [2008]) and Santos (2008, p.220), faithfully expresses an economic and social reality defined in a certain historical context. Therefore, it encompasses the “complexification of space and time, because the complexification of space and the objects that occupy it does not occur without a complexification of time and the activities that take place in it” (Lefebvre, 1999). After the 1980s, with the advent of the globalization process, which is understood as the realities and phenomena that distinguish the current era from previous periods (Santos, 1999), productive structures have undergone transformations that are multiple, diverse, complex and permeate multi- and inter-scalar dimensions, which have social and territorial implications, seen in the urban and the city.

In this sense, Santos (2004) speaks of a new urbanization, with a greater degree of differentiation and complexity, considering the intra- and inter-urban scales, due to the increase in the amount of intellectual work and consumption, both consumptive consumption, which is exhausted by itself, and productive consumption, which is necessary for production in the modernized countryside that has incorporated science, technology and information and requires machines, implements, components, material and intellectual inputs. These consumptions, according to the author, create heterogeneous demands according to income strata and sub-spaces, respectively, generating overlapping effects that contribute “to expanding the scale of urbanization and increasing the importance of urban centers, strengthening them both demographically and economically” (Santos, 2004, p.74).

Consequently, in the city and urban area, based on information, or the “empirical knowledge of the simultaneity of events and the understanding of their significance [...], the hegemonic actors of economic, social and political life can choose the best places for their actions” (Santos, 1999, p.9). As a result, new intra- and inter-urban¹ centralities are formed and/or consolidated, resulting in a change in hierarchies and spatial organizations, which can be analyzed based on horizontalities (based on continuity, organic solidarity between points with different functionalities that come together) and verticalities (established at points that are separated from each other, based on external commands/rationalities). After all, according to Santos (1994, p.129-130):

The city itself is the site of a selective valorization process. Its materiality is formed by the juxtaposition of different equipped areas [...]. Each place within the city has a different vocation, from a capitalist point of view, and the internal division of labor within each agglomeration is not indifferent to it (*tradução nossa*).

In the current period, some of the most important changes in/of the cities, considering their economic and demographic structures, but also often their physical constitution, have their roots in structural modifications of economic activities and in the special circumstances in which cities are increasingly implicated in globalization processes (Scott, 2014 [2008]). The author also

¹ From an interurban perspective, as the demographic censuses and studies by ReCiMe - the Network of Researchers on Medium-sized Cities - show, there has been an increase in demographic growth and a change in the role of medium-sized cities, which have gained in economic importance and in the spatial dynamics of Brazilian urbanization.

adds that “the more the urban economy proves itself capable of conquering distant markets, the more it becomes capable of growing and differentiating itself internally, in turn reinforcing its agglomerative magnetism” (Scott, 2014 [2008], p.13).

Understanding this current dynamic requires us to consider the idea and reality of networks, the notion of reticulated space, whereby “the stakes are not the occupation of areas, but the concern to activate points... and lines, or to create new ones” (Durand; Levy; Retailié, 1992, p. 21 apud Santos, 1999, p.13). Networks were used by Castells (1999) to describe the characteristic society of the 21st century, based on technologies that allow for more possibilities to move around and search for new experiences and opportunities on multiple scales.

With this in mind, when considering the dynamics of inter-scalar spatial interactions in the urban network, Catelan (2013) proposes the notion of urban heterarchy². This perspective aims to overcome the merely hierarchical view of networked spatial interactions and considers the meeting points and articulations of multiple scales, i.e. beyond traditional hierarchies and combining them, cities, more integrated into globalized capitalism, are articulated on different geographical scales. In this context, medium-sized cities have their regional role reinforced and can reach the international scale in an intense and profound way.

Focusing on the internal organization of the city, where “the interdependence between functionally differentiated areas polarized by the center is being replaced by complex relationships between goods, services and places linked by patterns of social life and the centre-periphery continuum has given way to network organization” (Barata-Salgueiro, 2023, p.67), *mutatis mutandis*, the notion of heterarchy also applies to rethinking the conceptions of the center and urban centrality in their classic models. After all, the “new centralities” tend to adapt to meet classic demands, such as access/functionality based on proximity, and new demands, such as material and immaterial exchanges based on connectivity, from networks and online and/or digital tools, generating multiple articulations.

2.1 Pondering the concepts of Center and Centralities in the contemporary city

In different spaces and moments in history, from the genesis to the continued expansion of the city, the center differs from any other part of the city in its form and content. Easily recognized in the urban fabric, the center is home to public administration activities and the most important temples, and its emergence was based on the concentration of the main economic activities and urban and regional flows in the same area, which can be described as integrating and dispersing at the same time (Sposito, 1991). It is the result of the centralization process of a market economy dominated by industrial capitalism, characteristic of the modern city, whose links with the outside world have been expanded, both qualitatively and quantitatively (Corrêa, 1989).

² Márcio José Catelan used as a basis the idea of heterarchy presented, with other objectives, by Armand Dreifuss in 2001. Regarding the concept, Catelan (2013, p.18) explains that: “the prefix 'hetero' means what is different or diverse. The word 'heterarchy' cannot be found in a dictionary, and if it were, the correct use of this prefix would be 'heteroarchy', the corresponding antonym of the meaning of 'hierarchy'. However, this is not the case with the concept 'heterarchy', which is also used to demonstrate what is different and/or diverse, but which does not oppose the hierarchy found in the urban network.”

This center, which can be designated in various ways such as: primary center or/and historic center, traditional center and/or old center, business center (CBD), main center, etc. and, specifically, centrality, does not necessarily coincide with the geographical center of the city (Guimarães; Cachinho, 2023).

The “center” can be understood from two analytical possibilities: as a traditional center or as a main center, so that the old center is, or was, both the traditional center and the main center (Whitacker, 2013). Thus, according to the author: “the perspective of the traditional center implies that we recognize permanence, in forms and/or processes, in opposition to, or highlighting, other modern centers. As far as the main center is concerned, primacy would be the valued element and would be characterized by the concentration of activities and/or the centralization of processes” (Whitacker, 2013, p.283).

However, excessive concentration has led to saturation and the breakdown of the old center, culminating in decentralization, which, combined with other processes, has led to changes in centuries-old trends and the creation of new centers, which may become the main center. After all, the center as a spatial form does not have a fixed character in a geographical point. As Villaça (2001, p.238) said, “no area is or is not a center; as the result of a process - (dialectical) movement - it becomes a center. In society, nothing is; everything becomes or ceases to be”.

An interpretative framework for the center and the multiple urban centralities is proposed by Barata-Salgueiro (2013). In it, the center can be analyzed according to three analytical dimensions: the geometric, the functional and the symbolic, separated for convenience of analysis, but interrelated and present in all urban centers. In the geometric dimension, one of the most important, accessibility stands out, in the sense of the connectivity that enables speed and ease, which consequently reflects on the size and hierarchical position of the center. The functionality dimension is related to the concentration of diversified functions, which are appropriated and used for the production of space, the realization of capital and the reproduction of life. Finally, the symbolic dimension is associated with the prestige of the place, which attracts groups with high economic capital, but also groups without economic capital but with cultural capital. Therefore, the author points out that “the growing appreciation of the meanings of places in consumer society thus contributes to the proliferation of new centralities defined by different groups and forms of capital” (Barata-Salgueiro, 2013, p.17). She also points out that:

[...] the word 'center' refers to an entity, a location with a strong power to attract people and with certain geometric properties, while 'centrality' refers to another type of property attached to that geometry and which reinforces its attraction. The evolution of the concept has been towards valuing the latter to the point of supplanting those of geometry. In fact, the semantic evolution in geographical literature from 'center' or 'central place' to 'centrality' seems to correspond to the desire or need to emphasize other dimensions than just the geometry of distances or accessibility, even though they have been present in the idea of an urban center for a long time, such as social characteristics like prestige (Barata-Salgueiro, 2013, p.14, *tradução nossa*).

Several scholars have contributed to the understanding of urban centrality, which is the essence of the urban, historically constituted by the spatial appropriation of places within

the city. In it, different groups and interests³ intertwine and dialectically construct and destroy centrality, in accordance with the characteristics of the ideological, political, economic and technological systems in force.

In this way, centrality does not have a specific form and is not limited to a single physical location, but rather to the distribution of distinct and interrelated activities and functions, potentially accessible to citizens from different parts of the city. Memory and the symbolic dimension are also associated with centrality, which is revealed and sustained by the flows resulting from the use, appropriation and meaning given to and apprehended from spaces (Sposito, 2001, 2005). Therefore, using Lefebvre's terms (1999, p.157), "Centrality defines the *u-topian* (that which has no place and seeks it). The *utopian* defines centrality."

Once we have covered the concepts of center and centrality, we move on to how they materialize in contemporary cities. Therefore, they are intrinsic to the characteristics of the current period, considering large and medium-sized cities, where there is a "shift from a mono or multicentral city, to the composition of urban spaces increasingly supported by polycentric structures, on multiple scales, from urban to interurban" (Sposito, 2013).

Therefore, in accordance with the different social and cultural dynamics of the present, in this new, multi(poly)centric or polycentric⁴ structure of many contemporary cities, which have a fluid, adaptable nature and heterarchical spatial interactions, there are various areas of centrality, often strategically planned by the public and private agents that produce urban space. Some of these centralities are specialized, for example, in leisure and recreational services, and others are diversified, because they combine different functions such as: commerce and offices or housing-commerce and offices, as well as educational, cultural and leisure services, in addition to other different types of centers, such as medical or health centers (Barata-Salgueiro, 2013). As a result, multifunctional and interconnected spaces can emerge in a multi-scalar way, generating "intense agglomeration economies that establish a vigorous gravitational field" (Scott, 2014 [2008], p.12).

The integration relationships between central areas can occur through the

[...] atomized appropriation, with each new area or axis specializing and thus being appropriated by spatial practices. In this case, spatial practices may or may not establish flows between the spaces that express centrality, more than those established between companies and agencies and made possible by transportation means and systems. Secondly, the establishment of supplementary actions between companies and the flows arising from this complementarity, expressed in relationships of a predominantly hierarchical type between companies and agencies and their branches or subsidiaries located in the different central areas. Here we must understand that the hierarchical relationship would happen more among the company units located in different central areas than among elements of the urban

³ According to Sposito (2001) these are: real estate in the construction of new commercial and service facilities; accelerated urban territorial expansion, generating discontinuous and fragmented fabrics; increased socio-spatial differentiation and improved forms of transport, with an emphasis on the increased use of individual transport.

⁴ From a critical perspective on the current form of urban space production, Sposito (2013, p.56) points out that "this movement that redefines centrality, in terms of the location of new central areas (often peripheral), and above all in terms of social and economic content, cannot just be conceptualized as multicentrality (faithful to the Latin radical *multi*, which means *many*), but must be understood as polycentrality (referring to the Greek prefix *poly*, whose meaning, *several*, denotes the sense of diversity), with one trend always combining with the other, even if contradictorily, giving rise to a multi(poly)centrality".

structure (main center and subcenters). Rather than the complementarity established by the agents, there is the one of the logics of the companies (Whitacker, 2013, p.296, *tradução nossa*).

This network of central areas of the multi(poly)nucleated city has differentiated contents/qualities that manifest themselves spatially and temporally in an individualized way, as well as being linked by flows of various kinds, related to the new economic spatial logics. These logics give rise to and are conditioned by the redefinition of spatial consumption practices, associated with changes in the use of time and the role of consumption in contemporary society, instrumentalized for social distinction and belonging to groups, within the framework of the growing symbolic production and appropriation of the city (Baudrillard, 1991; Barata-Salgueiro, 2013).

Therefore, as highlighted by various authors such as Lefebvre (1999), Sposito (2008, 2013) and Whitacker (2013), centrality is recreated, multiplied and unfolded in areas of the city, which acquire central conditions and qualities, and may even have a greater centralizing power than the central area itself, due to the presence of urban facilities and, consequently, the attraction of flows and various articulations. In this way, there is an increase in complexity in the center and the periphery, as well as changes in the center-periphery relationship, in other words, the definition of what is or is not a center is based above all on use value and the contents for the reproduction of daily life. Thus, geographical position becomes secondary in defining where the center is, since some urban areas can become centers of prosperity, while others face stagnation and/or decline.

2.2 The kaleidoscope of center and centrality as a possibility for cities

As explained above, the urban and the centrality (its essence) have a dialectical and contradictory nature. In this way, transformations in the urban structure, from monocentric to multi(poly)centric, can occur from various points of view. With this in mind, we are starting from the perspective that considers centrality as a possibility for changes in the paradigm of cities, as processes that make cities better to live in.

The emergence of new centralities has a direct influence on economic, social and ideological changes: demographic changes, both the increase in population in certain areas, which can create demand for new services, shops and infrastructure, and the ageing population, which demands health and leisure services; transformations in lifestyles with changes in relation to the workplace, housing, leisure and consumption, which can drive the development of new commercial and cultural areas; accessibility and urban mobility, considering the construction of access roads and the provision of public transport, including on-demand transport such as minibuses or shared transport services, which adjust to the population's need to travel at specific times and on specific routes; technological development and the emergence of creative sectors; as well as strategic urban planning and entrepreneurship, which create and offer spaces in line with the demands of a given moment.

With regard to accessibility, a basic dimension for centrality, as highlighted by Padeiro (2023), this is a complex, relative concept that encompasses a range of dimensions and different components such as the mobility system, the location system or land occupation patterns and

the characteristics of individuals. Therefore, in order to increase accessibility, account must be taken of the particularities of the various social groups, the increase in people's skills, interventions that increase the presence of services and amenities. The relativity of accessibility stems from the fact that:

[...] its increase in certain areas of the city necessarily implies its decrease, by comparison, in other areas. Similarly, its increase for certain means of transportation can lead to its decrease through the use of other means. Despite frequent attempts to break with the social status quo, accessibility imprints and reproduces the previous imbalances in space: what is (or becomes) more accessible is (or becomes) more expensive. The search for more accessibility can thus reinforce the anisotropy of space, i.e. its heterogeneity (Baker, 2023, p.281, *tradução nossa*).

Nevertheless, accessibility must be sought, after all, according to Padeiro (2023, p.284), “having or not having access to a place, and above all to the resources and opportunities it provides, can make a big difference in economic, cultural and health terms”, because

[...] healthy food stores, sports facilities and green areas influence the behavior and therefore offer the possibility of reducing some risk factors such as lack of physical activity or social isolation. Low accessibility to these resources can mean, for example, that people eat a less balanced diet, do less physical activity or take fewer walks in a relaxing environment. Differences in avoidable mortality, cardiovascular disease or mental health can thus be reinforced (Costa, Tenedório, & Santana, 2020; Lourei-ro, Santana, Nunes, & Almendra, 2019; Santana, Costa, Mari-Dell'Olmo, Gotsens, & Borrell, 2015; P. Santana, Santos, & Nogueira, 2009, *tradução nossa*).

In a convergent perspective, according to Vargas (2020, p.3), activities have spatial repercussions, since “they are both the cause and consequence of the movement of people, goods and services in the territory, emphatically reflected in the quality of urban life”. From the above statements, it can be seen that urban centralities can virtually play an important role in reducing socio-economic disparities in a city. This requires strategies and approaches such as providing basic urban infrastructure, as well as access to job opportunities and essential services such as education, health, leisure and commerce, for residents of nearby areas, reducing the need for long commutes and disparities in access to these resources, which are fundamental for a more equitable standard of living. It is also worth mentioning the possibility of social integration and community activities in public spaces, providing diversity and inclusion, reducing social and economic barriers, which therefore enables community engagement and participation.

This aspect is reinforced today by considering different paradigms, one of which is the broad concept of the “15-minute city”, coined in 2016 by Carlos Moreno, a professor at Panthéon Sorbonne University. In this concept, from a “chrono-urbanism⁵” perspective, there is a concern with the space-time relationship in cities and, consequently, with reducing the long, time-consuming, costly and unnecessary journeys made by city dwellers to and from the six essential urban social functions. These are: (a) living, (b) working, (c) commerce, (d) health, (e)

⁵ There are studies that refer to the “City of +15 Minutes”, since the 15-minute time interval is not particularly important, but the essential thing is to focus on time and change urban planning from the classic distance-based approach, in which distances are measured in meters or kilometers, to a more time-based approach, in which distances are calculated in minutes. This promotes a human scale, active green mobility and social interactions. Source: <https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/The-15-minute-city-International-experiences>

education and (f) entertainment, which must be connected, meet the needs of and be accessible to all demographic groups within a 15-minute commuting radius, whether on foot, by bicycle or public transport. This concept has the following pillars: (a) hyper-proximity - reducing distances; (b) diversity - in land use and people and cultures; (c) density - the ideal number of people that a given area can comfortably support in terms of urban service provision and resource consumption; (d) omnipresence - potential accessibility for all citizens, especially considering the participation of residents and the provision of services in real time through various platforms - including digital ones (Moreno et al., 2021).

This concept is in line with others that emphasize the human scale, walkability, social interactions between residents and sustainability, as advocated by Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (2000 [1961]), Jan Gehl in works such as *Cities for People* (2010), and other scholars and/or urban planners who strive to improve urban vitality and promote more sustainable, humane and accessible cities, at different scales, from the entire city to the neighborhoods and streets.

By creating parks, squares and public places in neighborhoods, there would be greater interaction and participation by residents, and in doing so, help to bridge the social gap in access to such facilities. The concept also considers other dimensions related to less time spent commuting, which would be proportional to a higher quality of life, ultimately leading to the construction of more resilient and healthier spaces (Moreno et al., 2021).

The situation also points to the recognition of the importance of the state and networks of solidarity and proximity, thinking of oneself and the other. In terms of the organization of the city's commercial structure, the tendency to strengthen urban centralities stands out, as a condition in which there is a concentration of activities to meet the needs of residents in terms of goods and services. In addition, it is worth adding that some concepts related to space and time in cities, such as the pairs: center and periphery, and public space and private space, are being/will be reframed.

Another paradigm, based on the circulation of information, one of the fundamental elements of the current technical-scientific-informational period (Santos, 1999), as Vargas (2022, p.8) points out, is an ongoing change that is moving towards a "dispersion of areas of centrality, with varying intensities, temporary and ephemeral, without the capacity for polarization". In this sense, the author highlights the tendency for on-demand, moldable, adaptable or flexible centralities, according to the changing needs of the population and the environment, to be a new paradigm for cities. However, it is important to remember that cities are dynamic, complex and conflicted spaces, and that this issue can present, dialectically, several facets.

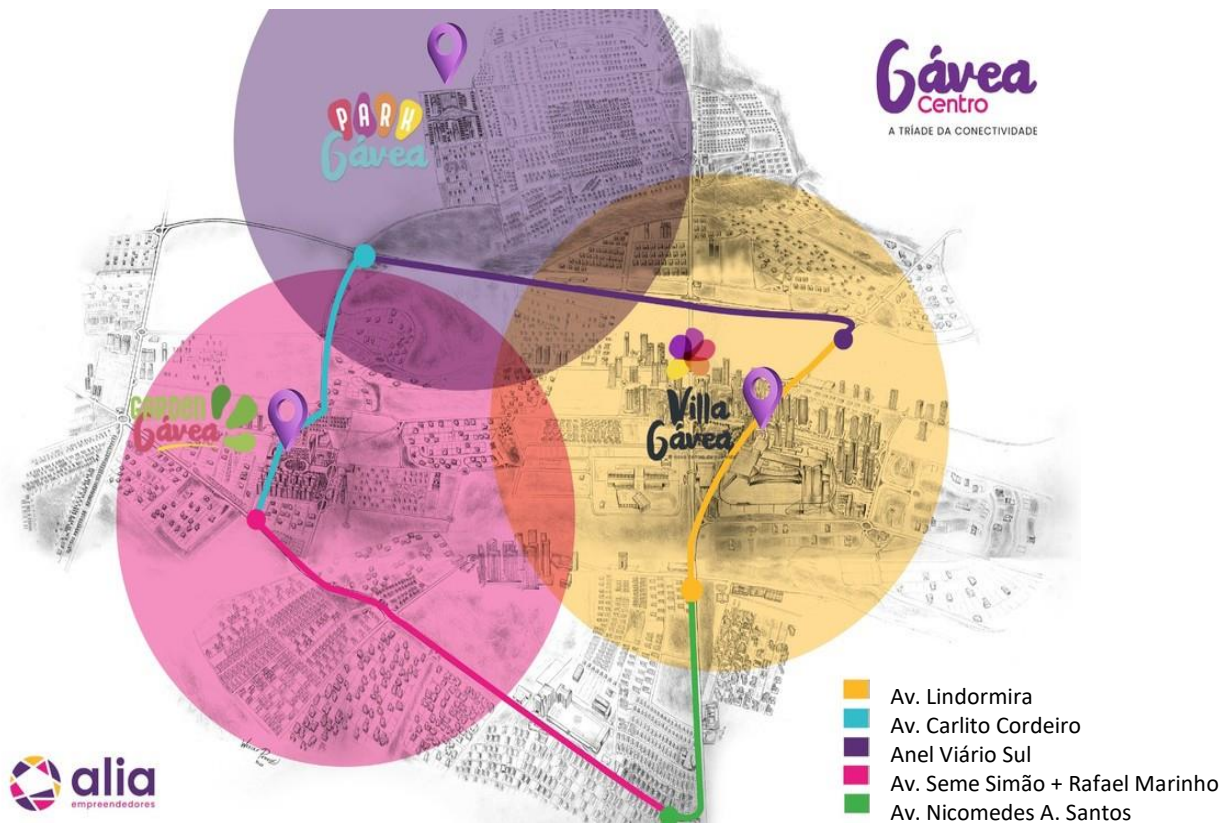
3 A LOOK AT THE SOUTH SECTOR OF THE CITY OF UBERLÂNDIA-MG

When considering the context of the city of Uberlândia-MG, specifically its South Sector, there is the proposal by Alia Empreendedores⁶, which is underway and is described in an

⁶ A company based in Uberlândia that acts as an intermediary and agency for professional, scientific and technical services for builders and developers. Through partnerships, the company has expanded its activities to other Brazilian cities, such as Uberaba-MG, Campinas-SP, Ribeirão Preto-SP and Sorocoba-SP, and to the Algarve in Portugal.

article published on August 30, 2023, in the G1 Triângulo Alto Paranaíba newspaper, as a “mega project ‘Triad of Connectivity’”. Materialized in Gávea Centro, it is made up of three centralities: Villa Gávea, Gávea Garden and Park Gávea”, as shown in image 1.

Image 1: Spatialization of Villa Gávea, Gávea Garden and Park Gávea in the South Sector of Uberlândia-MG
Source: Alia Entrepreneurs, 2023.



The project, also based on information from G1, proposes the establishment of a network of interactive and complementary centralities to meet the different demands of the immediate surroundings: “a sports square in Park Gávea, offering housing close to the colleges in Villa Gávea and leisure spaces in Gávea Garden”. Complementarity occurs because each of the centralities is aimed at a specific public, according to their social class, culture, experiences and other particular aspects, while interaction is based on diversity in the broadest sense: social, ethnic, sexual, generational, etc. and their encounters. In this sense, these three centralities complement each other and connect, as they are open and democratic spaces that can be used by anyone who wants to (Alia Empreendedores, 2023, s/p).

Furthermore, by being designed with commercial activities and services, leisure facilities, parks, sports areas and housing for different generations and family sizes, the centralities “influence, value and, above all, serve the surrounding communities”, creating “value for the community”, as well as envisioning the conformation of “a new model of center, unprecedented in Brazil, which is not just a commercial space; it is a place to live, enjoy and meet”. This model of interactive center, Gávea Centro, is based on an arrangement of multiple networks that are open to expansion, encompassing other centralities that already exist or could exist, thus avoiding saturation (Alia Empreendedores, 2023, s/p).

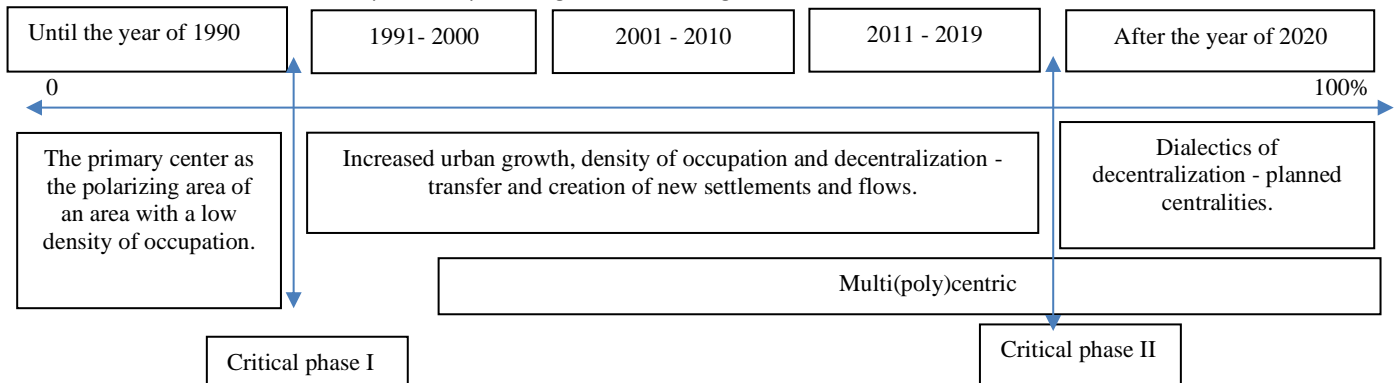
As the text above points out, the triad of centralities, Villa Gávea, Jardim Gávea and Park Gávea, presupposes respect for diversity, in the sense that it embraces sociocultural particularities. Thus, in the terms of Santos (2004), they suggest considering the mixed population, the built environment and the segmented but unique economy. A colossal, audacious and necessary challenge!

Given that this is an ongoing process, even though partially, it is worth looking at the idealization/conception, implementation/development and exploring the possible-impossible of such a proposal.

As a starting point for consideration, we can consider an axis⁷, flow chart 1, which represents movement and which is both temporal and spatial: spatial, in the sense of the characteristics of the urban structure (from the monocentric city to the multi(poly)centric city), so it represents the changes that have taken place in space; and temporal, as it represents different moments (the beginning of urban expansion and decentralization, installation and constitution of new centralities).

⁷ The idealization of a space-time axis to describe the process, situate and date the (relative) cuts is inspired by Lefebvre's (1999) proposal.

Flow chart 1 - Spatio-temporal diagram of the changes in the South Sector of Uberlândia-MG.



Org: The author, 2024.

We start from the absence of centrality in the South Sector to the culmination of the process for the formation of a possible new center, based on the accelerated process of urban structuring. Along this axis, there are borderline moments, critical phases, between the real/visible, therefore knowable, and the virtual/unknown, subject to conjectures of the possible-impossible.

With regard to changes in the urban structure, the general pattern of the city's ⁸ growth and the constitution of centralities are considered in a related way, because

Firstly, we have to consider the territorial growth of the city, i.e. the rhythms and forms of the extension of the urban fabric, which increase or decrease the distances from the main center. Secondly, and in combination with the first movement, there is, contradictorily or not, the distribution of occupational concentration in urban spaces, revealing mixtures of densities arranged unevenly in the cities. These two dynamics interfere with a third, that of the forms of agglomeration between urban centers. These changes result in a reorientation of the logic of movement in cities, accompanied by the segmentation of society, in terms of the possibilities of access to the different areas that make up the basis of the conformation of centrality, both at the level of the city and at the level of the urban network and system (Sposito, 2013, p.48, *tradução nossa*).

Thus, at first, up until the 1990s, the growth of the Southern Sector of Uberlândia was not yet intense and generally occurred on the outskirts, for example with the Morada da Colina, Cidade Jardim⁹ and Jardim Karaíba¹⁰ neighborhoods. Occupational concentration was low, with many unbuilt plots and "urban voids". UberShopping, inaugurated in 1987, was the first development to decentralize commerce and services in the city's South Sector. However, it was not consolidated due to certain aspects such as the lack of accessibility and the relatively low population density in the South Sector.

The first critical phase, as far as reality is concerned, is related to the start of the urban structuring process, with intense expansion of the urban fabric and decentralization of tertiary

⁸ This term is used in the sense that "cities grow by renovation of the built fabric, generally with an increase in the density of occupation (*infilling*), and by peripheral extension. More recently, these two basic processes have been joined by what can be called '*leapfrogging*', discontinuous forms in more distant areas" (Barata-Salgueiro, 2023, p. 67).

⁹ The occupation that gave rise to the Cidade Jardim neighborhood began between the 1970s and 1980s.

¹⁰ The Jardim Karaíba subdivision, which gave rise to the neighborhood of the same name, dates back to the 1980s. In 1994, the first gated community in the South Sector was set up there.

activities. As a result, the urban structure is redefined and reconfigured, becoming more complex, with dispersed and fragmented areas. The South Sector is occupied with discontinuities, in the sense of the unity of the city, with influences not only on the physical landscape, but also on social relations and the daily experiences of the inhabitants. In the context of the city as a whole, new centralities are emerging, but the city's main center does not lose its importance and its characteristic of being the city's main commercial area. In terms of what was possible for this phase, it is important to think about the role of citizens in the creation and socially fair development of the city.

With a dispersed urban fabric, since the 1990s, the process of urban and city¹¹ structuring in Uberlândia has increased, due to decentralization/recentralization and the installation of new spaces for commercial and service activities as a result of the “modernization” brought about by the arrival of large capitals and new enterprises” (Sposito, 2013), materializing the unfolding of urban centrality in points and lines of the city.

In the South Sector of the city, from 1991 to 2000, both the increase in occupation density and decentralization intensified. At this time, neighborhoods such as Shopping Park¹² and sub-centers such as São Jorge-Granada-Laranjeiras emerged.

In the period 2001-2010, there was a large increase in population growth and, consequently, spatial expansion, as well as, associated with the decentralization process, the emergence of new centralities based on commercial axes, such as Av. Nicomedes Alves dos Santos, and shopping malls, such as Uberlândia Shopping. Based on Sposito (2013), it should be noted that the establishment of *shopping centers* is particularly important for redefining urban centrality and the center-periphery structure, initially in metropolises, but currently in medium-sized cities, particularly those that are undergoing major changes in the process of shaping their urban and interurban centralities, as it is the case of Uberlândia-MG. Between 2011-2019, we must also consider the concept of other centralities, which can be playful and symbolic (Whitacker, 2013), involving experiences and pleasure. Some of these can be leisure and entertainment activities, with a focus on hedonic consumption and experiences (Vargas, 2017, 2022). They can take different forms and perform different functions, reflecting the complexity and diversity of urban activities and seeking to meet the varied needs of a diverse population.

In the South Sector of Uberlândia, the inauguration of the *strip mall*¹³ stands out for this moment. This sector of the city is home to four of the city's six *strip malls*: Pátio Vinhedos, Shopping Village Altamira, Gávea Business and Galeria Jacarandás. Also noteworthy are the specialized centers, such as the Uberlândia Medical Center (UMC), characterized as a “multiplex

¹¹ Sposito (2013, p.49), taking up previous discussions (Sposito, 1996, 2005 and 2007), uses the terms “urban structuring and city structuring, to distinguish changes in roles and contents (urban) from changes in spaces, with regard to the forms of their use and articulation between them (of the city). The use of the noun *restructuring* is reserved for moments when the set of transformations in these structures is profound and complex”.

¹² The Shopping Park I and II subdivision was created in 1992. The following make up the integrated neighborhood: the Nossa Senhora Aparecida (part) and Ibiporã (B, C and D) recreational sites, condominiums (such as Park dos Jacarandás I and II, Park dos Ipês I and II, Gávea Sul, Residencial jardins and Varanda sul) and the popular allotments also called Shopping Park, which make up the most recent part of the neighborhood, created in 2009 to serve the “Minha Casa, Minha Vida” Program.

¹³ These are smaller shopping centers that don't focus on leisure activities, but stand out for their strategic location, practicality and ease of access.

health center”, which brings together different activities in the health sector, established in 2014.

As in other medium-sized cities, we can consider, based on the new centralities that have emerged in the South Sector of Uberlândia, that:

The new areas or axes of concentration that express centrality have the quality, or the possibility, of being distinct and, in some cases, complementary. Distinction occurs through morphological characteristics, functional differentiation and socio-economic segmentation. [...] (Whitacker, 2013, p.296, *tradução nossa*).

In the second critical phase, which is marked by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, a multi(poly)centric city is observed, in which the primary or traditional center begins to transfigure, age, specialize¹⁴ and relatively lose its importance. On the other hand, other centrality paradigms are gaining prominence, including those planned and proposed such as integrated, interactive and complementary centralities or the “connectivity triad”. The latter, as they stand, could be the possibility for fostering integration between spaces and social interaction. They contribute to: (a) increasing social cohesion by enabling sociability between different people to be recovered and valued; (b) urban vitality by adding symbolic value to space and promoting feelings of collective personality, respect and trust.

However, in order to do this, it is necessary to be vigilant to ensure continuity with the surroundings, avoiding the materialization of relationships through spatial contiguity, in other words, “centralities without continuity with the surrounding socio-spatial structure”, which constitute the logic of enclaves and socio-spatial fragmentation (Barata-Salgueiro 1998, 2001 *apud* Barata-Salgueiro, 2023).

As such, centralities must effectively establish, above all, relationships based on spatial continuity, i.e. the use of time and space in terms of leisure, shopping, socializing and sociability.

In this way, different structures and objects are considered in which there are spatial interactions with all their immediate surroundings in the city and not just fragments with a certain homogeneity.

This is a fundamental condition for not losing the social richness of the city and, therefore, of the center, which is the sum of everything that exists, “the public space, as a place of information and interaction for all, a stage for diversity and enriching plurality [...], a space for exchanges, not only of goods, but also, and above all, of ideas” (Barata-Salgueiro, 2023, p.74).); for agents to find the difference in the city and for the promises that the different brings to city life to occur as a condition for overcoming crises, as highlighted by Jacobs (2000), Gehl (2010) and Moreno (2016).

The effort must be to understand “the concrete space is that of dwelling: gestures and routes, body and memory, symbols and meanings, difficult maturation of the immature-premature (of the ‘human being’), contradictions and conflicts between desires and needs, etc.” (Lefebvre, 1999, p.166), recognizing the presence of multiple points of reference and centers as essential elements of urban identity, as explored by Kevin Lynch, and solidarity, founded on the

¹⁴ Oliveira (2008) and Alves (2011) show the areas specializing in health services, financial services, car dealerships, etc. present in the central area of Uberlândia-MG.

slow times of the metropolis and which challenges the perversity spread by the fast times of competitiveness (Santos, 2004).

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Centrality as the essence of the urban, which ensures the meeting, agglomeration, integration and sociability between individuals and different social groups, is a kaleidoscope for cities today and in the future. Potentially, they can enable economic, social and environmental improvements, with implications for living conditions, depending on their particularities. They can even contribute to mitigating the socio-spatial segregation and inequality present in contemporary cities.

Therefore, considering that cities are different, especially in terms of their social and economic content, in their own form of organization, it is necessary for each one to create its own combination and mix of principles and interventions, taking into account their complexities and peculiarities for urban structuring, including the constitution of new centralities and, consequently, central areas.

In this sense, the importance of principles such as valuing the complexity and diversity inherent in cities, such as the mix of functions and interactions between people, stands out. Consequently, creating feelings of respect, trust, inclusion, among others, which are essential for urban vitality and for a fairer, more humane and gentler city. In addition to the above, for those who use the space and its resources, dimensions such as accessibility are also important, in its broad sense, including continuity with the surrounding socio-spatial structure, considering spatial interactions with all its immediate surroundings.

In the case of the city of Uberlândia-MG, Gávea Centro is made up of three centralities: Villa Gávea, Gávea Garden and Park Gávea, with particularities that meet different demands, but in an integrated way. In addition to providing for interaction with the surroundings, it is something original and has many possible-impossible consequences for the activities that take place in the city and the urban structure. Therefore, considering the Alia Empreendedores project (2023), when the center is created, because it is interactive, Gávea Centro, it will be different from the traditional, main or historic center, without appropriating it or disqualifying it. But they will become equivalent in their functions, forming a polycentric structure for the city, making it more connected, sustainable, democratic, accessible and inclusive. This is the ideal and what we hope for when we think about building a better city to live in!

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