

## LIFE CYCLE OF BRAZILIAN CITIES

**Hervé Théry**  

Doutor em Geografia pela Université Paris I (Panthéon-Sorbonne)  
Pesquisador emérito do Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique  
Contato: hthery@aol.com

Como citar: THÉRY, H. Life cycle of Brazilian cities.  
*Revista Formação (Online)*, v. 30, n. 56 - Dossiê, p. 3-25  
2023.

**Resumo**

As cidades brasileiras costumam ter o ciclo completo de nascimento, crescimento, declínio – e às vezes desaparecimento ou recuperação – em curtos períodos de tempo, às vezes menos de um século. O texto analisa várias situações, Londrina (Paraná), fundada em 1929, Sinop (Mato Grosso), fundada em 1974, Ouro Preto (Minas Gerais), de 1711 e Paraty (Rio de Janeiro), de 1597. Dentre a criação de capitais de estados, escolhemos os exemplos de Belo Horizonte (1897) e Palmas (1989) e, no âmbito nacional, o caso de Brasília (Distrito Federal), fundada em 1960.

**Palavras-chave:** Ciclo de vida. Cidades brasileiras. Fundação, crescimento, declínio.

**Abstract**

Brazilian cities usually have the full cycle of birth, growth, decline - and sometimes disappearance or recuperation- within short periods of time, sometimes less than a century old. The text looks at several situations, Londrina (Paraná), founded in 1929, Sinop (Mato Grosso), 1974, Ouro Preto (Minas Gerais, 1711), and Paraty (Rio de Janeiro, 1597). Amongst the establishment of state capitals, we have chosen the examples of Belo Horizonte (1897) and Palmas (1989), and at the national scale, the case of Brasília (Federal District), founded in 1960.

**Key-words:** Life cycle. Brazilian cities. Foundation, growth, decline.

**INTRODUCTION**

One remarkable feature of the Brazilian urban history? Of cities' development? Of the urban system? It is possible to observe the complete cycle of birth, growth, decline - and sometimes disappearance or recovery- of cities in short time spans, often less than a century.

This is particularly evident in the case of cities established at agricultural? pioneer fronts, such as the coffee front, that developed during the first half of the 20th century in the States of São Paulo and Paraná, or nowadays on the soybean front in the State of Mato Grosso. Earlier cases of establishment of cities during the colonial and imperial periods offer also examples that allow to perceive the entire life cycle of cities up until their final decline. This is the case of the gold towns in the State of Minas Gerais, which reached their economic and demographic peak in the 18th century, suffered a sharp decline in the 19th century and sometimes have witnessed a recent renaissance due to the increase of touristic activities. In addition, the country has in several occasions created *ex-nihilo* new cities to become capitals of federal States or, in two occasions, cities were created with the aim to become the capital city of the entire country, on dates that span between the end of the 19th century and the end of the 20th century.

The following article therefore analyses examples of cities that illustrate these three situations, focusing at first on the city of Londrina (Paraná), founded in 1929, then on Sinop (Mato Grosso), founded in 1974, as agricultural frontier cities; and Ouro Preto (Minas Gerais),

---

founded in 1711, and Paraty (Rio de Janeiro), founded in 1597, as cities established during the colonial and imperial period. Among the creation of State's capitals, are worth to cite the examples of Belo Horizonte (1897) and Palmas (1989) and at the national level the case of Brasília (Federal District), founded in 1960, which reached in 2017 the three million inhabitants mark.

In each case, will be examined the reasons for the founding of the city, generally related to an economic cycle of production, for export, of ores or agricultural commodities. Then the modalities of its growth and its positioning in the pre-existing urban and transport networks, including the already existing transport networks or those created in a specific occasion (e.g. the "royal route" for the gold export, or the creation of coffee railways and the trans-Amazonian roads). Special attention will be paid to cities that for a certain period played the role of *boca do sertão* (literally meaning "the hinterland mouth", it is an expression used to refer to the gateways to frontier zones), which lasted only until other competing cities supplanted them in the moment when the pioneer front advanced a step further inside the hinterlands.

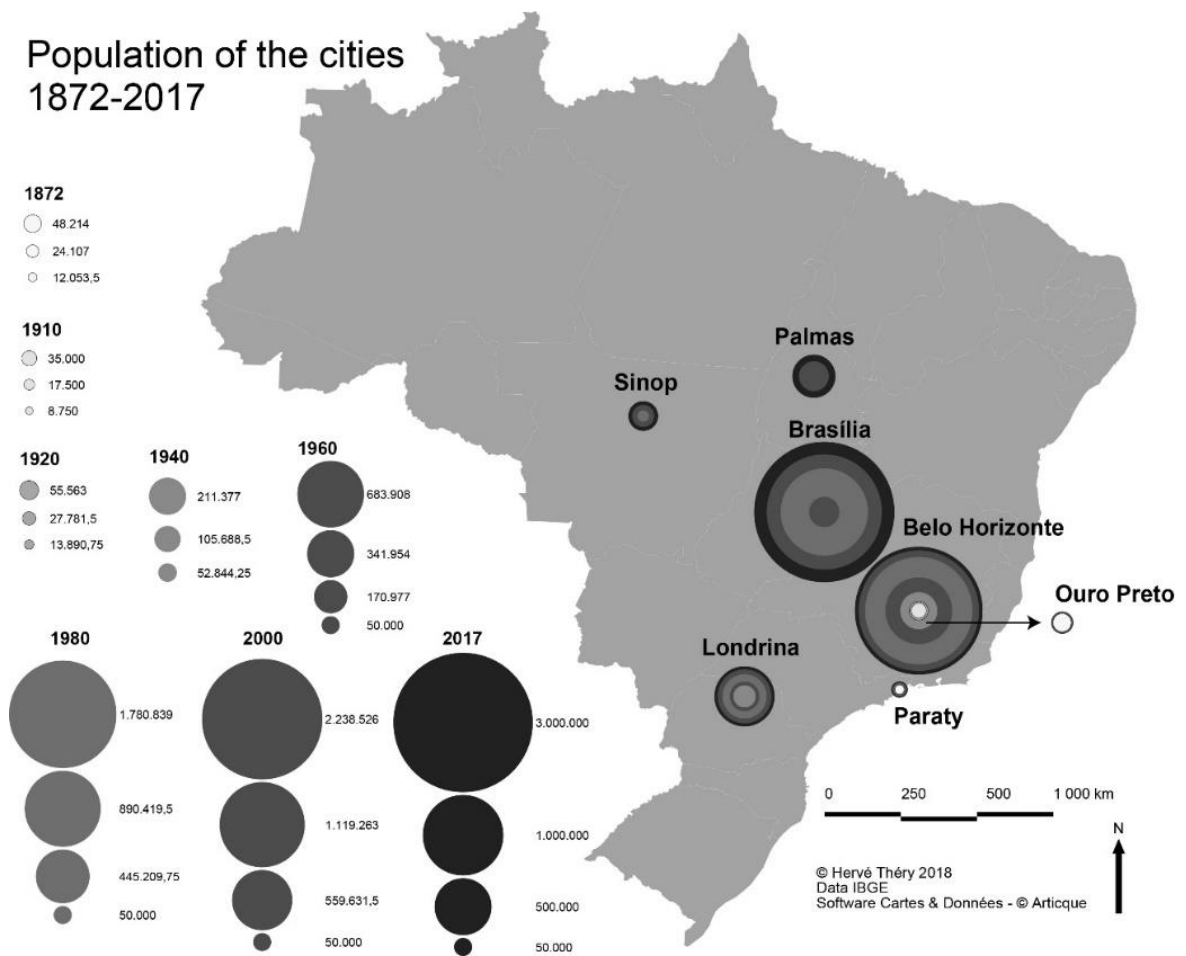
Finally, the article will also include an analysis of the ulterior destiny of those cities after the end of the peak of the economic cycle that gave birth to them. This would include situations where either economic? Population? Land occupation? growth stabilized on different economic? bases, or a more or less pronounced economic? Socio-Political? decline, followed or not by a recovery in another situation. In the case of voluntarily created capitals, it is valid to assess whether this initiative has had the expected success in giving the new city a real administrative command role and how these cities function in terms of reorganizing the territory under their area of influence.

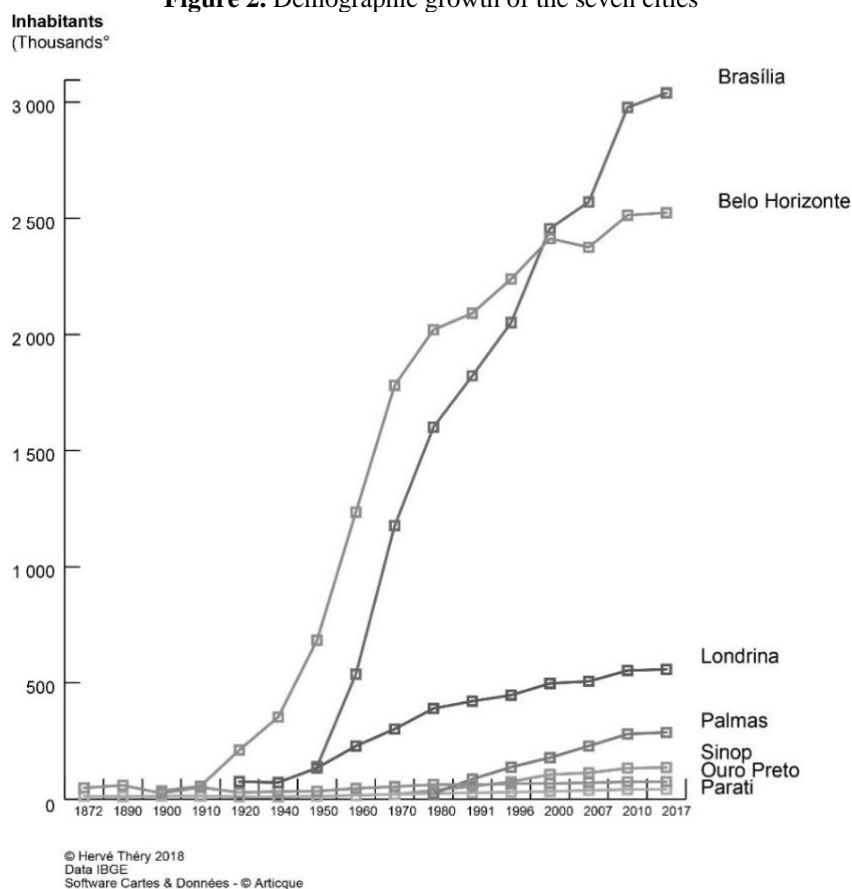
Can you please add a commentary on how you think it is interesting/relevant to analyse in parallel the life cycle of cities emerging from different necessities and historical moments? Do you have any comments on how this type of economic or administrative (political) origins in the basis of the establishment of new cities may serve to understand the potential capacity of a city to survive long periods? Or do you see in the lifecycles of Brazilian cities, some features which are particular to Brazil? How about other cities that were built at agricultural fronts/ or as administrative capitals in the rest of the world?

**Table 1.** Summary of the seven cities

<b>Creation</b>			
	<b>Date of foundation</b>	<b>Reasons of foundation</b>	<b>Economic cycle</b>
<b>Londrina</b>	1929	Pioneer front	Coffee
<b>Sinop</b>	1974	Pioneer front	Soybean
<b>Paraty</b>	1597-1606	Pioneer front	Gold
<b>Ouro Preto</b>	1711	Pioneer front	Gold
<b>Belo Horizonte</b>	1897	State Capital	Political
<b>Palmas</b>	1989	State Capital	Political
<b>Brasília</b>	1960	National Capital	Political
<b>Growth</b>			
	<b>Peak</b>	<b>Transport</b>	<b>Gateways to frontier zones</b>
<b>Londrina</b>	1940-2017	Railway	Yes
<b>Sinop</b>	1974-2017	Roads	Yes
<b>Paraty</b>	1700-1763	Trail	No
<b>Ouro Preto</b>	1700-1897	Trail	No
<b>Belo Horizonte</b>	1900-2017	Railways	No
<b>Palmas</b>	1989-2017	Roads	No
<b>Brasília</b>	1960-2017	Roads	No
<b>Ultior destiny</b>			
	<b>Stabilized growth</b>	<b>Decline</b>	<b>Recovery</b>
<b>Londrina</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Sinop</b>	No	No	No
<b>Paraty</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Ouro Preto</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Belo Horizonte</b>	No	No	No
<b>Palmas</b>	No	No	No
<b>Brasília</b>	No	No	No
<b>Area of influence</b>			
	<b>Command role</b>	<b>Rebalancing the territory</b>	<b>2017 Population</b>
<b>Londrina</b>	Local	Yes	558.439
<b>Sinop</b>	Local	Yes	135.874
<b>Paraty</b>	No	No	41.454
<b>Ouro Preto</b>	Local	No	74.659
<b>Belo Horizonte</b>	Regional	No	2.523.794
<b>Palmas</b>	Regional	Yes	286.787
<b>Brasília</b>	National	Yes	3.039.444

**Figure 1.** Demographic growth of the seven cities



**Figure 2.** Demographic growth of the seven cities

Could you please add a comment on how the tables and graphics above relate to the lifetime of cities discussion? Why did you choose these seven cities, and their role in the national urban system?

### Birth of pioneer cities

Creations *ex nihilo* of cities still happen in Brazil today, because its territory is still in formation and some regions are still nowadays being occupied and made to produce mineral and agricultural commodities - not without damages for an environment until then preserved and for the people who used to live there. These pioneering conquests occurred, in the first half of the twentieth century, in the South and Southeast regions, today in the Central West and the Amazonian North: Londrina and Sinop are, respectively, good examples of these two periods.

## LONDRINA

The reason of Londrina's foundation in 1929 is the expansion of the coffee pioneer front. A little less than ninety years later, the regional capital of Northern Paraná had a population of over half a million inhabitants, went through all the stages of growth and must now face all the problems of urban maturity: heavy traffic, segregation, degradation of the environment. Both successes and problems make Londrina an exemplary case amongst Brazilian cities, as it has run in less than a century the complete cycle from birth to maturity.

**Figure 3.** Londrina in 1934



Source: IPPUL-Instituto de Pesquisa e Planejamento Urbano de Londrina.

### **Date of foundation:1929**

### **Reasons for the founding**

Londrina was founded by the *Companhia de Terras Norte do Paraná* settlement company, with British capital (hence its name, meaning in Portuguese “Londoner”). Its aim was to create a new base for the development of coffee culture, which after having traveled all the State of São Paulo from East to West was then advancing in the north of Paraná. Does this link to the geographical/ climatic features of the region?

### **Modalities of growth**

The city has experienced continuous population growth since its foundation, first based on the export of coffee by rail and then by road, as the gateway to a pioneering region (*boca do sertão*).

### Ulterior destiny

When coffee production fell sharply with the 1975 frosts, the region was able to convert into soybean production and gradually developed agro-industrial and service activities that allowed it to continue growing.

### Area of influence

Londrina is today, in competition with its neighbor Maringá, the regional capital of Northern Paraná but is a little larger than its rival is, with 558 439 inhabitants (Maringá has 406 693).

### SINOP

The city of Sinop is the result of the occupation policy of the Brazilian Amazon led by the federal government in the 1970s. Its name comes from the initials of the settlement company, the North-West Company of Paraná (*Sociedade imobiliária do Noroeste do Paraná*), which founded the city, after having carried out actions of the same kind in this southern State (like the one which gave birth to Londrina).

Figure 4. Sinop today



Source: <http://www.sinop.mt.gov.br/sic/>



---

**Date of foundation: 1974****Reasons for the founding**

The pioneers of Sinop came mainly from Paraná, and began arriving in 1972 and 1973. When the project launched, 400 men and machines crossed the Rio Verde river and founded, besides Sinop, three other smaller cities (Vera, Santa Carmem and Cláudia), and opened 1,400 kilometers of roads.

**Modalities of growth**

Sinop's real economic take-off dates from the arrival, in the 1990s, of the pioneer soybean front (and its associated products, maize and cotton). The city is located on the BR-163 road, the main exit route for those products: this has led to the development of a transport logistics function and the deployment of new businesses focused on exporting and processing raw materials. In the last ten years, the number of companies has increased by about 150%, between 2010 and 2016 9,062 companies in the industry and trade sectors have established themselves in Sinop.

**Ulterior destiny**

The city has been growing steadily since its foundation and, although recent, it is one of the municipalities with the highest indices of development and quality of life in Brazil. In addition to its function of sending agricultural products to the South, its location makes now also Sinop the main point of support on the road to the Amazonian port of Santarém, in the state of Para, located “only” 1400 kilometers away in a northern direction.

**Area of influence**

Currently, the growth of Sinop continues, it had in 2017 135 874 inhabitants. The city is now one of the main urban centers of the north of Mato Grosso (in competition with Lucas do Rio Verde, Sorriso and Alta Floresta) with regard to the medical and hospital, educational, industrial, commercial and leisure aspects.

**Decline and rebirth of former pioneer cities**

To better understand the “life cycle of Brazilian cities” and fit it into the general theme of the “lifetime of urban, regional and natural systems” we can, to benefit from the perspective

---

given by history, look at past cases. Some cities once knew pioneering conquests comparable to the present ones, but had then time to know stagnation, decline and - sometimes - rebirth on other bases. This is the case of cities that experienced gold rushes in the eighteenth century, such as Ouro Preto, or were used for the export of precious metal, such as Paraty.

## **PARATY**

The city of Paraty, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, is one of the busiest tourist spots in Brazil; it is now one of the top twenty destinations in the country (and one of the top five for French and English visitors). However, tourism has only developed in the last fifty years, the main factors of its recent growth being its exceptional location and the new roads that have allowed the rediscovery and enhancement of its historical heritage, dating back to the time when the city was the outlet of the “gold route”, well preserved by a long period of isolation.

### **Date of foundation: 1667**

The date of foundation of the city is not firmly established: according to some, a small settlement dedicated to San Roque already existed in 1560; others trace its origin to 1597, when Martim Correa de Sá undertook an expedition against the Guaianá Indians in the Paraíba Valley. Others prefer 1606, when the first settlers arrived. In any case, in 1660 the situation was good enough for its inhabitants to demand their separation from Angra dos Reis and their rise to the rank of vila, obtained in 1667 under the name of Villa de Nossa Senhora dos Remedios de Paratii.

### **Reasons for the founding**

Paraty has become a prosperous trading post because of its strategic position on the shore of Ilha Grande Bay. It was here that the trail coming from the Minas Gerais region (literally “the general mines” (where enormous gold deposits were discovered at the end of the 17th century) reached the sea: thanks to this “gold path” its port had then become the second of the country.

**Figure 5.** Playing slavery in Paraty

Source: ©Hervé Théry (2009).

### Modalities of growth

In 1702 the governor of Rio de Janeiro had promulgated the “Mining Regulations” which provided that only cattle could be brought from Bahia, and that all other products should pass through Rio de Janeiro (then a very small town), then from there “take the direction of Paraty”. In 1703 the Royal Letter of May 9 ordered the establishment of a *Casa de Quintar* (literally a house where to take the 20% share of the gold for the Crown) to control the flow of gold from mines to Rio de Janeiro, and men and goods in the opposite direction.

Unfortunately for Paraty, from 1710-1711 was underway the opening of another path leading straight from Rio de Janeiro to Minas by way of the Serra dos Orgãos, reducing the travel time by half. In 1767, the development work of the *caminho novo*, the “new path”, was complete, that of Paraty becoming the *caminho velho*, the “old path”.

### Ulterior destiny

With the fall of the gold trade, Paraty turned to the production of *cachaça* (the Brazilian version of rum), used as barter money to buy African slaves. The former gold road became more and more the way to get them to the coffee plantations of the Paraíba Valley, and

to get the coffee bags out. On the way in also came the luxury goods imported from Europe by the “coffee barons”, who provided the country with its main wealth, and the government - via the export tax - its main tax resource.

In 1850 Emperor Dom Pedro II passed a law prohibiting the slave trade. However, it continued in the form of contraband, which passed through Paraty because the slavers found in Ilha Grande Bay many places less controlled than the port of Rio de Janeiro, where they could anchor, and islands where to rest, under good guard, the slaves exhausted by the Atlantic crossing.

Decline began in 1864, when the railway reached the Paraíba Valley at Barra do Piraí and the whole valley began to use it to sell its produces, causing the final decadence of Paraty and of the old gold path. The *coup de grace* was the abolition of slavery in 1888, which provoked such an exodus that, while the city had 16,000 inhabitants in 1851, it had only at the end of the nineteenth century, according to a traveler of the time, “600 old men, women and children”.

The city then remained virtually isolated for decades, which preserved it as it was at the end of the coffee cycle and in the mid-twentieth century it had about the same extent and appearance as then. Both Paraty and its heritage were rediscovered in 1954, with the reopening of the Paraty-Cunha road linking it to the state of São Paulo. The movement then intensified with the construction of the Rio-Santos road (BR-101) in 1973, connecting it, along the coast, to the two metropolises. Initially “discovered” by intellectuals and artists, who found there beautiful houses at very low prices, the city gradually became a popular destination thanks to its heritage, but especially to its landscapes, which allowed him to combine cultural, ecological and seaside tourism.

Paraty became “State patrimony” in 1945, has been registered in the inventory of the *Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico and Artístico Nacional* in 1958 and classified “national monument” in 1966. It officially has 88 cultural attractions, including the Festival da Pinga (*cachaça*) and the Paraty International Literary Festival (FLIP), which attracts every year writers from around the world.

### **Area of influence**

The situation of Paraty favors its new tourist role: it is located halfway between the two biggest cities of Brazil, 248 km from Rio de Janeiro and 330 km from São Paulo. This is obviously a major asset since the first has more than 12 million and the second more than 20

million inhabitants, among which the largest concentration of high-income families in the country. It can therefore count on an large pool of well-to-do customers, to which it is well connected by the coastal road and, by the highways that connect the two metropolises with each other (further west, in the Paraíba valley) and from which several perpendiculars allow to go down the Serra do Mar and join the coast. It had a permanent population of 41,454 inhabitants in 2017, but it welcomed the same year nearly 36,000 people during the New Year holidays, and during the Carnival the number of tourists exceeded 22,000 people in six days.

## **OURO PRETO**

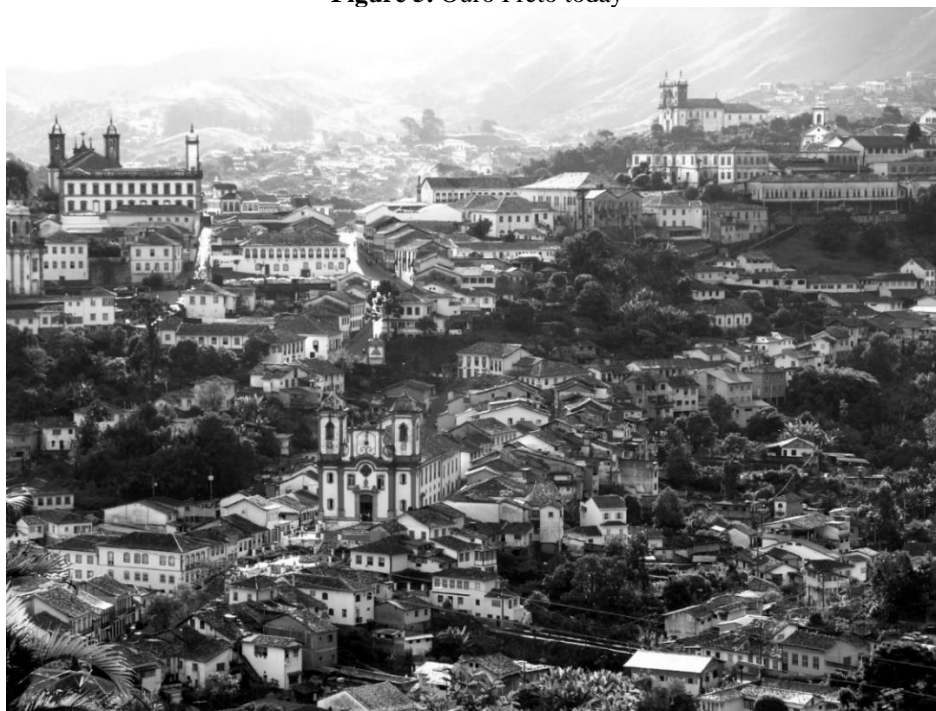
Ouro Preto is located in one of the main areas shaped by the gold cycle of the XVIII century, one of the greatest “gold rushes” in history. Officially, 800 tons of gold were shipped to Portugal, not to mention what was circulated in an illegal manner, nor what remained in the colony, such as gold used in the ornamentation of the churches. The city became the most populous in Latin America, counting around 40 thousand people in 1730 and, a few decades later, 80 thousand. At that time, the population of New York was less than half of that number and the population of São Paulo did not reach eight thousand.

### **Date of foundation:1711**

The origin of Ouro Preto is the “Arraial do Padre Faria” (Father's Faria camp), founded by the bandeirante Antônio Dias de Oliveira and by Father João de Faria, around 1698. Joining these various camps, it was elevated to the category of *vila* in 1711 with the name of Vila Rica. In 1720, it became capital of the new captaincy of Minas Gerais, in 1823, after the Independence of Brazil, it received the title of Imperial City, confirmed as capital of the province and, later, of the State, until 1897.

### **Reasons for the founding**

The city had its heyday during the last decade of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the climax of the explorations by miners coming from São Paulo. They had found the “black gold” (“*ouro preto* in Portuguese”) from which the city derives its name: as it has a high content of iron oxide gold found there did not have its usual golden color, but a rather darker hue.

**Figure 5.** Ouro Preto today

Source: ©Hervé Théry (2009).

### **Modalities of growth**

Striking episodes from the history of Ouro Preto were, from 1708 onwards, the “Emboabas War”, between Paulistas and “outsiders” from other parts of Brazil or Portugal. In 1720 the Revolt led by Filipe dos Santos against the 20% tax on gold taken by the Portuguese crown, and in 1789 the “Inconfidência Mineira”, a conspiracy led by rich miners to make Minas free of the Portuguese yoke. The apogee of Ouro Preto lasted until the end of the 18th century, when the deposits were exhausted and the gold cycle gave way to livestock and agriculture.

### **Ulterior destiny**

With the proclamation of the Brazilian republic in 1889, Ouro Preto came to be seen as an obstacle to the development of the modern State of Minas Gerais, which replaced the province of Minas Gerais. Its leaders decided, then, to transfer of the State capital to a new planned city, the present Belo Horizonte, inaugurated in 1897.

Ouro Preto remained then stagnant for decades, and only much later, in the second part of the twentieth century, did it experience a renaissance, thanks to the tourist valorization of its historical patrimony. The city was the first Brazilian site considered World Heritage by Unesco, title it received in 1980. Before that, it had been classified as State patrimony in 1933 and

---

national monument in 1938. Today's greatest concern is to conserve this patrimony, considering the large number of tourists who visit the city (15 to 25 thousand per month).

Although currently the economy of Ouro Preto depends heavily on tourism, there are also important metallurgical and mining industries in its region. Another resource for the municipality is the presence of the students of the Federal University of Ouro Preto.

### **Area of influence**

Ouro Preto has a purely local influence, included in the area of attraction of Belo Horizonte, its population was in 2017 of 76 659 inhabitants.

### **New capitals**

Another cause of cities creation is the decision to build *ex nihilo* a new capital, either to break with the past, or to benefit from more favorable conditions for urban development, or to rebalance the territory by installing the new capital in a more central and more accessible position. The history of Brazil is rich of this kind of initiative, since the foundation of Teresina, new capital of the State of Piauí (1852): Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais) in 1897, Goiânia (Goiás) in 1932, the new federal capital, Brasília, in 1960 and Palmas (Tocantins) in 1989. We have chosen the cases of Belo Horizonte, one of the most significant successes in demographic terms, Palmas, the most recent, and Brasília, whose population has grown from zero to 3 million inhabitants in sixty years.

### **BELO HORIZONTE**

The city was planned and built as the new political and administrative capital of Minas Gerais State. It then had an accelerated population growth, reaching more than one million inhabitants less than seventy years after its foundation, and 2.5 million today, after 120 years.

**Figure 6.** Belo Horizonte today

Source: <https://prefeitura.pbh.gov.br/>

**Date of foundation:1897****Reasons for the founding**

The transfer of the capital city of the State intended to replace the old colonial capital, Ouro Preto, by a brand new city, designed under the influence of the ideas of positivism, in a moment of strong appeal of republican ideology in the country

In 1893, the governor had referred the proposal for the founding of the new capital to the Minas Congress, which indicated that the capital change should occur in a place that met the ideal conditions. A technical commission suggested five localities judged to be in almost equal conditions, including Belo Horizonte, but another one, Várzea do Marçal, being preferred. The proposal returned to the Congress, which, after extensive debates, established that the capital was to be where is now Belo Horizonte. Still in 1893, it was elevated to the category of municipality and capital of Minas Gerais, under the denomination of Cidade de Minas. In 1894, it was dismembered from the municipality of Sabará and on December 12, 1897, the then president of Minas inaugurated the new capital, which already had 10,000 inhabitants. In 1901, the Cidade de Minas had its name changed to the present Belo Horizonte (“beautiful horizon”), after the name of the district.

**Ulterior destiny**

In its early stages, the new capital was the major problem State government: built after overcoming many obstacles, it remained relatively stagnant due to the financial crisis of the



---

early twentieth century and its development was minimal until 1922. One of its few comparative advantages was the proclaimed virtues of its climate, and the city became attractive for the treatment of tuberculosis: hospitals, pensions and hotels multiplied. However, until 1930 the city exercised an almost strictly administrative function. In the 1930s, Belo Horizonte consolidated as a capital, at this time the municipality already had 120,000 inhabitants and was experiencing problems of occupation, and lack of public services.

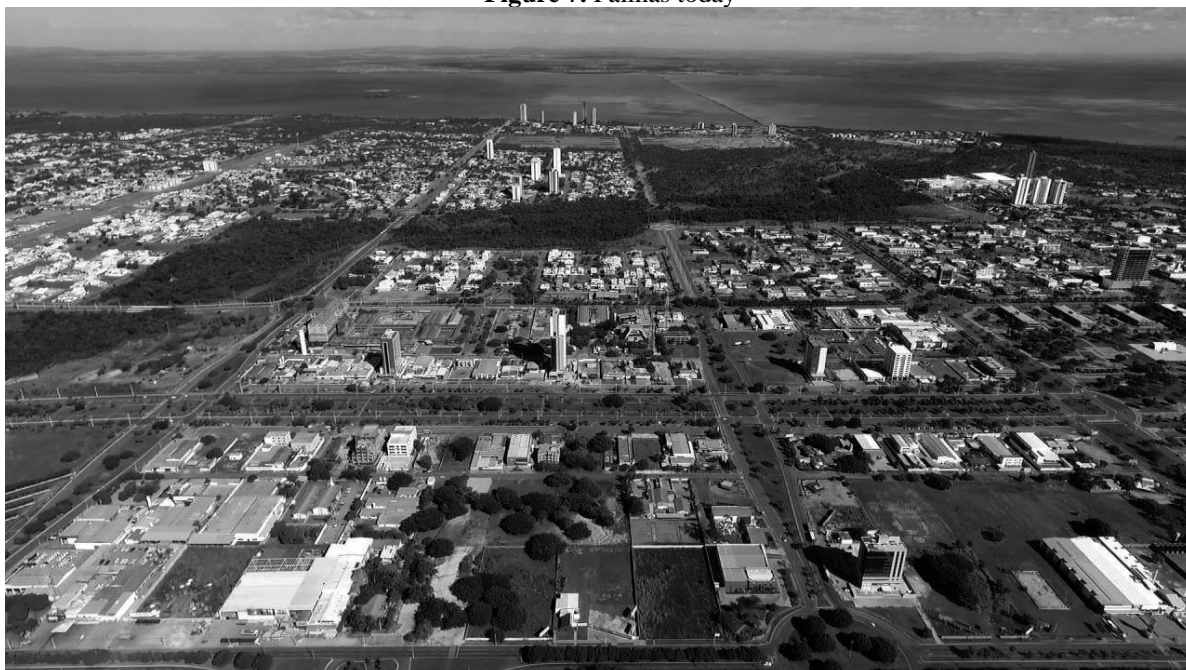
Between the 1930s and 1940s, industrialization advanced, in the 1950s the population of the city doubled again from 350,000 to 700,000, and in the 1960s the city reached more than 1 million inhabitants. The installation of Fiat in 1973, the first automaker off the Rio-São Paulo axis, established a major industrial hub in the state. Today it leads the production and sales of automobiles in the domestic market, becoming the company's most important production unit outside Italy.

### **Area of influence**

The population of Belo Horizonte (or “BH”, as it is usually dubbed) is of more than 2.5 million inhabitants (2,523,794 inhabitants in 2017), making it, besides the uncontested capital of Minas Gerais, and the sixth most populous municipality in the country.

### **PALMAS**

Palmas, capital of Tocantins State, born of the dismemberment of Goiás in 1988, is the most recent State capital in Brazil, after Campo Grande, capital of Mato Grosso do Sul (dismembered of Mato Grosso in 1979). Nevertheless, the latter already existed before becoming capital while the former has been built in a region until then practically empty.

**Figure 7. Palmas today**

Source : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcFzRDIwX5U>.

### **Date of foundation**

The foundation of city occurred on May 20, 1989, shortly after the creation of Tocantins State. However, it was only on January 1, 1990, that Palmas became its definitive capital city.

### **Reasons for the founding**

The city was to be, from the beginning, the capital of the state of Tocantins, and it is still today the Brazil's newest State capital.

### **Modalities of growth**

Palmas is located on the highway BR-153 (also known as Belém-Brasília Highway). This location gives access to the main cities of Tocantins and other regions of the country, especially the Center-South and the other states of the Mid-North (Maranhão, Pará and Amapá) Ulterior destiny

The growth of Palmas was very fast during the decade of 1990. In 1991 the city had a population of 24,261 inhabitants, 130,528 in 2000, 228 332 in 2010 and in 2017 its population was estimated by IBGE to be 286 787 inhabitants.

---

## Area of influence

The development of Palmas made it a hub whose socio-economic influence extends beyond the State of Tocantins to southeastern Pará, northeast of Mato Grosso and south of Maranhão.

## BRASÍLIA

A little more than half a century after its inauguration on April 21, 1960 Brasília and its "satellite cities" (as are known the parts of the city outside the Pilot Plan) have today more than three million inhabitants and are part of an agglomeration of more than four million. The monthly income *per capita* of its citizens was in 2014 (according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) nearly twice the national average, one and a half times that of the State of São Paulo, the richest of Brazil, and four and a half times that of Maranhão, the poorest.

### Date of foundation: 1960

### Reasons for the founding

Brasília has been designed to be the capital of Brazil, and as such, it must be seen in the national context and it is now in many ways its capital. However, we can wonder if it is quite true, as it seems to occupy a position apart (we do not dare say eccentric, since it stands in the center of the country) compared to the center of gravity of Brazil and to the economic flows in which it is inserted. Furthermore, in the project of the founders, Brasília should have been not only be the new capital of the country, but also be exemplary in every way, as they wanted to make it a city with perfectly logical and fluid operation, a model of brotherhood between its inhabitants, rich and poor.

### Modalities of growth

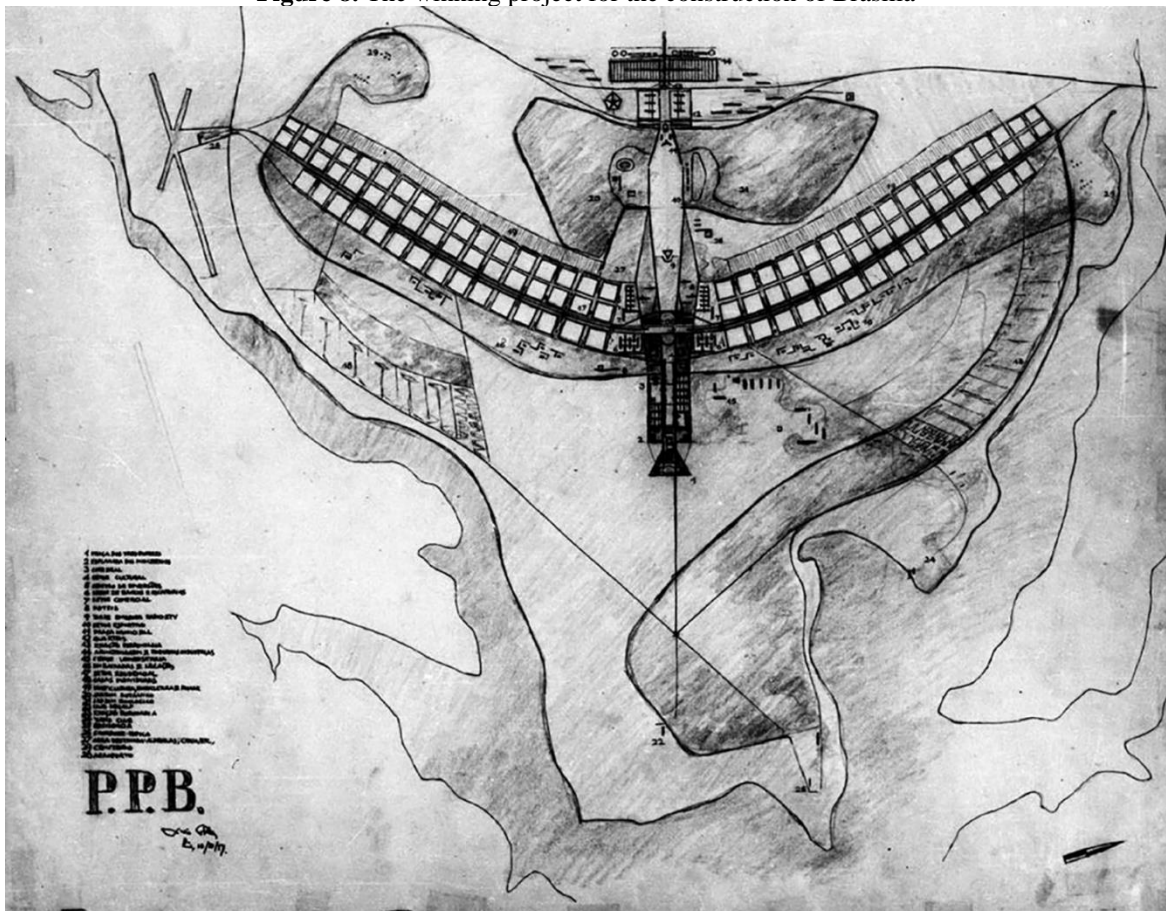
On the national level, Brasília has contributed to refocusing transport flows, but more the ones done by road than the ones done by railways, which until then had been predominant. A striking symbol of this disaffection is the redevelopment of the Brasília railways station, renamed *Rodoferroviaria* (road and railway station), which in fact became its temporary long-distance bus station. It was much needed, as Brasília's construction gave the start of major road works, a series of roads were built to connect it to the rest of the country, radials roads linking

it to the major cities of Sudeste, Nordeste, Amazon and Central West. Connected to most Brazilian cities, at the crossroads of most major roads in the country, plays its full role as a hub.

In terms of air transport, Brasília airport certainly is less busy than those of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro are, but it has experienced strong recent growth thanks to its central position, which makes it a *de facto* hub. Many region-to-region links pass through it, and bring their transit flows in addition to those of the officials on mission or politicians and solicitors “going up” to the capital.

On the local level, the planned city (called “Pilot Plan”) gradually filled up from 68,000 inhabitants in 1960 to just over 200,000 in 2010. The two extensions around the Paranoá Lake (North Lake and South Lake) and Cruzeiro district became administratively autonomous in the mid-1980s but, even with them, the heart of the city today hardly exceeds 300,000 inhabitants, and its growth remains slower than that of the other parts of the Federal District.

**Figure 8.** The winning project for the construction of Brasília



Source <http://doc.brazilia.jor.br/plano-piloto-Brasilia/plano-Lucio-Costa.shtml>.

## Ulterior destiny

Satellite cities have multiplied more rapidly than the planners of the Pilot Plan had anticipated. Their origins are diverse, starting with the ones created to house the construction workers who chose to remain in the city, like *Cidade Livre*, legalized in 1961 under the name of *Núcleo Bandeirante*.

These peripheral offspring of the Pilot Plan experienced an explosive growth, for instance 87% average annual growth for Recanto das Emas between 1991 and 1996. From 1960 to 1980, while the population of the Pilot Plan had quadrupled, Taguatinga multiplied eightfold (reaching 361,063 inhabitants in 2010). Whenever the urban fabric is consolidated, the influx of people reduces, and a certain normalization of the city occurs, as well as an incipient “gentrification” of the best-equipped areas, accompanied by an increase in real estate prices and a modification of the social composition.

## Area of influence

Brasília has become the capital of Brazil, although it is not the only one. Goals defined by official projects have been achieved, in more than one way. As early as 1948, Francis Ruellan had summed up the alternative between two possible functions conditioning the choice of the site: “Finally, it is necessary to define what is expected of the new capital. Should it be exclusively a political and administrative center, enjoying all the possible amenities for itself and in its neighborhood, placed in an already densely populated area? In this case it is south of the central plateau that we will find the best sites. If, on the contrary, the capital is to be in addition a ferment, a center of colonization and irradiation towards the great *sertão*, or backwoods, of the North and the West, it is necessary to place it as some big cities are located. Beijing for example, is the political capital at the same time as a large land port and a starting point for caravans to Mongolia and Manchuria. Belo Horizonte played this role of ferment for the São Francisco *sertão*, Goiânia plays it now in the best possible way for its surroundings and further north” (Ruellan p.100).

Brasília has fulfilled both these functions at the same time: it is a “political and administrative center” and in fact enjoys “all the possible conveniences, for itself and in its neighborhood”, attracting migrants fascinated by this islet of wealth. Even if it was not “placed in a zone already densely populated”, the migratory movement has been responsible for creating

this situation. It has also been “a ferment, colonization and irradiation center”, thanks to the roads built to connect it to both populated areas and pioneering frontiers of the West and North.

Undisputed federal capital, pioneering capital, Brasília is also changing scale, like many other metropolises in the world. Its real functional space is not only the *Distrito federal* under the direct jurisdiction of the Federal State, but also its “*entorno*” (“surroundings”). Since 1998, it is officially part of the RIDE, (*Região Integrada de Desenvolvimento do Distrito Federal e Entorno*) created to “articulate the administrative action of the Union, the States of Goiás and Minas Gerais and the Federal District”, much bigger: the “DF” had 3,039,444 inhabitants in 2017, and the RIDE already had 4.4 million. This *entorno* attracts more and more migratory currents, coming mainly from Goiás, the neighboring State, but also from all the country. Many small towns are in formation, such as Cidade ocidental or Valparaiso, built along the lines of communication, which explains the discontinuous nature of this periphery, modeled on the geometry of the transport network.

The emerging metropolis, unlike the planned city that was its starting point, is indeed now a fragmented territory, marked by increasingly strong oppositions between rich and poor neighborhoods, very different from what had dreamed its founding fathers.

## CONCLUSION

The extraordinary dynamism of the Brazilian urban network thus offers many examples, observable until today, of the “lifetime of urban systems”, much more than in the countries of Europe or Asia, where the origins of the cities are so remote and their history so long and complex that it is difficult to reconstruct the various phases of their trajectories.

Analyzing the contrasting destinies of Brazilian cities makes it possible to observe multiple cases of city creations between the sixteenth century - when the Portuguese arrived - to the present day, where foundation of new cities are still frequent. In the past, some of them were able to grow up without hindrance but for others the causes that allowed their creation no longer exist. Few have disappeared or become ghost towns, but they have sometimes experienced a significant decline if they have not been able to find other bases to continue to grow. For a few, new resources have appeared, for others the legacy of the older phases allowed them to convert to heritage enhancement activities, launching a new cycle superimposed on the old one. We therefore do hope that those examples can contribute usefully to the reflection on “lifetime of urban, regional and natural systems”.

---

**REFERENCES**

BARROS, M. V.; BARROS, O. F. N. ; MELLO, N. A.; THERY, H. Londrina, de la ville pionnière à la maturité. **M@ppemonde**, n. 73, 2004.

BARROS, M. V.; SAMPAIO, R.; BARROS, O. F. N., MELLO, N. A.; GRATÃO, L. H. B.; THÉRY, H. Situações de Londrina. **Cidades**, v. 4, n. 6, p. 115-134, 2008.

CAMARGO MAIA, T. R.; MAIA, T. **Paraty**. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1975.

COTRIM, C. R. M. **Villa de Paraty**. Rio de Janeiro, Capivara, 2012.

MELLO, N. ; LE TOURNEAU, F. M.; THERY, H. ; VIDAL, L. Brasília, quarante ans après, Éditions électroniques de l'Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique Latine, 2004. Available at : <http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00007177>.

RUELLAN, F. Quelques problèmes de l'expédition chargée de trouver des sites pour la nouvelle capitale fédérale des États-Unis du Brésil. **Bulletin de l'association des géographes français**, n. 194-195, p. 90-100, 1948.

THERY, H. Brasília 55 ans après. **La Géographie**: Terre des hommes - Utopies et géographies imaginaires, n. 1558, p. 33-37, 2015.

THERY, H. Brasília, de la capitale à la métropole ?. **Vingtième siècle, revue d'histoire**, n. 81, p. 93-105, 2004.

THERY, H. Brasília, de la vitrine à la métropole. **Géoconfluences**, 2017. Available at : <http://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/informations-scientifiques/dossiers-thematiques/de-villes-en-metropoles/corpus-documentaire/brasil>

THERY, H. L'évolution du "modèle" de Brasília, vers une métropole banale ?. **Cahier des Amériques latines**, n° 41, p. 123-136, 2002/3.

THERY, H. Paraty, atouts de localisation et valorisation du patrimoine historique. **Vi@**, n. 7, dossier Le Brésil, le Tourisme au-delà du Carnaval, 2015. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/viatourism.669>.

VALLE NOGUEIRA, N. **Paraty**: análise histórica do seu desenvolvimento turístico. 2011. Monografia (Graduação em Turismo) - Universidade Federal Fluminense, Departamento De Turismo, Niterói, 2011.

VIDAL, L. **De Nova Lisboa à Brasília**: l'invention d'une capitale. Paris: Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique Latine, 2002.