

Google Arts & Culture

# Brasília: A Modern Capital City with Historical Roots

in association with  sixredmarbles

[Vista das cúpulas do Congresso Nacional, Rui Faquini, Chamber of Deputies, Brazil](#)

## How to Make the Most of This Lesson

This lesson serves as a **road map** for your journey through a rich and exciting collection of online content made available by **Google Arts & Culture's partners**. You will explore photographs, slideshows, voice recordings, and more. The images in this lesson are just a sample of what's available to you via the **Google Arts & Culture** website.

You can complete this lesson independently or with fellow students, a teacher, or another adult. The content is accessible to a wide range of ages, but it's especially geared toward students ages 13 to 16.

## Your journey in this lesson will take you through three major topics:

Chapter 1: Origins of Brasília

Chapter 2: Brasília and Oscar Niemeyer

## You'll see some helpful signs along the way:



Estimated time for completing the chapter



Audio recording or video



Link to more online content



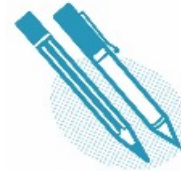
Learning activity

## Tools for Learning

Below are tools for learning that you may need for Digital Discovery lessons:



A device that connects to the internet (a computer or tablet)



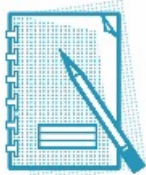
A tool for writing your responses and big ideas (pen, pencil, computer, etc.)



Art supplies (markers, crayons, paint)



Scissors



A notebook



Scrap paper

**Explore! Google Arts & Culture** pictures are **big**. If you want to explore a picture in greater detail, click on the magnifying glass symbol, and zoom in with the zoom slider. By dragging the white box around, you can see even **tiny** details.

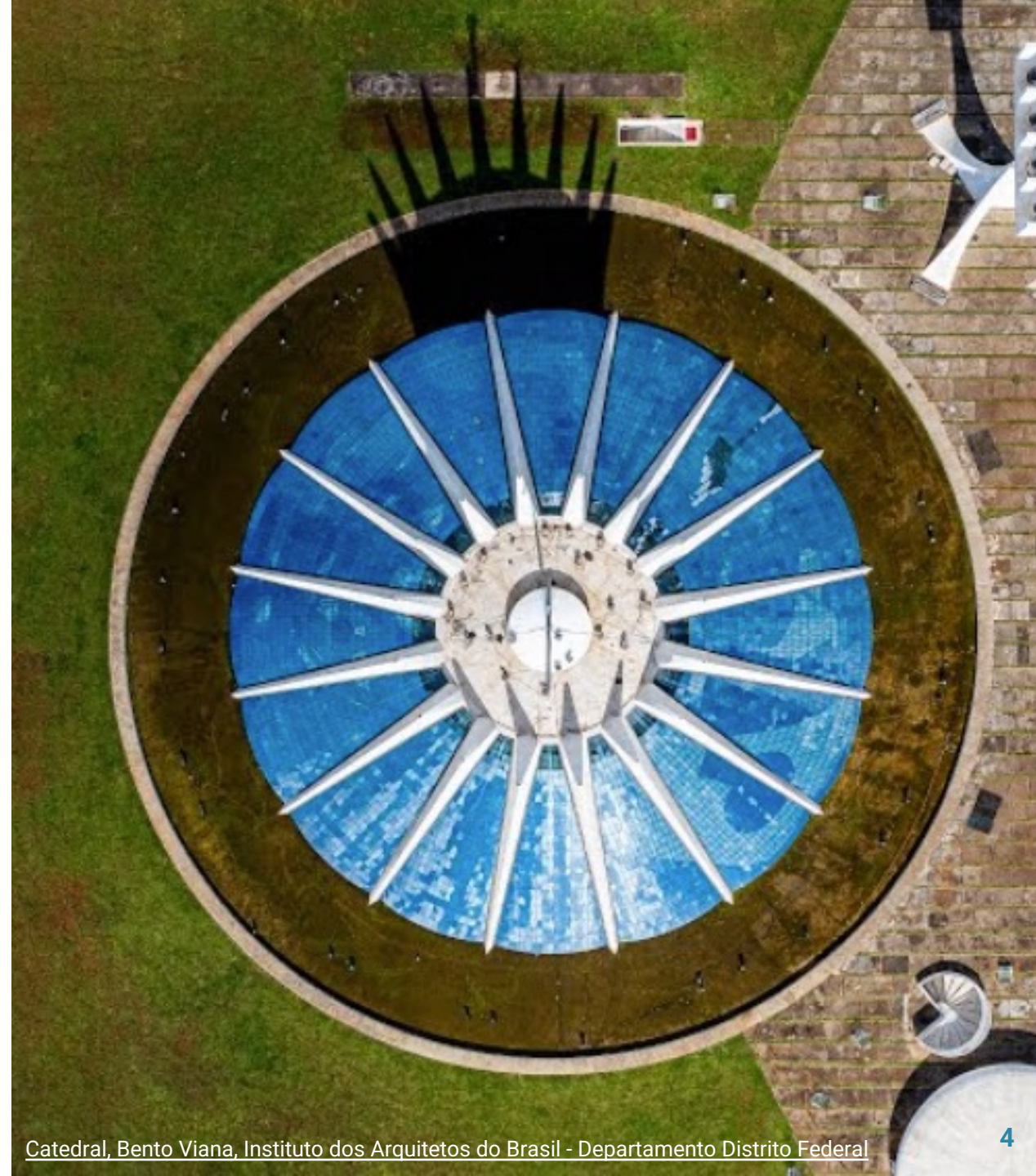
## Welcome to Brasília: A Modern Capital City with Historical Roots

In 1960 the capital of Brazil was moved from Rio de Janeiro to a brand-new interior city called Brasília. The push to move the capital to a new location had first taken form in the late 1700s, during the early Brazilian independence movement. Many Brazilian leaders wanted a more central location, away from the coast. In this module, you'll observe the building of the capital from the ground up, and then you'll design your own capital city.

### What Will You Do?

1. Learn about the building of Brazil's capital city.
2. Find out how long the building process for Brasília lasted.
3. Discover the architects whose work served as the foundation for Brasília.

This photograph shows an aerial view of the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Brasília.



## What's in this lesson?

1. Read about how a new national capital for Brazil was established.
2. Understand how the construction process got underway.
3. See how the project was completed.

## By participating in this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Identify the architects who designed Brasília and many of its important buildings.
2. Understand the term *modernism* as it relates to architecture.
3. Explain the role of modernist architecture in Brasília's design.

## Vocabulary

Central Plateau, infrastructure, iconic, Candangos, satellite town, inaugural, modernist movement, innovative

*Need help with some of these terms? See the glossary at the end of this lesson.*



Membros da Comissão Exploradora do Planalto Central do Brasi chegando em Catalão - Goiás, 1892.  
Henrique Morize 1892 Arquivo Público do Distrito Federal - ArPDF

## Origins of Brasília



*What is this chapter about?*  
The development of Brasília



*How long with this chapter take?*  
1 hour

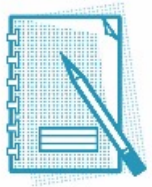
An 1892 mission to study the Brazilian Central Plateau

# Chapter 1: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

## Consider

1. What do you know about the geography of Brazil? Spend a little time researching online to find out more about the location of Brazil and some of its key features.



## Discover

2. What would a leader want to emphasize if they were building a city from the ground up? What kinds of features might a new city need to have?

# A Slow Start

The idea of moving the capital picked up steam after Brazilian independence from Portugal (1822). The plan was even included in Brazil's 1891 constitution. In 1892, exploratory missions were sent out to find promising locations on Brazil's **Central Plateau**. For the next 50 years, however, the debate over the move continued. The country faced many political and economic hurdles that prevented progress from being made.



Ponte sobre o Rio das Almas - Pirenópolis, 1892, Henrique Morize, 1892, Arquivo Público do Distrito Federal - ArPDF

This photograph shows members of an exploratory mission in 1892.



Learn about the first exploratory missions in [this story](#).



Read about the history of the Central Plateau region [here](#).





In the late 1940s, more surveying in the interior was done to determine a site. A general location was mapped out. In 1956, Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek took office and pressed for the project to begin. He had run on a promise of modernizing and industrializing Brazil. Part of this promise included a modern new capital in the Brazilian interior, along with new highways and other **infrastructure** to get there. Kubitschek created a project development company, NOVACAP.



Find out more about the history of the selection process in [this story](#).

# The Project Gets Underway

The Brazilian government then held a design contest to select an architect for the city plan. The requirement was to design a city for 500,000 people that showed the layout of the main elements and how they were interconnected.

In 1957, it was announced that Brazilian architect Lúcio Costa (1902–1998) was the winning designer. Costa's plan, referred to as the Pilot Plan, focused on a "crossroads" at the center of the site. The monumental federal buildings would be built along the straight line, known as the Monumental Axis. Residential buildings were planned for the curved line, the Residential-Highway Axis.

Development was already moving quickly before the plan was complete. A runway for a commercial airport and housing for construction workers was built. Construction on federal buildings, designed by Oscar Niemeyer (1907–2012), the architectural head of NOVACAP, began even before a winner was announced.



Read more about the early years of development [here](#).

This photograph shows the crossing of the axes in 1957.





## A Short Timeline

The main phase of construction of the capital was completed during Kubitschek's presidency. Brasília went from being an isolated spot on the Central Plateau to a fully equipped, modern city with **iconic** architecture in just 1,310 days. This involved constructing not just government buildings but also residential buildings, roads, services, and other infrastructure that modern cities have.

Such a huge task was only possible because of the dedication of the many people who worked on the project—architects, engineers, construction workers, and more. The construction workers who built the city were known as **Candangos**. Many of the migrant workers who moved to the region for work settled in what became known as **satellite towns**—settled areas on the outskirts of the city.



Explore [this story](#) to find out how Costa envisioned neighborhoods for government workers.



Learn more about the Candangos and building the capital city [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Read more about the satellite towns in [this story](#).



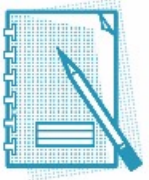
**Inaugural** day for Brasília was April 21, 1960. The city had been finished in record time. In the decades since, Brasília has grown to around 4.7 million people. This photograph shows an aerial view of part of the city in 2011.



See more of Brasília from above in [this story](#).

# Chapter 1: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by answering the question below.



- When you build a city in an undeveloped location, what must you construct beyond the buildings themselves?



Memorial dos povos indígenas Bento Viana, Instituto dos Arquitetos do Brasil - Departamento Distrito Federal

# Chapter 2:

## Brasília and Oscar Niemeyer



*What is this chapter about?*  
How Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer impacted Brasília



*How long will this chapter take?*  
1 hour

# Chapter 2: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

## Consider

1. What does it mean to be “modern”? Look up a definition of the word, and write it down.



## Discover

2. How do an architect's influences impact the development of projects? Think about
  - materials used and
  - form and shape of buildings.

# Niemeyer and Modernism

As you read earlier, Oscar Niemeyer was the head of NOVACAP. Niemeyer was influenced by the **modernist movement** in architecture. Modernist architecture features several key components, including materials like concrete, glass, and steel; **innovative** forms; and minimal ornamentation. Lúcio Costa, for whom Niemeyer worked for several years, was a key figure in modernist architecture.



Learn more about Niemeyer and other modernists [here.](#)



Brasilia, Dmitri Kesse 1961-04, Life Photo Collection



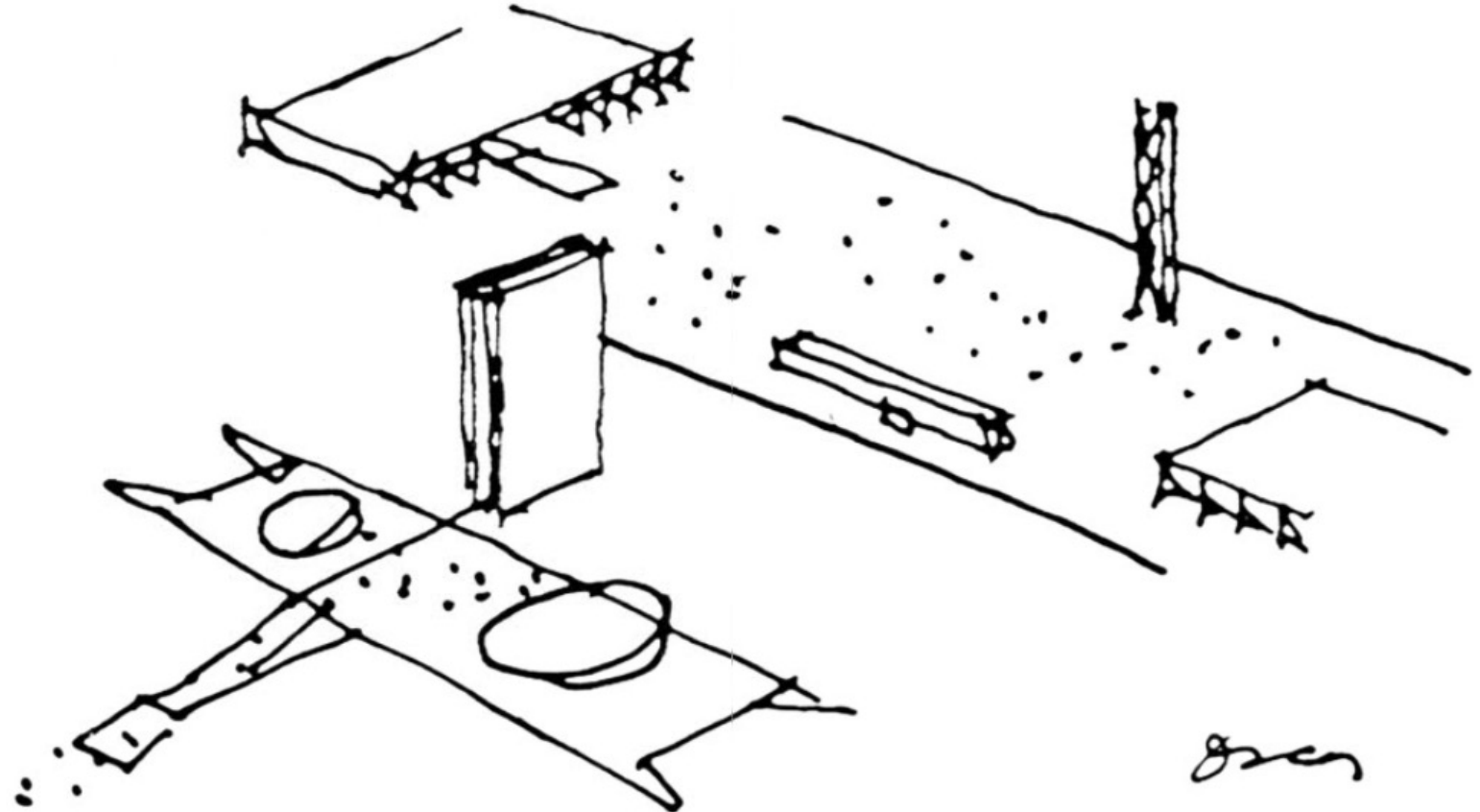
# Brazilian National Congress Palace

On the previous slide, you saw a photograph of the Brazilian National Congress Palace. Here, you can see Niemeyer's initial concept drawing for the compound. The Congress Palace was one of Niemeyer's favorite designs. It is considered an icon of the capital city and a symbol of the importance of lawmaking.



See more about the design and construction of the National Congress Palace in [this story](#).

Learn about the interiors of the palace [here](#).



# The Cathedral

Niemeyer designed more than 25 buildings in Brasília, including the Cathedral, shown here. The Cathedral is thought by some to be one of Niemeyer's best Brasília designs. The Catholic church is mostly below ground, with only its "crown" visible above ground.



Ministério, Catedral Joana França 2012-06-14, Instituto dos Arquitetos do Brasil - Departamento Distrito Federal



View the exterior of the Cathedral [here](#).

See a 3D model of the Cathedral's crown [here](#).

Explore the Cathedral and other Niemeyer buildings [here](#).

# Ministries Esplanade

The first section of the Monumental Axis contains the buildings for the various government ministries, or departments. The heads of the ministries advise the Brazilian president. Niemeyer continued to design other buildings for the city in the decades after the inauguration. These included the University of Brasília main building and the National Museum.



Learn more about the buildings of the University of Brasília [here](#).



Esplanada dos Ministérios Joana França 2010-02-10, Instituto dos Arquitetos do Brasil - Departamento Distrito Federal

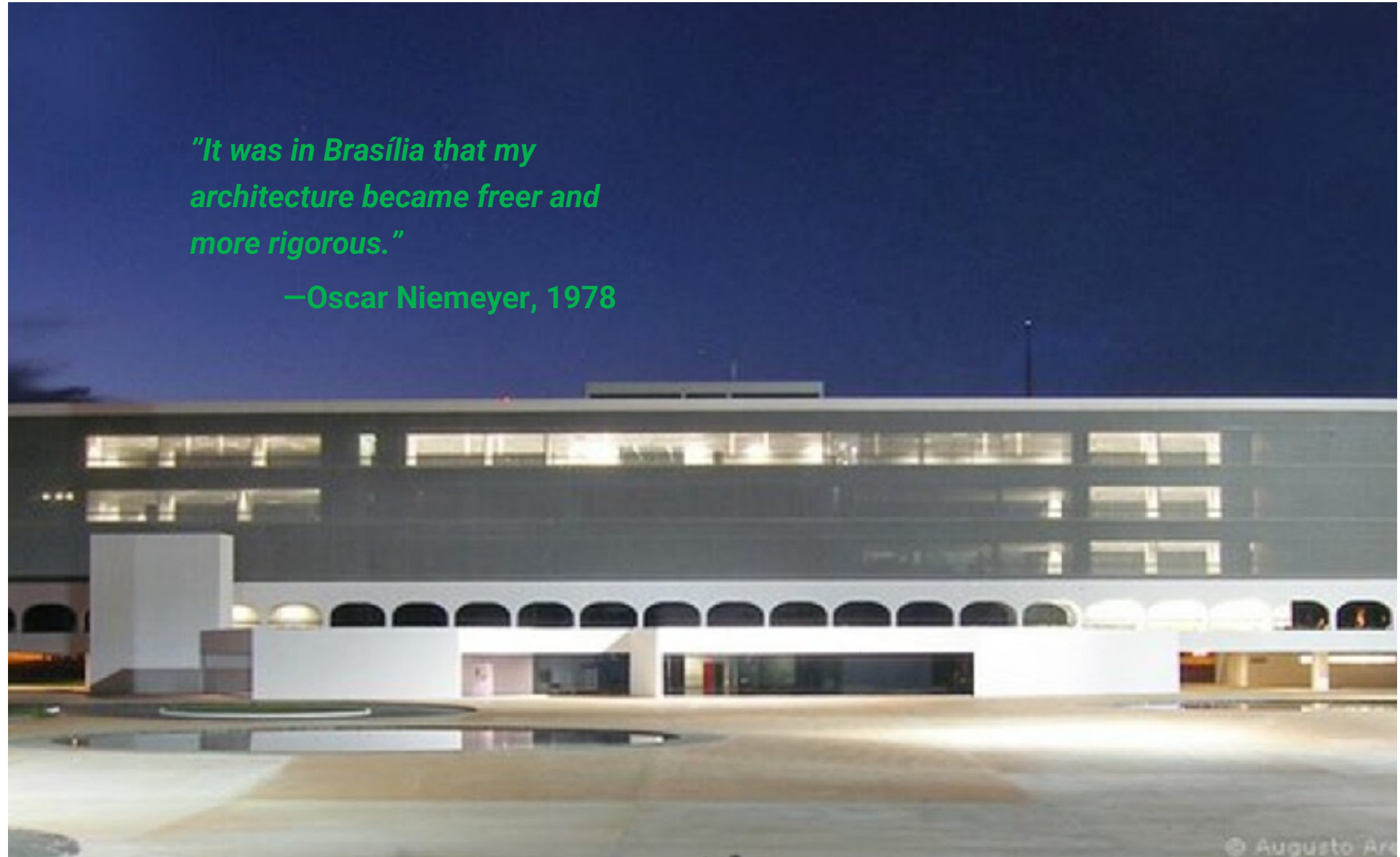
# The Legacy of Niemeyer's Work

The National Library, shown here, was designed by Niemeyer in the 1960s but not built until the 2000s. Even though it wasn't constructed until later, builders kept to the concept and materials that were part of the original design.



Learn more about the national library in [this story](#).

See more of the shapes and forms of Brasília's buildings [here](#).



Fotografia do Edifício da Biblioteca Nacional de Brasília, Augusto Areal 2012, Biblioteca Nacional de Brasília

# UNESCO World Heritage Site Designation

In 1987, Brasília was named by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a world heritage site. UNESCO chooses sites that have “outstanding universal value.” Sites given this designation represent those that have significant cultural or natural value outside of the borders of the countries in which they lie. Brasília was chosen not only for its design and buildings but also for its role in developing the interior of Brazil.



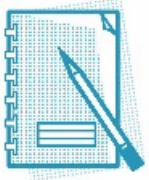
Praça do Cruzeiro, Bento Viana, Instituto dos Arquitetos do Brasil - Departamento Distrito Federal



Would you like to explore more of Brasília? Go to [this site](#).

# Chapter 2: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by answering the question below.



- How does Niemeyer's work reflect the term *modern*?

# Digital Learning in Action

So, what did you learn? Read the questions and complete the learning activities below to extend your learning based on what you just experienced.



**Reflect** Answer these questions:

- What was one main component of Costa's design?
- Do you think the Brasília project reflects the goal of President Kubitschek to modernize Brazil?
- From what you've seen of Brasília in this lesson, how do you think the city could be constructed so quickly?



**Summarize:**

Choose one of the buildings you saw in this lesson, and describe how it reflects Niemeyer's influences and point of view regarding modernist architecture. Use specific details from the building in your answer.



**Create:**

You've now learned about some of the elements included in Brasília's original design. What else should be included in a capital city? Briefly sketch your own version of an ideal capital city. What will you include? How will you appeal to the people who live and work there?

# Glossary

- **Candangos:** a name given to the construction workers who built Brasília
- **Central Plateau:** the highlands region of Brazil that makes up more than half of the country; includes steep cliffs, plateaus, hills, and rocky terrain
- **iconic:** widely recognized
- **inaugural:** relating to the beginning of service of something or someone
- **infrastructure:** the system of public works of a place, such as its roads, bridges, and water system
- **innovative:** introducing new ideas
- **modernist movement:** architectural trends that broke with tradition and used nontraditional materials, forms, and techniques
- **satellite town:** a community settled near a large city